

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS MEET COMMON CORE

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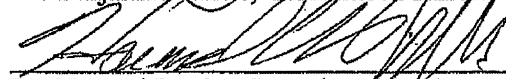
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ABSTRACT

There are high expectations for students with disabilities (SWD) to meet grade-level Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and be college and career ready by graduation. Researchers have recommended teachers of SWD be trained on the CCSS and alignment of the CCSS to individual education programs (IEPs). There are differing professional opinions on how to meet the needs of SWD as described in IEPs and whether to place SWD in general education settings to meet the CCSS. Under the guidance of special education administrators (SEAs), the teachers of SWD lead IEP teams for SWD. The purpose of the study was to understand the perceptions and experiences of SEAs regarding SWD meeting the CCSS because researchers have provided effective strategies for school leaders to meet the CCSS, but have not yet studied SEA perspectives and experiences. The researcher in the current study used grounded theory design and explored the experiences of a theoretical sample of SEAs in a Northwest school district through the use of qualitative methods, including surveys and in-depth interviews. The current study had a focus on high school SEA perspectives and experiences with challenges and supports in meeting the CCSS for SWD. Key findings from the responses included strategies for SWD to have access to general education settings and curriculum through co-teaching, co-planning, double dose/dip, learning improvement time, and specially designed instruction (SDI) classes. Co-teaching was one way used to access general education, and co-planning was used in professional learning communities (PLCs) outside of co-teaching. Strategies from this study—double dose, learning lab, side

by side, and SDI—were used frequently to provide access to general education for SWD. Recommendations for action for educators include universities addressing training teachers of SWD on CCSS alignment with IEPs. Recommendations for research include using other methods in addition to co-teaching to provide access while providing the IEP requirements of SDI.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Study Background.....	2
Problem Statement	3
Audience	6
Specific Leadership Problem	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions.....	8
Methodology Overview	9
Definitions of Key Terms	14
Summary	16
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	18
History of Federal Mandates.....	18
Challenges to Implementing the Common Core State Standards for Students with Disabilities	26
Principals and the Common Core State Standards	30
Teachers of Students with Disabilities	31
Supports of Meeting the Common Core State Standards	32

Collaboration.....	36
Inclusion	37
Co-Teaching	41
Professional Development	42
English Language.....	44
Reading.....	44
Writing.....	46
Math	48
Theoretical Framework.....	50
Authentic Theory.....	50
Inclusive Education Theory.....	51
Summary.....	52
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	55
Research Methods.....	55
Instruments.....	58
Interviews	60
Field Journal	61
Sampling Method.....	61
Participants.....	62
Data Collection	63
Survey Data Collection	63
Interview Data Collection	64
Field Journal	65

Data Analysis	65
Trustworthiness.....	68
Limitations	70
Summary.....	71
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	73
Research Questions.....	73
Data Collection	75
Data Analysis	76
Findings.....	77
Finding 1.....	78
Finding 2.....	80
Finding 3.....	84
Categories	86
Category 1	87
Category 2	93
Co-Teaching	98
Co-Planning.....	99
Category 3	103
Theory.....	106
Findings.....	107
Summary.....	108
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	110
Discussion of Findings.....	112

Finding 1.....	112
Finding 2.....	114
Finding 3.....	115
Answers to the Research Questions.....	116
Research Question 1.....	116
Research Question 2.....	118
Research Question 3.....	119
Research Question 4.....	121
Application to Leadership.....	122
Recommendations for Action.....	126
Recommendations for Further Research.....	128
Limitations.....	129
Concluding Statement.....	130
APPENDIX A.....	152
Survey Questions.....	152
APPENDIX B IRB Approval Letter.....	154
APPENDIX C.....	155
Research Information Sheet.....	155
APPENDIX D.....	156
Organizational Informed Consent Form for Superintendents.....	156
APPENDIX E.....	157
Participant Consent Form.....	157
APPENDIX F.....	159

Online Consent form.....	159
APPENDIX G Coding Key	160
APPENDIX H.....	162
TRIANGULATION CHART	162
APPENDIX I	164
DISTRICTS REPORT ON STRATEGIES AND METHODS	164

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 4.1. Districts' Job Title	74

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 4.1. SEAs meeting standards concept map	87
Figure 5.1. Multi-tiered support system	126

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices officials and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) worked to develop the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with the goal of creating consistent grade-level standards across all states (CCSS Initiative, 2019). The CCSS were developed by state officials in 2009 and have been agreed upon by 45 states. Federal and state regulations require all students with disabilities (SWD) to meet grade-level CCSS and be college and career ready by high school graduation (CCSS Initiative, 2019).

The standardization means students with disabilities (SWD) use the same CCSS as used by peers who do not have disabilities. There are no provisions in the CCSS for SWD. Students with disabilities are a diverse group who have different levels of need due to the different types of disabilities, and the school years are directed by individual education programs (IEPs). Students with disabilities have differing experiences with barriers or struggles in meeting the CCSS in one or more content areas, depending on the needs and type of disabilities. Different measures may need to be taken by teachers of SWD based on the different needs of SWD. Researchers have reported on teachers' and principals' perspectives and experiences in working with the CCSS, but special education administrators (SEAs) oversee teachers of SWD, who have the expertise in the field and make critical decisions that impact SWD (Van Boxtel, 2017). Guidance for meeting the CCSS for SWD may require the efforts of district SEAs.

Although teachers of SWD have direct impacts on SWD' learning and environments, SEAs provide leadership direction and support for teachers of SWD. Measures for SWD to meet the CCSS may require the expertise of district SEAs. District-

level SEAs lead all components of plans to integrate the CCSS, evidence-based best practices, and special education requirements to support building administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals) and teachers. Teachers and SWD depend on support from SEAs to meet the CCSS.

There is a lack of empirical research about high school SEAs' perspectives and experiences of the CCSS. The purpose of this qualitative, grounded theory study was to explore the implementation of the CCSS, strategies and methods for incorporating the CCSS, and IEP requirements from the perspectives of SEAs.

Study Background

Federal policy makers have worked to improve national education outcomes but only sometimes consider SWD. During the 1960s, many low-income students or disabled students did not receive education (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], n.d.). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was designed to improve access and equity for low-income students (Geer, 2018). In 1967, the Bilingual Act was designed to provide students with limited English-speaking ability and education. In 1975, the IDEA was formed, mandating access to education for SWD (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). Geer (2018) traced the former acts to provide context in the changes to the CCSS, linking them to standards-based reform and numerous other curricular changes. The IDEA has been reauthorized six times in an effort to improve access to education for SWD (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). Although the names of the acts have changed, the acts have been designed to provide equity and access to education for all students (Geer, 2018). The policy reforms and reauthorizations have required district officials to change school district policies, which impacts teachers and students.

Numerous laws and mandates have affected SWD, such as the ESEA, the Education for All Handicap Children Act, and the IDEA. Bicehouse and Faieta (2017) claimed, since 1975, schools and special education programs have been restructured. For individuals with disabilities, the restructuring of education has meant drastic changes, from being institutionalized and segregated to being provided with separate classes to seeing maximum effort exerted to guarantee all students graduate to a reformed shift where all students, regardless of ability, are held accountable for meeting national standards (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). These changes to education and special education policies have affected how educators work with SWD, and the CCSS present new challenges for those educators. A detailed account of the history of education reform as the laws and acts relate to SWD will be presented in Chapter 2.

In 2010, officials developed the CCSS to provide uniformity for all students across all states (CCSS Initiative, 2019). Due to the changes to the federal mandates and the addition of the CCSS, some SWD may need the rigor provided by the general education curriculum and setting because teachers of SWD do not have the same college training of general education teachers and collaboration is imbedded in the CCSS. By providing the same CCSS, a ninth grader in one state would be learning the same standard in another state, and demographics that have shown disparities, such as race, income, or disability may be impacted positively (CCSS Initiative, 2019).

Problem Statement

There are gaps in academic achievement between SWD and non-SWD. In a study about the CCSS and students with severe disabilities, Dukes and Darling (2017) claimed there were gaps in interpreting the CCSS and implementing curricula to support students

with severe disabilities academically. Historically, Dukes and Darling (2017) stated students with severe disabilities make little academic gain, and a linkage to promote educational support was needed for students with severe disabilities.

In a longitudinal study, Schulte and Stevens (2015) discussed the gap in math achievement among SWD and non-SWD in one state. Schulte and Stevens reported there may have been bias in how SWD data were reported for achievement outcomes. Schulte and Stevens (2015) said when SWD were identified based on disability groups, the achievement gap grew larger across grades.

With no guidance for addressing SWD in the CCSS, all students are required to meet the same standards. Koutsoftas (2016) completed a quantitative study using multiple regression analysis with data from 21 inclusive classrooms, matching 64 students who met particular criteria by age, gender, and classroom applicability. Koutsoftas stated students with no disabilities were able to write longer with better quality stories when compared to the stories written by SWD. Students with disabilities need to improve in all areas academically to meet the CCSS.

District leadership plays a crucial role in the cultural changes needed to increase academic outcomes among SWD to meet the CCSS requirements. Durand, Lawson, Wilcox, and Schiller (2016) completed a mixed-methods study on district leaders on curriculum teams and superintendents focused on elementary schools. Durand et al. (2016) claimed district leaders used innovations from the Race to the Top (RTTT) and found district and school leaders who had students who performed higher on the CCSS used a policy implementation theory, leadership theory, organizational change theory, and organizational learning theory, especially learning-focused leadership strategies.

Durand et al. (2016) claimed proactive and adaptive leadership was key in building a willingness for staff to change. Durand et al. (2016) indicated the need for research on district and school leadership resource reallocation for new roles and responsibility configurations.

Researchers have discussed the lack of voices of SEAs to explain leadership practices used to support teachers of SWD when working to meet the CCSS and IEP requirements (Van Boxtel, 2017). Van Boxtel (2017) completed a quantitative study with SEAs in California to investigate recommendations of the CCSS for SWD. The leaders' voices were needed for teachers of SWD to know which strategies best met the needs of SWD to balance both the IDEA and the CCSS. Van Boxtel (2017) claimed further studies about SEAs were needed to make comparisons between subgroups of SWD with similar demographics.

District and building administrators play an important role in overall school dynamics (Mahfouz, Barkauskas, Sausner, & Kornhaber, 2017). Mahfouz et al. (2017) interviewed six principals and two curriculum coordinators regarding the understandings and leadership actions needed to implement the CCSS. The authors were not focused on SEAs' perspectives but rather the school staff and other district leaders' understanding and actions that were important for schools to adapt to change. Mahfouz et al. (2017) found, in the short term, most leaders made a good faith effort in times of policy pressure to lay the ground work and obtain the resources necessary for the change, but in the medium or long term, change depended on how many policy reforms the leaders had already gone through during the leadership period and the perspective and willing to seek

change. Mahfouz et al. (2017) said the leaders should focus on certain areas of the required policy change, such as curricula, assessments, and professional development.

The problem explored in this study is that there are disparities in academic achievement and no strategies in the CCSS to help SWD meet the more rigorous standards. Special education administrators may be instrumental in overcoming the problems of meeting the needs of all SWD whether severely, behaviorally, learning, or intellectually disabled. The researcher of this study focused on SEAs' perspectives and experiences as SEAs may be instrumental in taking action to increase academic gain for SWD to better meet the CCSS.

Audience

State agencies, district leaders, educational service district staff, teacher leaders, and school leaders could benefit from the findings of the current study. By recognizing the strategies and methods used by SEAs, school culture improvements and academic advancements for SWD may be possible for SWD to meet full human potential. Special education administrators hold the key to collaboration with building leaders to support and share responsibility with teachers of SWD (Bettini, et al., 2017). The findings from this study can provide increased knowledge to share with instructional leaders responsible for professional development and training. With the background expertise of SEAs, there is an understanding of balancing the needs of SWD with specially designed instruction while providing access to general education curriculum and settings.

Specific Leadership Problem

District leaders are experiencing the policy reforms of how to get all students to graduate on time and be college and career ready and how to increase attrition of teachers

of SWD. In the current study, the researcher analyzed the transcripts of interviews of district SEAs to learn what SEAs do to meet standards for SWD. The student focused on high school leaders' perspectives and experiences of SEAs in a county in the Northwest who supported teachers of SWD as they worked with students to meet the CCSS. There were approximately 400 SEAs in the researched county with fewer than half of those in high schools. Experts from extant research have not explored SEA perspectives of the CCSS nor have researchers clearly defined the SEA role (Bettini et al., 2017). In a qualitative study from five district administrators—a superintendent, assistant superintendent, professional development coordinator, special education school to work program, and special education director—Bettini et al. (2017) recommended effective instructional leadership in districts was needed to include SEAs who closely support the teachers of SWD, but also should be involved in important district level decision making.

In a study on the increased attrition of teachers of SWD, Hagaman and Casey (2018) found administrative support was needed for teachers of SWD due to stress-related responsibilities, lack of cooperation and recognition, and large caseloads, but building administrators were confined to provide the supports needed for the general population. To meet the CCSS, SEAs need to understand the important role as leaders to support teachers of SWD and building administrators regarding implementation of CCSS to ensure success for SWD.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to explore the perspectives and experiences of SEAs regarding SWD who are expected to make academic gains to meet the CCSS. Research studies addressed principal and teacher perspectives in SWD

meeting CCSS. There was one study that dealt with SEAs and the CCSS (Van Boxtel, 2017). There was no study found who solely focused in the high school setting for SWD. Special education administrator perspectives are important since the SEAs are leaders who are the district decision makers and impact SWD in the schools. The SEAs are typically the district leaders who provide education for the building administrators.

Through the use of grounded theory, the researcher developed a theory of district-level SEAs' leadership perspectives and experiences of implementing the CCSS. Special education administrator perspectives and experiences were conveyed on the following topics: collaboration and communication, reading, writing and math, professional development, and alignment of IEPs for teachers of SWD in the researched county in the Northwest. The researcher used the data to provide information about SEA leadership to address strategies used with building administrators and teachers of SWD in meeting the CCSS. The intent of the study was to explore SEA perspectives and experiences on the practices used to address the CCSS for SWD.

Research Questions

Exploring the voices of SEAs involved understanding how the CCSS interface with federal regulations in core subject areas of reading, writing, and math, which are required for graduation. Students with disabilities need to master or be proficient in each of the areas to pass the courses to obtain credit.

The questions to guide the research study are:

1. How do SEAs view best practice strategies to address the CCSS for collaboration and communication with teachers of SWD?

2. How do SEAs perceive the expertise of teachers of SWD meeting the CCSS in English (reading and writing) and math?
3. How do SEAs manage IEP alignment with teachers of SWD to meet the CCSS?
4. How do SEAs perceive the need for teachers of SWD to meet the CCSS?

Methodology Overview

A qualitative, grounded theory design was used for in-depth understanding and a theory was developed through the methodical approach of simultaneously interviewing and analyzing data, going back and forth between comparing and interacting with the data and developing codes, which then extended into theoretical categories (Charmez, 2014a). Strauss and Corbin (1998) described grounded theory as a general methodology used to generate a theory grounded in the data. The grounded theory design was chosen by the researcher of the current study since there was only one other researched study by Van Boxtel (2017) analyzing SEAs and the CCSS. Since there was only one other study on the CCSS and SEAs, the researcher chose grounded theory as a design since the approach entails forming a theory from the analyzed data and required a rigorous procedure in data analysis as opposed to other designs, which have a theory prior to collecting the data or are not as rigorous in data analysis.

The target population were the SEAs from districts responsible for high schools in a Northwest county. Data were collected from SEAs through preliminary surveys and in-depth interviews. The sample frame was identified through an educational service district. Theoretical sampling was used as the theoretical sampling best answered the research questions of the current study. Charmez (2014a) claimed the goal in theoretical

sampling was to obtain data representative of the categories; therefore, when each category was saturated, there was no more new insights or information. Theoretical sampling, according to Charmez, (2014b) is explicit, deliberate, and methodical with identified categories. The categories were SEAs leading district-level and school staff with cultural change, SWD accessing general education curriculum and/or setting while teachers of SWD gained skills in instructional pedagogy, and SEAs managing special education requirements. Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2018) specified the nature of the research questions was one factor that determined how quickly or slowly the saturation of data occurs using theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling impacts saturation since in grounded theory the researcher continues to interview until the categories are saturated and no new information is available. Charmez (2014a) defined theoretical sampling as a development of theoretical categories, and theoretical saturation occurs when no new insights are provided from the data. The researcher could gather data from one or more categories until saturation was evident in all categories. Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2018) claimed an ongoing and gradual process of theoretical saturation required insight and knowledge.

The data collection instrument used was a survey developed by Van Boxtel's (2017) quantitative research which was to determine alignment, from recommended research studies, and reports from SEAs in California school districts. Permission was given to use the survey items from Van Boxtel's (2017) study with adaptation for the current qualitative study. The survey had a total of 10 open-ended questions based on CCSS topics, including English (reading and writing), math, collaboration, communication, and professional development. Following completion of the survey,

SEAs were interviewed. Interview questions for SEAs were based on information from completed surveys.

In school districts, the superintendent's organizational permission was needed to complete any level of research. Then, each SEA's permission was needed to participate in the interview. One district required the researcher to sign a Memorandum of Understanding, so the researcher's planned interactions were clearly written on the district form.

The researcher gathered data through the online surveys and interviews. Once permission was gained, SEAs completed a survey through SurveyMonkey. Of the SEAs who completed surveys, six were selected to be interviewed. Emails were sent to all districts superintendents initially and those who responded were contacted and the consent forms signed. Six participants initially responded right away to the email. In-depth interviewing began with six participants who had completed the survey throughout the iterative process of analysis. The researcher set up in-depth interviewing with SEAs, which included probing questions and open dialogue, which allowed for more complete and rich stories (Minikel-Lacocque, 2018). Once the initial six in-depth interviews were completed, three more districts superintendents were contacted by phone since an email had already been sent to the district for organizational consent and there was no theoretical saturation of categories. After organizational consent, and participant consent, participants completed the survey followed by in-depth interviews and theoretical saturation occurred for all categories.

Data from interviews and surveys were analyzed using Charmez's (2014a) strategic steps of analysis to gain knowledge and meaning from different sources of data.

Initial coding began with a close read of the transcripts and being open to the theoretical direction from the data. Then, the researcher reread the data for focused coding to develop categories and theoretical integration (Charmez, 2014a). The language used in the coding of each stage, from developing open codes to focused codes to categories, gave meaning to the perceptions of SEAs. Strauss and Corbin (1994) said in grounded theory, there is a constant interplay of back and forth between data collection and data analysis. The researcher translated the data into codes, focused codes, and categories with data from the interview transcripts.

One limitation was the possible researcher bias due to the researcher's 36 years of experience in the field of special education. In the current study, perceptions and prior knowledge were journaled with perceptions noted to ensure validity. Bracketing was used to maintain an open mind and a field journal was kept recording any thoughts or prior experiences during reflection, so the bias could be identified. With the current study, the researcher added to the research on SEA leadership related to the CCSS and SWD, but findings were confined to the demographics in the researched county, specifically high schools. Although the sample size was small, the current study was based on a grounded theory design with the aim to better understand the perceptions and experiences of SEAs. Therefore, the limitation was due to the size and was situationally generalizable, meaning the study sample was matched to the study population. Another limitation was the researcher's novice experience in grounded theory. The grounded theory is a time-consuming design and the novice researcher began the current study with only theoretical knowledge of the grounded research and no experience from which to draw on in times of being overwhelmed with the on-going analytical process. During the time of being

overwhelmed, the researcher would reread Charmez (2014a) to gain some perspective and reflect on the next steps of the process.

The outcome of the current study was the development of the changing inside out theory developed from the data derived from SEAs across the researched county high schools. The changing inside out theory relied on the support of the SEA leadership to provide the support to teachers of SWD. In turn, the teachers of SWD would receive ongoing support and develop internal confidence on how to increase academics which would create rigorous and high expectations in the lesson plans without the effects of attrition. The change the teachers showed internally would be verbalized to SWD and SWD would see the change in the teachers of SWD behavior. Over time the SWD would begin to believe in the capability within and be able to show the progress needed for academic growth in meeting CCSS.

With the findings from the current study, the researcher contributed to the gap in the literature on SEAs' approaches in high schools. The researcher built and expanded on the findings from Van Boxtel's (2017) research about SEAs' recommendations for how SWD needed to meet the CCSS in California school districts through a qualitative interview to gain richer, more in-depth data. Van Boxtel (2017), who completed a quantitative study using surveys, stated:

As CCSS and special education is an emerging area of research, this study sheds some light on the degree of transfer between recommended best practices found in the current literature and implementation in practice. An implicit assumption guiding this study is that administrators would have both a unique perspective and a key role in bringing best practice recommendations to fruition. (p. 58)

Results included a need for further professional development with teachers of SWD being able to align the CCSS with English, math, and IEPs; however, math was the area with the highest need (Van Boxtel, 2017). The researcher of the current study provided perceptions and experiences of specific best practice strategies districts were using through collaboration, professional development, and inclusion to meet the CCSS in high schools.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms may be new for the reader. To help the reader understand, the terms were defined according to the usage in the study.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): Current educational standards used for grades kindergarten through 12th grade, released in 2010 and being used by 44 states and the District of Columbia (ASCD, 2019).

Co-planning: When general education and teacher so SWD were brought together to co-plan inclusive units as part of a professional development effort. There were three conceptual lenses for the process: (a) characteristics of collaboration, (b) small group interactions, and (c) community discourse (Swanson & Bianchini, 2015). In the current study, this collaborative method was often combined with “double dose/double dip” for SWD to receive a general education class and a special education class, which focused on similar goals due to the co-planning efforts as a method for SWD to receive the SDI time. The terms were often used by SEAs in the current study.

Collaborative teaching or co-teaching: A teaching strategy that involved two teachers working together planning, organizing, delivering, and assessing in the same classroom, allowing SWD to be exposed to the general education curriculum while needs

of SWD are met by two teachers (Sinclair et al., 2019). The terms collaborative teaching and co-teaching were used interchangeably in this study. The six teaching methods of co-teaching involved: (a) one teaches, one observes; (b) one teaches, one assists; (c) parallel teaching; (d) station teaching; (e) alternative teaching; and (f) team teaching (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO): Nonprofit, nonbiased national representatives who head the department of elementary and secondary education (Endacott et al., 2016).

Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) Act of 1965: Federal funding provided to districts for low-performing students' preschool through 12th grade (Caruana, 2015).

Inclusion: A term that implies an emphasis on SWD having the right to be in general education classrooms with the general education curriculum and general education peers, versus being segregated (Jahnukainen, 2014).

Individual education program (IEP): The IEP is developed by a team of people working with SWD and covers such areas as present levels of performance, goals, services, transition plan, testing, and accommodations (Caruana, 2015). The IEP document is required to be reviewed annually.

National Governors Association (NGA) of Best Practices: Members of the governors from 50 states and five territories who were not biased or from any political party, promoted state leadership, shared best practices and spoke on *national* policy (Conley, 2014).

No Child Left Behind of 2001 (NCLB): The reauthorization of ESSA of 1965 included Title 1 monies for disadvantaged students. The NCLB was replaced by ESSA in December 2015 (Conley, 2014; Endacott et al., 2016).

Pacing: The rate at which an individual learns based on the students learning rhythm, learning environment, time, space, classroom resources and students' need (Díaz, Nussbaum, Ñopo, Maldonado-Carreño, & Corredor, 2015).

Race to the Top (RTTT): The U.S. Department of Education gave 4.35 billion dollars of competitive grants to spark innovation and bring academic success especially with low performing students (Durand et al., 2016). There were four goals: (a) use the CCSS and assessment to enable students to be college and career ready, (b) develop a data system to track progress, (c) recruit and place effective teachers and principals where needed most, and (d) turn around low-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Response to intervention (RTI): Response to intervention is a multitiered model, with the goal to determine scientifically, based interventions or instructional strategies before the need for more special education was considered in an effort to improve academic instruction (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017).

Summary

The researcher of current study focused on the problem of the lack of research perspectives from SEA leadership in the areas of communication and collaboration, English (reading and writing), math, IEP alignment, and professional development. The researcher included only those administrators located at the district office with special education responsibilities in high schools in the researched county in the Northwest.

Administrators with only general education school responsibilities, or administrators located in the schools, such as principals or vice principals, were not included.

The researcher in the current study extended the research from Van Boxtel (2017) through a qualitative methodology with a grounded theory design to determine a theory of SEAs in meeting the requirements of the CCSS for teachers working with SWD. A grounded theory design was chosen since the design allowed the researcher to examine the participants in the natural setting. The researcher was able to analyze, transform, and interpret the data from surveys, in-depth interviews, websites, and field journals to create a theory.

According to the requirements of the CCSS, all students should have access to the general education curriculum in the general education classrooms, the leadership perspectives and experiences of SEAs across the county will be central. Leadership from SEAs provided the support and knowledge needed for staff going through the pressure and changes to create the success of CCSS for SWD. The implications of the special education administrative leaders' viewpoints were a vital step for SWD to make progress in CCSS and through change.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to examine relevant research and theory regarding special education administrators' (SEAs) leadership perspectives relevant to the CCSS and special education high school programs. This chapter begins with history of federal mandates to give context for the emergence of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The literature directly related to the research questions included (a) challenges to meeting the CCSS for students with disabilities (SWD), (b) supports to meeting the CCSS, (c) teacher collaboration to assist SWD in meeting standards, (d) professional development to support teachers of SWD, and (e) content areas SWD qualify for special education services, including English (reading and writing), and math.

History of Federal Mandates

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 had a focus on low-income families in an effort to provide equal educational opportunities for all students through federal funding (Stotsky & Holzman, 2015). Stotsky and Holzman (2015) claimed the ESEA was enacted by government officials to provide funding to districts to fight poverty and close the gap between low-income households and middle-income households. Through this act, Stotsky and Holzman (2015) said some—though not all—SWD were required to be educated in schools, and this was the beginning of inclusive education. The act included statements to hold districts accountable for the federal dollars used for low-income students. In an article, revisiting the foundations of the special education movement Bicehouse and Faieta (2017) claimed in 1967, the ESEA would be amended by Congress to provide further services to special education since

education was the pathway to a better life for SWD which would be a sign of support for the SWD.

Ten years after the ESEA, the Education for All Handicap Children Act, more commonly known as Public Law 94-142, was enacted. This act required all states that accepted federal funding to provide equal access to education for SWD (IDEA, n.d.). Public Law 94-142 required free and appropriate education (FAPE) for all SWD. Many federal requirements came from Public Law 94-142, including requirements for districts to provide SWD one meal each day, educational evaluations, and educational plans with parent input and provisions of special education services similar to the general education classes (IDEA, n.d.). Educational plans would later be known as IEPs. For school officials, this meant SWD would no longer be in institutions but in schools.

In 1990, the Education for All Handicap Children Act was reauthorized and became the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; n.d.). Officials of this reauthorization introduced the concept of access to general education curriculum for SWD (IDEA, n.d.). The change in name also came with a change in concept from exclusion and segregation of SWD in schools to inclusion (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). The IDEA (n.d.) funded states and public agencies to provide education and services to the 6.5 million infants, children, youth, and teens with disabilities in the United States. The IDEA has six principles with the main premise of providing SWD education, from birth to age 21, with specialized design instruction (SDI) aligned to evaluations and IEPs (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). Bicehouse and Faieta, (2017) stated the IDEA's six principles were FAPE, appropriate evaluation, IEPs, least restrictive environment (LRE), parent and student participation in decision making, and procedural safeguards. The

IDEA set the precedence that SWD were to be in the LRE and receive FAPE through age 21. Least restrictive environment is in SWD' IEP, but the term is related to access of general education settings and/or curriculum based on the needs of students.

In 2002, the ESEA became No child Left Behind (NCLB), which increased the government's role in holding schools accountable. The NCLB required all students to be proficient on state tests, which were aligned to state standards. *All students* meant general education students and SWD, regardless of disabilities. When schools did not meet expectations, financial consequences ensued (Kempson, 2015). The economic consequences created many problems in schools and districts, which resulted in many problems for states and Congress (Kempson, 2015; Stotsky & Holzman, 2015). Government officials believed when accountability policies required annual yearly progress (AYP) and annual testing was tied to federal dollars, all students would be proficient in meeting the standards. Stotsky and Holzman (2015) claimed there was an assumption that not making AYP meant the school had bad leadership, inadequate teachers, and not enough focus on teaching and learning. The problem that arose, Stotsky and Holzman (2013) claimed for officials, was that there were too many schools who did not make AYP, which required schools to develop restructuring plans. However, Stotsky and Holzman (2013) said government officials did not provide districts with much support for restructuring plans, or clarify what districts were to do to restructure the schools who did not make AYP, or what *excellence* meant for all students. Later, the states had to restructure the schools, or implement intervention plans if the schools closed, and reopened under a charter schools, or the principal and 50% of staff were replaced; or transform the school into a higher performing schools in a specific time

period. The process cost the districts money for consultation and outside services (Stotsky & Holzman, 2013).

In 2005, regardless of opposition and unanswered questions from districts, lawmakers infused IDEA concepts with NCLB and created the Individual Disabilities Education Improvement Act, which has six main concepts: (a) IEPs, (b) FAPE, (c) LRE, (d) appropriate evaluation, (e) parent and teacher participation, and (f) procedural safeguards (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). Changes included the ability to amend a student's plan without a parent's written consent and the focus on the use of technology.

The RTTT was a volunteer, federally funded program for which state officials competed to raise the academic stakes for students, kindergarten through 12th grade, by meeting the federal guidelines for academic testing released in 2009 (Durand et al., 2016). Weiss, former Secretary of Education, claimed the RTTT accomplished goals by finding and sharing innovative and effective programs from states to increase academic accountability (Weiss & Hess, 2016). Hess, the American Enterprise Institute's director on educational policy, said RTTT was \$4 billion full of empty promises made by states with grant writers, during a time when states needed to reduce spending and not build dreams, since grants funded did not create academic achievement (Weiss & Hess, 2016). Hess claimed the RTTT grants did not work because either schools did not include structural changes for the long term or made promises without follow through of grant promises. Hess indicated schools that received grant money did not make more academic gains than the schools who did not receive grant money (Weiss & Hess, 2016).

The RTTT had similar goals to NCLB; however, NCLB was mandated for districts accepting federal funds (Lohman, 2010). A vital part of the accountability passed

down from the RTTT competition and NCLB was district leadership who were responsible for providing a longstanding framework with methods and supports for the CCSS into a cohesive plan of implementation for staff (Endacott et al., 2016). District-level SEAs were tasked with incorporating all components of the CCSS, researched practices, and special education requirements to support building administrators, principals, assistant principals, and teachers with a plan that aligned IEPs and accompanying documentation.

In 2009, the NGA Center for Best Practices and the CCSSO, supported by governors and state commissioners, met to lead a nationwide effort to develop the CCSS (NGA Center, 2019). One reason for the development of the CCSS was that throughout history, states have each had different definitions for academic proficiency. With the development of the CCSS, standards are consistent across all states (NGA Center, 2019). Regardless of whether students were in a Southeastern state or a Northwestern state, academic standards were the same, and students would not be behind or ahead of standards being learned by other students. The goal of the governor and commissioner officials for CCSS was to make all students, regardless of geographic location, able to compete for opportunities in college and employment. The CCSS Initiative (2019) listed four strands for the 45 states that adopted the CCSS: reading/writing, math, listening, and speaking. The four strands of the CCSS and application of analytical skills can be addressed through all subjects taught in schools.

By 2010, the draft of the CCSS was ready for feedback from the public, with the final draft ready to be launched by June of the same year (National Governors, 2019). The standards were meant to be rigorous to prepare students for the future. The CCSS

were adopted in 45 states based on official announcements made by Departments of State; this number included the District of Columbia (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2019). Since the development of the CCSS, a heightened awareness of the need for all students to improve academically to meet future demands for employment has developed among states for district leaders. Learning goals include (a) all students will need to read, write, and communicate effectively in a variety of settings, and (b) students would need to think analytically and apply core concepts to various subjects. SEA leaders would be involved in bringing about cultural change, providing professional development for implementing the CCSS, and aligning standards with IEPs.

Parents, teachers, and administrators needed to be involved with the implementation process for the standards to come to fruition. Data-driven decisions and accountability were global topics for policy and school reorganization (Park & Datnow, 2017). When the CCSS were implemented as intended, officials who created the CCSS used best-practice strategies to provide opportunities to develop skills for students to meet the goals of being college and career ready for a future in a global world (Conley, 2014). Conley (2014) claimed teachers needed to provide consistent standards while having high expectations for all students by teaming up with other teachers. To provide consistency in the CCSS, district leadership need to provide significant interpretations and supports from the federal, state, district, and local levels (Dukes, Darling, & Bielskus-Barone, 2017). To provide interpretations, SEAs need to understand the CCSS and the distinctions between standards and to implement the standards.

In 2015, Every Child Succeeds Act (ECSA), formerly known as NCLB, continued some provisions of NCLB, such as testing, while focusing on equity and high expectations for all students (U.S. Department of Education 2018). More than 40 years had passed since the inception of IDEA, and questions remained about the high expectations from RTTT, the ECSA, and the CCSS (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). Bicehouse and Faieta, (2017) analyzed the foundation of the policies to determine the impact on the struggles for SWD. The authors questioned the impact of the changes in the policies on the special education field (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). The changes in policies over the years have yielded revisions between the delivery of special education services and general education. Previously, special education funding competed with general education funding; now, both were working closer together toward the same goals of inclusion in the classroom. Bicehouse and Faieta, (2017) claimed segregation took over a century to go to inclusion for SWD, and there was a moral obligation to learn from mistakes of the past and to individualize and focus on specially designed instruction while supporting inclusion.

Since, the release of the CCSS, experts have recommended evidenced-based practices for SWD (Graham et al., 2015). Graham et al. (2015) identified best-practice writing methods through a meta-analysis of writing intervention studies. The challenge for SEAs was to determine which best practices would work for the different types of disabilities within SWD.

Leadership may be challenged at all levels with recent standards and best practices. School leaders are assigned by district leaders to include SWD in general

education classrooms, meet grade-level CCSS, and prepare students to be college and career ready (Common Core, 2017).

The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH, 2019) is an international advocacy rights organization that began in 1975 with the goal of equity, education, and establishing active, inclusive, public policy for the people with disabilities. The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (2019) has claimed some advocacy groups, using a social justice lens, have addressed the rights of all students. Many of these groups feel SWD have the right to be included in the same settings as peers and to have reciprocal relationships (TASH, 2019). Placing all SWD in an inclusive environment without ensuring the provisions of specially designed instruction would violate the IDEA (n.d.).

With the CCSS, there is a gap between interpreting the standards and developing the academic and social supports for teachers working with SWD to be academically successful in meeting the standards (Dukes et al., 2017). Dukes et al. (2017) explored students with severe disabilities and the CCSS and claimed the CCSS was controversial in being able to guide all students to be college and career ready, especially in light of the various types of disabilities. Dukes et al. (2017) believed if the CCSS were meant for all students, the creators of the CCSS should have adopted a guide for the students with severe disabilities to meet the standards because the standards are too far reaching for students with some disabilities. Adopting a CCSS guide for various types of SWD may need to be completed by district leaders because there is no guide.

The CCSS are intended to help prepare SWD for college and career success; thus, the standards should consider progressive and growth mindsets for these students and

address SWD knowledge, experiences, and engagement (Morningstar, Zagona, Uyanik, Xie, & Mahal, 2017). Morningstar et al. (2017) sampled 35 national experts in a Delphi method study to determine the skills, opportunities, and supports needed for students with severe disabilities to be college and career ready as required by the CCSS. The authors recommended state officials develop alternative standards that align to CCSS college and career readiness for the students with severe disabilities (Morningstar et al., 2017).

In research literature from 2014 through 2018, there were 2 research-based studies found involving administrators and the CCSS: Van Boxtel (2017) and Weber and Young (2017). Van Boxtel (2017), in a study with SEAs in California, attested teachers of SWD generally do not have clear direction from SEA leaders on how to meet the standards with students, given the gap between the CCSS and SEA leadership approaches. Weber and Young (2017) found administrators' attitudes and beliefs about the special education inclusion program impacted the effectiveness of the leadership. However, Weber and Young (2017) did not clarify which administrators completed the study, only that the administrators were directly involved with the inclusion framework, which could be principals, vice principals, or SEAs.

Challenges to Implementing the Common Core State Standards for Students with Disabilities

Leadership from SEAs is an important for teachers of SWD (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2014). In a study regarding administrative support for teachers of students with emotional or behavioral disabilities, Cancio et al. (2014) found a direct link between a lack of administrative support and teachers leaving the field of special education. Similarly, in a study of why teachers of SWD leave the field, Conley and You (2016)

stated there was a direct link between a deficiency of administrative support for teachers working with SWD and teachers of SWD leaving within three years of entry into a special education career.

Communicating the CCSS necessitates a variety of approaches. Dukes et al. (2017) completed an inquiry of districts' websites and policies from California, Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania, reviewing data using the Perceived Quality of Websites instrument (PQWI) to determine how the CCSS were translated into resources and supports for teachers working with severely disabled students. When exploring four state Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI) websites and 12 school district websites, the researchers found there was a dearth of information on the CCSS and SWD and few resources for teachers (Dukes et al., 2017). Solely considering the lack of information on the websites, teachers of SWD would have difficulty to understand how to incorporate the CCSS into classroom lessons and IEPs while maintaining the rigor of the standards.

Since the CCSS, Hagaman and Casey (2018) declared there had been added attention on the special education field to meet standards and the attrition of teachers of SWD. Using a nominal group technique, Hagaman and Casey (2018) conducted focus groups about the retention of teachers of SWD. The top four reasons why teachers departed the special education position were feeling overworked, lack of administrative support, high caseloads, and insufficient professional development. In another focus group, Hagaman and Casey (2018) stated the administrators (who hired or supported teachers of SWD) agreed with the teachers about feeling overworked, the lack of administrative support, the amount of paperwork required for teachers of SWD and

meeting the CCSS for all SWD. Meeting the CCSS for all SWD, Hagaman and Casey (2018) claimed, devalued the role of the teachers of SWD because administrators did not provide a road map or curriculum for all the levels of disabilities, from students who were mildly disabled to students who were severely disabled for the teachers of SWD.

Hagaman and Casey (2018) said all focus group participants agreed the reasons why teachers of SWD leave the field within three years were stress, lack of administrative support, and lack of respect.

Cross (2017), a statistician for the U.S. Department of Education, said the shortage of teachers of SWD in the United States was 100,000 in 2015, and the shortage was so bad in some states, foreign and noncertified teachers were being hired to compensate. Cross (2017) claimed there was a continuous shortage of teachers of SWD from 1996 through 2018. The statistician continued by stating, since 1990 there was only two years (1994 and 1995) when there had not been a special education teacher shortage in the state that was the setting for this study (Cross, 2017).

Glasgow, Largent, and Kalamaros Skalski (2017), the co-chairs for the National Coalition Shortages on Personnel Shortages of Special Education and Related Services, reported reasons teachers of SWD left the field of special education within three years, included a lack of administrative support and poor working conditions. Also, Glasgow et al. (2017) stated there was a shortfall of professionals providing services to SWD (i.e., school psychologists and speech therapists), and in 2014, there was attrition of teachers of SWD in 49 states. Glasgow et al. (2017) claimed the reasons for the shortfall of teachers of SWD included a lack of needed credentials, a lack of applicants for rural or high-poverty areas, and no financial incentives to draw people into the field considering

the demands of the job. With such a huge deficit among teachers of SWD and the increase of SWD who need to be served in the schools, supportive leaders among SEAs is important for teachers of SWD.

Teachers of SWD should be guided and supported in teaching the SWD population using the CCSS (Bettini et al., 2017). In a grounded theory study, Bettini et al. (2017) found local SEAs in the Victoria School District, an inclusive schooling system in the Southwest United States, cultivated relationships to support effective teachers of SWD; however, the role and responsibilities of SEAs were not closely examined in the research. School administrators were responsible for increasing the academic progress of students in schools and shared administrative roles with SEAs to enhance the effectiveness of teachers of SWD (Bettini et al., 2017). Bettini et al. (2017) stated principals in the Victoria School District did not have the special education background and knowledge to support the needs of teachers of SWD, and SEA roles had changed from bureaucratic management to instructional facilitation. Thus, SEAs had the experience and associated knowledge of the special education field and were better equipped to develop strategies and methods for effective teachers of SWD and may be more effective in creating a culture of effective teachers of SWD than building administrators (Bettini et al., 2017).

The CCSS were developed as a measurement to ensure all students would be college and career ready (Van Boxtel, 2017). However, Van Boxtel (2017) claimed the CCSS officials did not determine how SEA leaders should meet the standards with SWD, given the need for increased collaboration for SWD using general education curriculum and settings. In a study on SEAs in California, Van Boxtel (2017) claimed the problem

was the limited research on SEAs' methods and strategies used with teachers of SWD to meet the CCSS.

Principals and the Common Core State Standards

Authors of a phenomenological qualitative study with eight leaders (six principals and two curriculum administrators) found the communication and expectations written into the CCSS hindered the role of leaders in the schools from focusing on their diverse student populations (Mahfouz et al., 2017). Eighty percent of principals polled in 14 states said they were unprepared for the CCSS (Mahfouz et al., 2017). Despite being unprepared, the school leaders prioritized the standards, which, ultimately, required focus on learning targets to provide more meaningful assessments (Maxwell, 2014). In other words, all students need to show academic progress, and the leadership approach of SEAs plays a critical role.

In the most optimal scenario, principals receive the necessary support and communication from SEAs (Cobb, 2015). Cobb (2015) supported this assertion by examining 19 studies and found principals supported seven key special education roles that supported the special education inclusion framework in schools. The author discussed principals' challenges of incorporating special education components, which included avoiding litigation, creating partnerships for shared responsibility, collaborating among contradictory views, communicating an inclusive vision, supporting new teachers to reduce attrition, practicing the use of differentiated learning environments, and organizing staff, budgets, and schedules (Cobb, 2015). With a background in special education, SEAs support principals with the daily challenges in special education (Cobb, 2015).

Teachers of Students with Disabilities

There is a national concern for the role of teachers of SWD given the positions have been difficult to fill and because new teachers have been leaving within three years of starting a position (Cancio et al., 2014). In a quantitative study, Langher et al. (2017) researched 276 teachers of SWD who were asked to complete the Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey on perceived support from general education teachers. The purpose of the study, Langher et al. (2017) stated, was to determine the perceived level of support related to the reduction of burnout from teachers of SWD. Langher et al. (2017) completed a correlation analysis and created a multi-regression model by controlling for several variables, such as inclusion training, social-emotional characteristics, teacher training, and professional background. As a result, Langher et al. (2017) said depersonalization strategy was a negative adaptive strategy that did not reduce burnout, but encouraged teachers of SWD to leave the field of special education and impacted the teachers of SWD' abilities to care for SWD. Langher et al. (2017) found depersonalization was reduced with stronger personal development for teachers of SWD. Working with SWD, Langher et al. (2017) found teacher burnout was related to the teachers of SWD who had an emotionally demanding role, being overworked, and high expectations to meet the CCSS.

Conley and You (2016) used the School and Staffing Survey to examine administrative support, teacher team efficacy, workplace factors, behaviors of SWD, and intent to leave the field. The authors discussed a direct link between the lack of administrative support and a lack of teacher efficacy, which was highlighted as the reasons teachers left the special education field. Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, and Kiely

(2015) analyzed research articles on the science of learning and provided a practice-based model for teachers of SWD to use education strategies and methods aligned to literature for effective performance. Leko et al. (2015) stated if SEAs planned on implementing the CCSS effectively and intended to keep teachers of SWD, district leaders needed to rethink the use of educational and financial resources. SEA leaders needed to concentrate on reforming special education to provide the ongoing support for teachers of SWD, by being at policy tables and joining leadership groups that had an influence over special education programming (Leko et al., 2015).

Supports of Meeting the Common Core State Standards

In a study of how to align writing CCSS to IEPs, Caruana (2015) claimed with the completion of the CCSS, teachers of SWD were required to align IEPs to the writing CCSS and curriculum. Caruana (2015) said teachers of SWD should initially consider aligning IEP annual goals to the writing standards. Caruana (2015) described three principles and a five-step process regarding how IEPs could have goals that are efficiently aligned with the CCSS. The principles, Caruana (2015) said, were instructional supports based on universal design for learning (UDL), instructional accommodations for the general education teachers, and assistive technology to access the CCSS. The five step writing process involved (a) considering the biggest academic area of impact, (b) isolating grade-level standards, (c) breaking down standards into subcomponents and subskills based on students strengths, (d) identifying subskills that are measurable to meet SWD needs and strengths, and (e) applying IDEA components to the measurable goal. Through the three principles and five steps, Caruana (2015) said, SWD can better meet the writing CCSS and continually evaluate the standards using the

IEP. Caruana (2015) suggested teachers of SWD (a) choose a standard that allows flexible language, (b) describe how the goal will be met, and (c) use some of the language of the chosen CCSS. *Flexible language*, according to Caruana (2015), was when a teacher revised the standard and kept the intent without including how the standard should be met. Instead of indicating a standard would be met by *writing* the IEP goal would use the word *communicated*, since all SWD could not write (Caruana, 2015). When teachers of SWD create standards-based alignment to the CCSS in IEP goals, teachers provided strong evidence of academic achievement through IEP documentation (Caruana, 2015). Caruana (2015) described the three guiding principles to IEP goal development aligned to the CCSS as (a) instructional supports based on UDL, (b) instructional responsibility shared between teachers of SWD and general education teachers, including shared responsibility for accommodations, and (c) consideration of UDL technology needs. Caruana (2015) claimed addressing the three planning issues, the five-step goal-development process, and the three guiding principles could impact academic growth with SWD, though this relies on district leaders to incorporate these concepts into professional development.

In a study on how to unfold the CCSS, Power-de Fur (2015) wrote a book for speech language pathologists who work with SWD who need speech and language services for lesson planning. *Unfolding* a standard means to view the standard deeply and understand all the steps required to attain the standard. Power-de Fur (2015) developed a book to support speech and language pathologists to unpack the CCSS speech and listening standards and developed intervention activities aligned to the standards. According to Power-de Fur (2015) 35% to 45% of SWD receive speech and

language services and were required to have goals in IEPs in the speech and language areas. Power-de Fur (2015) suggested (a) reviewing the CCSS, (b) explaining expectations of language and communication standards, and (c) analyzing students' abilities to meet the CCSS. To address the CCSS by disability category, Power-de Fur (2015) addressed each disability category: communication disorders, autism spectrum, deaf and hard of hearing, visual impairment or deaf-blindness, specific learning disabilities, severe disabilities at the secondary, and English language learners (ELLs).

In a meta-analysis of 21 articles regarding writing practices for elementary students, Graham et al. (2015) claimed with the addition of the CCSS, writing practices needed to be adjusted if students were going to meet the standards. Success in writing, speaking, and meeting IEP requirements were important when considering the CCSS (Graham et al., 2015). Individual district leadership teams ultimately determine the practices used by schools with SWD. More research may be needed on methods by which SEAs implement the CCSS while addressing federal IEP requirements for teachers of SWD (Graham et al., 2015).

Researchers demonstrated success using the inclusion model. Inclusion is described as when SWD and general education students are included in general education classes (Hornby, 1992). Hornby (1992) explained SWD have the right to be educated with general education students when being in the general education classroom best meets the students' needs. Lowrey et al. (2017) explored the experiences of general education teachers who implemented universal design of learning (UDL) and related UDL strategies to the inclusion of severely intellectually disabled students. Lowrey et al. (2017) implemented a qualitative approach using Polkinghorne's method of analysis with

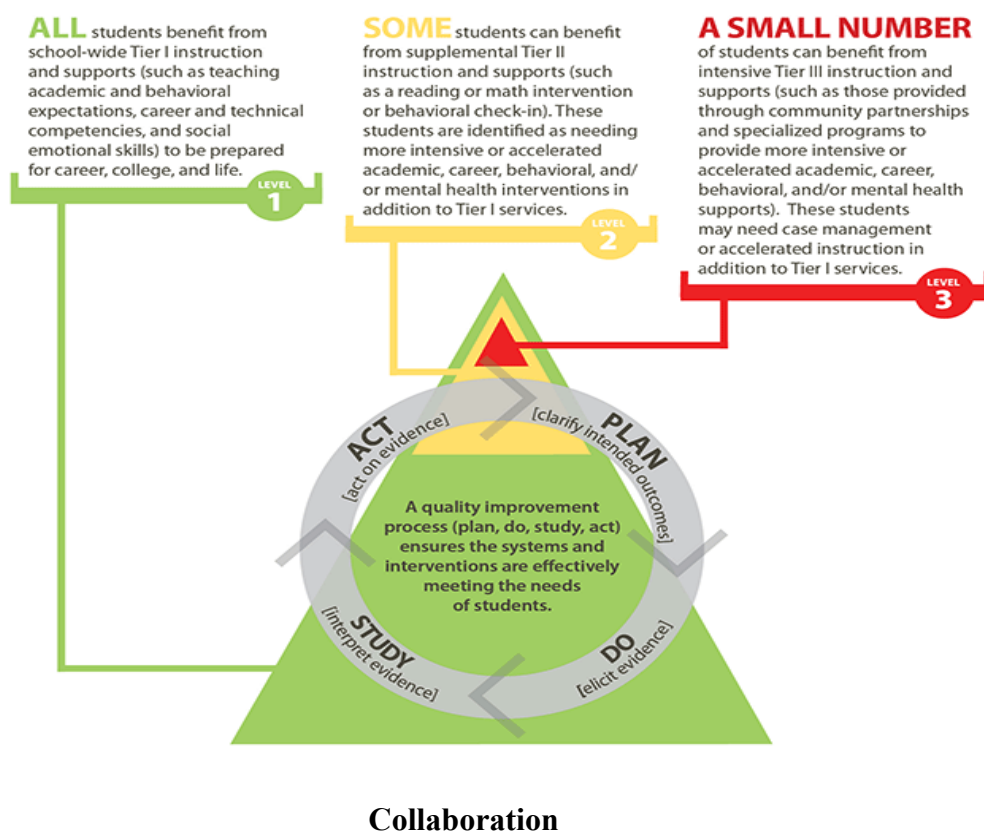
seven teachers' narratives, each of whom used the UDL framework for at least a year. Lowrey et al. (2017) examined three principles: engagement, representation, and action. There are three core assumptions made in this framework: proactive, intentional planning to remove barriers; researched best practices; and providing flexible instruction to accommodate all students. The model Lowrey et al. (2017) said was used when teachers concentrated on the needs of students who are severely intellectually disabled, followed the core assumptions, and had intentionally planned to prevent barriers for all students. Lowrey et al. (2017) recommended having an inclusive education classroom using (a) a UDL framework, (b) collaboration, (c) co-planning, and (d) individualization of the UDL framework.

In a study, addressing leaders changing the culture of the school to be an inclusive education school, Theoharis and Causton (2014) analyzed research literature and formulated a seven-step process with tools for leaders to implement an inclusion model. The authors, Theoharis and Causton (2014) found school leaders were effective in creating an inclusive environment for SWD when they (a) established a vision, (b) developed a democratic plan, (c) involved staff members systematically, (d) created collaborative teams, (e) provided ongoing professional development, (f) continually monitor and updated service delivery, and (g) established an inclusive environment for all students. Theoharis and Causton (2014) made a case for using collaboration through an inclusive education framework with race and disabilities to meet the CCSS.

Researchers discussed the Response to Intervention (RTI), more recently known as Multitiered support System (MTSS), as a support strategy in meeting the CCSS for students who demonstrate difficulty in either academics or behavior. Avant (2016)

researched RTI/MTSS as a social justice promotion for schools. Deficit thinking and marginalization were a part of the schools, according to Avant (2016), and school counselors or school social workers needed to use the RTI/MTSS to support the students through multiple leveled interventions of the educational process (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Multi-tiered support system.



For individuals with disabilities, Bicehouse and Faieta, (2017) claimed education has changed drastically over the years, from providing separate classes for SWD to ensuring maximum effort to guarantee all students graduate to a reformed shift where all students, regardless of ability, are held accountable for meeting national standards. Providing rigor for SWD is a challenge in meeting the CCSS (Van Boxtel, 2017). Curriculum and instruction, according to Porter, Fusarelli, and Fusarelli, (2015), has been

used in special education classes but has not always been uniform with general education classrooms, and SWD may need the rigor provided by the general education curriculum and classrooms. Modified curriculum has not always been similar to the curriculum used for general education students (OSPI & WEA, 2013). Porter et al. (2015) claimed professional collaboration was a leading form of communication in PLCs, co-planning, and collaborative teams with the purpose of analysis in data and planning, which was needed since the role of teachers had changed with inclusive education and co-teaching. Professional collaboration was when two teachers shared as equals in planning, goals for students' success, teaching, monitoring, and grading according to Porter et al., 2015.

Inclusion

Weber and Young (2017) searched for studies of high school administrators in North America regarding special education inclusion and found only four empirical articles, indicating a lack of literature associated with high school administrative leadership perspectives regarding special education collaborative strategies, such as inclusion. Collaborative teaching or co-teaching often occurs in inclusive education. Weber and Young (2017) said in-depth information was necessary to understand how and why inclusive practices benefit students with various disabilities, and such information has only been available quantifiably, not through in-depth exploration in research. School administration has not provided the in-depth information needed to understand how inclusion works for students with various disabilities or why administrators believe inclusive education does not work for some SWD (Weber, & Young, 2017).

Roberts et al. (2017) researched 12 administrators, both principals and SEAs, to determine the vision and expectations for teachers of students with severe disabilities in

relationship to inclusion. Roberts et al. found school administrators played an important role in supporting teachers in teaching and learning, but administrators had only surface-level knowledge of teaching students with severe disabilities using inclusion or following the CCSS. The authors said administrators expected instruction for teachers of students of severe disabilities was a combination of professional expectations outside of classroom and managing, being positive, communication, shaping behavior, and caregiving inside the inclusive education classroom. Roberts et al. said administrators were not able to give specific instructional practices to use with students with severe disabilities, which may perpetuate a negative stereotype for students with severe disabilities unless the instructional problems were addressed due to a lack of knowledge or experience with this type of SWD. Continuing to improve the inclusive education for both teachers of SWD and general education teachers was important in meeting the CCSS, which may be addressed through SEAs providing professional development (Roberts et al., 2017).

Endacott et al. (2016) completed a national study on 5,170 teachers' perceptions of district administrators and school leadership support of the CCSS, collaboration, working conditions, and job satisfaction. The authors found successful, long-term change required policy board members, different levels of leadership, and teachers to focus support on CCSS implementation, collaboration building, teacher conditions, and job satisfaction (Endacott et al., 2016). Endacott et al. claimed when the leaders were open and actively involved with teachers, teachers had a positive outlook on using the CCSS, teaching conditions, and job satisfaction. Therefore, many stakeholders need to work together to bring effective and long-standing change of collaborative practices using the CCSS using inclusion or co-teaching (Endacott et al., 2016).

Weber and Young (2017) completed a literature review of high school administrators and inclusive education. Without incorporating the voices of high school administrators in the literature, Weber & Young (2017) said it remained difficult to understand which strategies were used to achieve the goals set by the CCSS for SWD . Some administration teams made inclusion as the surest approach to pursue to meet requirements of the CCSS for some SWD; however, the concept of inclusion is accompanied by much criticism and hesitation (Broderick, 2018; Jahnukainen, 2014; Roberts et al., 2017).

In analyzing inclusive education in relationship to capability theory, Broderick (2018) claimed there were limitations in indicating all SWD should be in an inclusive environment due to the vast types of disabilities and consideration of when inclusion may not help SWD meet their full human potential. Broderick (2018) indicated there was a balance between differentiating for SWD and avoiding labels and or stereotypes. A four-step guide, Broderick (2018) stated could be used to process equalities that arose in the inclusion model in determining the SWD' needs and whether inclusion was a good fit for the SWD when faced with lessons in which SWD could not partake due to disabilities. Broderick (2018) claimed the four steps were (a) equalizing by expanding opportunities of a students' capabilities not outcomes, (b) determining goals for SWD in inclusive education, (c) accommodations and reasonable supports for SWD, and (d) widening the norm for students' differences. When SWD are in an inclusion classroom, but due to severity of disability, the SWD cannot partake in activity, teachers would not be using an inclusion model if the SWD was doing a separate assignment while the remaining students were involved in another activity.

Roberts et al. (2018) claimed inclusion was complicated for students with severe disabilities and required an entire school transformation for successful implementation. However, Roberts et al. (2018) said often administrators lacked the pedagogical knowledge regarding students with severe disabilities. Roberts et al. (2018) found principals needed to be challenged by district administrators given the negative stereotypes about students with severe disabilities. Negative stereotypes, according to Thornberg (2015), happened because SWD were viewed as outside of the norm, which showed a devaluation. A variety of disabilities were deemed to be severe, involving functional capacities (such as mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, or interpersonal skills), and Roberts et al. (2018) did not specify which type of SWD were included in the study.

An ongoing special education debate has involved determining the best classroom settings to meet the needs of various types of SWD (Friend et al., 2010; Hornby, 2015). Inclusion could be viewed as the overarching umbrella term, while co-teaching is one of the programs encompassed in inclusion. Inclusive education and special education are diametrically opposite in philosophy (Hornby, 2015). However, Hornby (2015) provided a combined concept for how inclusive special education could be approached using the philosophy, values, and practice of inclusive theory while using the interventions, strategies, and procedures of special education to provide academic gain for all SWD. Hornby (1999) claimed when using the inclusive education theory, leaders take into consideration whether the general education setting best meets the needs of students with a variety of disabilities.

Co-Teaching

In a study of literature with collaborative teaching or co-teaching practices, Friend et al. (2015) found there was confusion among school administrators with the term *co-teaching*, but a distinction has been made regarding this term and apprentice teaching. *Apprentice teaching* involves a certified teacher and a student teacher whereas co-teaching involves two certificated. There was less clarity with the term inclusion, given the term inclusion does not have a universal definition (Friend et al., 2015). Friend et al. said co-teaching was the beginning of innovative and creative teaching practice as an education option and a sign SWD should be viewed first as a student without a focus on the boundaries that separate the disability and the general education student.

Building administrators, Friend et al. (2015) said, cannot be expected to lead staff through collaborative integration with existing programs in the school building when there is little knowledge of fundamental concepts. Researching school administrators and the leaders' ability to manage special education in the schools, Schwab, Holzinger, Krammer, Gebhardt, and Hessels (2015) claimed school administrators had limited experience with students with exceptionalities or special education issues in teaching and leadership training. In addition, Schwab et al. (2016) stated special education is the highest area of litigation for building leaders who have little experience with special education. School administrators reported professional development was needed for building administrators in special education law, behavior modification strategies, and teaching and instructional strategies for working with mild, moderate, and severe SWD (Schwab et al., 2015).

Generally, inclusion involves all students being included or integrated into general education settings and using the general education curriculum (Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). Strogilos and Avramidis (2016) said co-teaching is also known as *shared teaching* and is a model where two certified teachers teach collaboratively in one, inclusive classroom. The two teachers share instructions, resources, accountability, and planning for one classroom (Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). In a study with a sample of 12 students who were autistic and 10 students with intellectual disabilities, Strogilos and Avramidis (2016) compared co-teaching and non-co-teaching special education classrooms. Strogilos and Avramidis (2016) stated co-teaching had some positive effects for SWD, but further studies were necessary to define the roles and responsibilities of the co-teaching model for both general education teachers and teachers of SWD, since there would need to be some behavior management involved in the setting.

Professional Development

Professional development gives teachers opportunities to grow in the schools. In an exploratory, mixed-methods study focusing on high school English teachers' perspectives of professional development, Ajayi (2016) found professional development was inadequate when encouraging teachers to incorporate the CCSS and maintain classroom rigor. In light of the co-teaching model and inclusion, Ajayi (2016) stated teachers of SWD and general education teachers needed to be trained together in the same professional development sessions. Ajayi (2016) attested high school English teachers were confident the standards would help provide the growth students needed to be college and career ready but were not confident in knowledge of incorporating the CCSS. All teachers reported the essentialness of providing continued professional

development opportunities with some training specifically aimed at the English CCSS (Ajayi, 2016). Ajayi (2016) found English teachers needed more opportunities for quality professional development, planning time, collaboration with peers and training sponsored with outside organizations. To assist with meeting the rigor of the standards, Ajayi (2016) claimed teachers were provided research-based, CCSS-aligned, instructional materials and necessary technology. Ajayi (2016) said there were many components for leaders to address the standards which were necessary to engage students in a learning environment. Yet, according to Ajayi, (2016) there was very little known about the CCSS' effectiveness especially in addressing all students, including SWD or students as ELLs.

Response to intervention, according to Bartholomew and De Jong (2017), was an approach allowed by the IDEA in the early identification of students, starting in the general education classroom, and was a multitiered approach. Response to intervention is a necessary area of professional development, not only for teachers, but administrators and support staff (Bartholomew & De Jong, 2017; Bineham, Shelby, Pazey, & Yates, 2014). Bineham et al. (2014) claimed there was much confusion over the term RTI because some staff described RTI as a framework used only in special education; other staff said RTI was a reading intervention program; and 10% completely misunderstood what RTI involved or whom RTI involved. Bineham et al. (2016) claimed RTI might be used in professional development opportunities to support the CCSS since some students may benefit from the RTI process, as the RTI process offers research-based levels of instructions and strategies to determine areas of strengths and necessary instructions to meet the CCSS.

Administrators of ELL and SWD need to ensure resources, flexibility, time, support, and quality professional development were provided to teachers of SWD and ELL (Murphy & Haller, 2015). Murphy and Haller (2015) said this was necessary for teachers to collaborate, get comfortable with CCSS best practices, align the standards with curriculum, and implement the reading standards for all SWD and ELL. Murphy and Haller (2015), who completed a qualitative researched study, claimed teachers of SWD and ELL reported not receiving sufficient professional development to develop self-efficacy, knowledge and skills to implement CCSS.

English Language

Research articles can typically be found on reading and writing in lower grades, but fewer empirically based articles were available for high school English. English subject, and math, were chosen using the same rationale as the CCSS (Wallender, 2014). English and math, according to Wallender (2014), were chosen for the research because English and math skills were required to excel in other school subjects. In high school classes, reading and writing were encompassed in one subject area called *English*. This was unlike elementary school grades, where reading and writing may be taught as separate classes with one teacher in each classroom. Also, when students qualified for special education services, reading, writing, and math were three academic areas that SWD could qualify for additional services. The SWD can qualify in one or two subject areas of reading and/or writing.

Reading

Garwood et al. (2017) studied the reading fluency and comprehension for students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) since that group was typically the lowest

performers in reading and sometimes also have learning disabilities. For SWD to meet the reading CCSS, teachers of SWD needed to know what the most important elements were to teach, which required knowledge from SEAs (Van Boxtel, 2017). Reading for SWD was difficult, and SWD were sometimes emotionally or behaviorally disabled and may not benefit from traditional academic interventions (Garwood et al., 2017). Many SWD struggled with reading comprehension and fluency, and reading was needed for all content areas (Garwood et al., 2017). Garwood et al. (2017) provided two strategies—graphic organizers and story maps—in working with students with EBD.

Regarding the CCSS reading standards, Garwood et al. (2017) explained how the standards were complicated for SWD with reading-related issues. Garwood et al. (2017) claimed there were problems when SWD struggle during earlier grades and basic reading proficiency did not progress. Once the students enter high school, teachers introduced more complex texts into the curriculum, and if students were below grade-level standards, problems progress (Garwood et al., 2017). Garwood et al. (2017) indicated teachers had adopted various methods, including preparing students, implementing instructions, and creating independent reading processes, so students do not continue to struggle with reading. Garwood et al. (2017) said teachers in the study used five strategies in the classroom to improve high school CCSS reading scores: (a) repeated reading, (b) collaborative reading groups, (c) structured peer tutoring, (d) silent reading, and (e) story mapping or graphic organizers. Furthermore, Garwood et al. (2017) claimed implementing professional development, a structured environment, and best practice strategies to teachers of SWD, high school SWD can experience growth in reading proficiency.

Writing

With no guidance for SWD, all students were required to meet the same standards in the writing CCSS. Santangelo (2014) completed a narrative review of the writing process and said learning disabled students were unskilled at writing due to lack of purpose and planning. Many SWD had weak writing abilities, according to Santangelo (2014) and needed to be taught writing processes and strategies. Santangelo (2014) claimed students with learning disabilities, in general, do not have the writing skills necessary to demonstrate proficiency in writing narrative, expository, or persuasive essays required to meet the CCSS. Santangelo (2014) researched the writing development and proficiency of students with learning disabilities and claimed four contributing factors led to a lack of competency in writing: planning, text production, revising, and motivation. Santangelo (2014) noticed three of the four contributing factors—planning, text production, and revising—were part of the five-step writing process: planning, producing a draft, editing, revising, and finalizing.

In a quantitative study using multiple-regression analysis, Koutsoftas (2014) used a sample of 64 students, in 21 inclusive classrooms, who met criteria of age, gender, and classroom applicability. Koutsoftas (2014) said compared non-SWD with SWD with an emphasis on the writing expectations in the CCSS. In creative writing exercises, Koutsoftas (2014) used writing activities over a three-day period to provide the rigor of the demands of the writing CCSS. Koutsoftas (2014) required students to use the five-step writing process: planning, drafting, editing, revising, and finalizing as stated in the CCSS. The non-SWD showed higher quality writing as compared to the SWD; the SWD

had increased in amount of writing but lacked the organization due to planning skills (Koutsoftas, 2014).

There was a lack of theoretical models regarding the writing process over time, which makes reaching agreement on the integration of the CCSS writing standards difficult for professionals (Graham & Harris, 2015). Graham and Harris (2015) said if professionals who wrote the CCSS struggled to agree about the writing standards, CCSS would be even more difficult for teachers of SWD to agree about an approach to the curriculum without the support of SEAs. However, writing has been considered the most powerful tool that demonstrates what students know about a subject according to Santangelo (2014) and the writing process was used to determine the knowledge a student has on various topics and was often used for assessments.

According to Graham and Harris (2015), although the writing standards of the CCSS were ambitious, the standards encompass more benefits than limitations as compared to the former standards. Graham and Harris (2015) claimed students were required to be more efficient and better writers, which, in turn, prepared students for college. There were no provisions in the CCSS for SWD; provisions were necessary for academic success considering the ongoing struggle with learning and schooling for SWD (Graham & Harris, 2015). Graham and Harris (2015) attested, with the demands of the writing CCSS, many teachers of SWD had little to no training regarding how to teach the writing process. Graham and Harris (2015) claimed teachers of SWD lacked the training to support writing CCSS by examining the transcripts of interviews with teachers and students' writing through a meta-analysis design. The self-regulated strategy development (SRSD), Graham and Harris (2003) claimed writing involved a six-step

process: (a) develop background knowledge, (b) describe strategy, purpose, and benefits, (c) teacher models the strategy, (d) students memorize steps and mnemonic, (e) students use strategy with little support, and (f) teacher scaffolds for student mastery. Graham and Harris (2015) gave five recommendations for working with SWD: (a) provide the SRSD model, making certain students have the skills before teaching the model, (b) establish a writing goal, (c) allow technology, such as speech to text and word processing, (d) teach the writing process—planning, text production, editing, revisions, and final, and (e) use collaborative writing.

Wilcox, Jeffery, and Gardner-Bixler (2016) collected data using interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and documentation data. In a multiple-case study involving nine schools, Wilcox et al. (2016) focused on how the writing CCSS and teacher evaluation systems influenced students' writing. Wilcox et al. (2016) discovered that although teachers were using evidence-based practices, a writing rubric, and the five-step writing process, pedagogical guidance in writing CCSS was needed to help teachers understand the shift to the writing CCSS. Wilcox et al. (2016) attested leaders needed to provide professional development opportunities to staff to ensure there was alignment of standards, correct use of scaffolding for diverse learners, differentiation for all students, and increased collaboration among teachers.

Math

In a longitudinal study, Schulte and Stevens (2015) analyzed math achievement between general education students, SWD, and non-SWD (the only subgroup in the longitudinal study that involved students with cognitive limitations). Schulte and Stevens (2015) found SWD scored lower on the math assessment than any other at-risk students

involved in the study. Schulte and Stevens (2015) claimed the likelihood of SWD meeting the math CCSS was unlikely. Schulte and Stevens (2015) stated the SWD also showed lower and slower achievement across grades. Although further studies were needed in Math CCSS and SWD area, according to Schulte and Stevens (2015) regardless of the criteria used, SWD would struggle with math concepts when using critical thinking skills.

Van Boxtel (2017) researched the CCSS with SEAs to determine alignment between researched literature on the CCSS and SEAs usage of strategies and methods. Van Boxtel (2017) found the need for more professional development in math for teachers of SWD based on SEA replies in surveys. The greatest areas of need for math were teaching higher level, complex math to SWD, aligning math CCSS to instruction and IEP goals, and designing math interventions.

In working with SWD who already struggle with math calculations and concepts, Spooner et al. (2017) said aligning the CCSS to the math curriculum was vital to understand critical elements, such as problem solving, conceptual math, and critical math. In meeting the math CCSS, Spooner et al. (2017) claimed SWD needed to understand the connections between foundational skills and higher-level standards. Bottge et al. (2015) claimed there was more pressure on teachers of SWD and general education teachers as inclusion programs incorporate the math CCSS.

In a study by Fuchs et al. (2015), the math CCSS were used in a random control trial for three years to study the use of general education math curriculum in two settings: (a) inclusion (general education) and (b) specialized (special education). Fuchs et al. (2015) claimed SWD increased academic proficiency when in the specialized setting but

decreased in proficiency in the inclusion setting which contradicted CCSS best practice inclusion model. Fuchs et al. (2015) found both high-performing and low-performing general education students increased academic proficiency when in the inclusion classroom, but SWD did not increase proficiency in the same setting.

In a critical analysis of 20 researched articles, from 1975 to 2012, regarding literature aligned with the math CCSS for students with EBD, Mulcahy et al. (2014) researched interventions related to secondary schooling promising practices. Research literature was limited for CCSS math strategies for EBD; however, Mulcahy et al. (2014) said for students diagnosed with EBD, there were some promising strategies. Mulcahy et al.'s (2014) analysis resulted in four strategies: (a) peer mediation, (b) technology, (c) conceptual instruction strategies, and (d) academic/behavior interventions. During the analysis, Mulcahy et al. (2014) discovered there were no studies from 1975 through 2012 that addressed or demonstrated evidence of meeting math concepts and instructional content or the CCSS beyond the basic-skill level.

Theoretical Framework

In the following section, the researcher described the theories being used in the current study. Authentic leadership theory was used to interpret the data for the current research. Then, inclusive theory was explained to illustrate the approach taken to guide the study in answering the questions.

Authentic Theory

Authentic leadership was developed by George (2003) through a practical approach of individual characteristics needed to develop the authentic leadership theory. George (2003) said authentic leadership could be developed by leaders reflecting on

whether there was a balance on working, home and life and then to change the behavior, so there was balance. George (2003) described authentic leaders as individuals with high integrity, a deep sense of purpose, and high morals. Initially, George (2003) developed the authentic leadership theory through a business lens, and then, the theory became more widely used and was recognized by academic leaders. Authentic leaders reflected on strengths and weaknesses, had a passion for leading to the betterment of an organization, established genuine relationships, and shared thoughts and heartfelt experiences (George, 2003).

Authentic theory, according to Northouse (2017) is a framework that explains how leaders need to be authentically diligent in personal and professional pursuits. Northouse (2017) claimed authentic leadership theory was renowned for being described by authors from different perspectives and multiple viewpoints. Authentic leaders have genuine relationships where the leaders learn from the followers and the followers learn from the leaders (Northouse, 2017). Leaders who were authentic led others through a genuine, ethical, and honest style of behavior that shows meaning, purpose, and values, regardless of the setting (Northouse, 2017). Authentic leaders lead with the heart and have an open mind to learn from other peoples' behavior (Northouse, 2017).

Inclusive Education Theory

The inclusive education theory was first developed by Hornby (1999, 2015) who said, inclusive education theory supports having SWD in general education classrooms. Hornby (1999, 2015) claimed inclusive education theory addressed equity issues or fairness without biases. Hornby (1999, 2015) stated inclusive education theory for special education encompasses philosophies, values, and practices of including SWD in general

education classrooms with peers. The inclusive education has been widely used today as the umbrella to collaborative teaching or co-teaching as one of the models (Hornby, 1999, 2015).

According to Hornby (1999, 2015), there was confusion over the human rights versus the moral rights of SWD. Inclusive education theory, Hornby (1999, 2015) stated, differentiates between human rights for SWD to be in general education settings and moral rights for SWD to be in the setting that best meets SWD needs for learning (Hornby, 1999, 2015). However, Hornby (1999, 2015) claimed the moral rights of SWD took precedence over human rights. The priority for the inclusive education theory, Hornby (1999, 2015) stated, was focused on the right to learn in an appropriate environment, not the right to learn in the same environment as nondisabled peers. Hornby (1999, 2015) claimed in inclusive education theory, SWD should be involved in general education when the IEP team said the SWD' placement was in the best interest of the student.

Many researchers have discussed Hornby's (1999, 2015) inclusive education theory in a framework called *inclusion* (Im & Martin, 2015; Jahnukainen, 2014; Roberts et al., 2017). Since local districts have indicated SWD were typically the lowest performers in schools, using the inclusive education model to meet the CCSS with SWD was the goal. Further, SWD may be better challenged in general education settings with general education curriculum and students when in the students' best interests.

Summary

Included in Chapter 2 was a discussion of the purpose to review current literature related to the SEAs' perspective of the CCSS strategies and methods related to the high

school special education programs. There was rigorous expectations and huge undertakings for all teachers regarding the standards (Caruana, 2015). Special education administrators' role was to support building administration and teachers of SWD.

Historical mandates and policies were examined in relationship to the SWD. Policies changed over the years from the Elementary and Secondary Act to the Individual with Disabilities Education Act to the more recent CCSS requirement with the goal of improving the academic growth of all students.

Summarizing main findings can be understood using the literature reviewed from the challenges and supports to meeting CCSS, collaboration, professional development in the academic area in reading, writing, and math and the theoretical framework. These were areas which required the support of leadership. Based on requirements from the CCSS, all students needed access to the general education curriculum and /or general education classroom settings, which required the pace often found in the general education setting. Students with disabilities who were with general education peers was known as the inclusive education program. Principals and vice principals directly experienced many of the associated challenges since the implementation of CCSS, inclusion and co-teaching into the classroom. Multiple authors from researched studies found school administrators needed the support from SEAs (Cobb, 2015; Mahfouz et al., 2017). Principals and vice principals faced several challenges in light of the lack of special education background and training. Thus, the school administrators often relied on teachers of SWD' knowledge of policy, practice, and regulations.

In conclusion, CCSS either would have a negative effect or prove to be a chance for change and improvement as SWD face the future (Van Boxtel, 2017). Curriculum and

resources supporting CCSS needed to be purchased for all students, including SWD (Mulcahy et al., 2014). As teachers of SWD work to meet the requirements of CCSS, support from SEAs was needed to support teachers of SWD, especially with the national shortage in this area (Conley & You, 2016). Special education administrators can help to voice the opportunities, support, and direction to districts to meet CCSS expectations. More information is needed from the SEAs on the perspectives and experiences in creating the change needed for high school special education programs for SWD to meet CCSS.

The qualitative methodology will be introduced in the next chapter. The qualitative methodology, and grounded theory design of the research will be discussed in Chapter 3. The specifics of the instruments, participants, data collection method, data analysis method, and trustworthiness of the current study will be addressed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodological design of the current study was discussed. The researcher of the current study used a qualitative methodological approach with a grounded theory research design. Grounded theory method was used to systematically collect and analyze the data which resulted in the development of a theory grounded in data (Charmez, 2014a). A grounded theory design was chosen for the current study given that grounded theory design was to inductively reach conclusions about the perspectives of the SEAs in the high schools.

Research Methods

Qualitative methodology was used when a problem or issue needs to be explored and a complex understanding of the problem was necessary. The current study was based on Van Boxtel's (2017) California's quantitative study. A qualitative methodology was considered for the current study due to the California study of special education administrators (SEAs) addressing the CCSS being quantitative. The purpose was to gain more in-depth information and to provide a theoretical explanation which fit the problem. Creswell (2014) claimed quantitative methodology was used to provide a numerical description or to determine if a treatment influences an outcome. A qualitative methodology better fit the problem. The qualitative methodology process of how SWD could meet the CCSS could be explained through SEA experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the quantitative and mixed methods were ruled out. Also, a qualitative study was the chosen framework so the problem could be examined in the natural setting of the SEAs. New ground was needing to be addressed regarding leaderships' perspectives of teachers of SWD in the high school. The researcher chose a

qualitative methodology to provide an exploration using the school settings with the voices of SEAs with more in-depth and rich data. When using a qualitative approach, exploring the target phenomenon was best managed when the data were obtained by in-person interactions to help establish patterns and themes (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methodology according to Creswell (2014) required the methodological design to be aligned with the research questions.

The researcher chose grounded theory design for the current study instead of other qualitative designs since only one other study was found on the combined topic of SEAs and the CCSS, and the study was a quantitative methodology, indicating little in-depth research had been completed about the topic, and no other research concentrated on the high school level. Creswell (2014) claimed grounded theory was used when there was either inadequate or little research to explain a phenomenon. There was little research from high schools and high schools were very different from the lower levels, since high schools requires students to show preparedness by passing state assessments to graduate, gain a required number of credits, and have a plan after graduation. In the lower level grades, students were not required to earn credits to go to the next grade level.

Grounded theory was also chosen because unlike other designs, the underlying research process of grounded theory according to Charmez (2014a) allowed the researcher to use the iterative process of starting with the data and ending with a formulized theory. Charmez (2014a) alleged grounded theory was an inductive logic that uses “rigorous, comparative analysis” (p. 14) to develop theories to inform practice. Furthermore, Charmez (2014a) stated grounded theory was an iterative process that differs from the

other qualitative designs. Grounded theory, Charmez (2014a) said, can solve problems by collecting and analyzing data which can aid in developing a new theory, direction, or idea.

Grounded theory was started with inductively gathering data. By starting the data analysis during the data collection process, theory construction emerged through the use of data inductively, comparatively, and iteratively (Charmaz, 2015). The researcher began with the open coding process, being attentive to what actions were being defined by using gerunds to replace the transcribed interview. The researcher initially coded transcript data with a gerund phrase or temporary concept, which was used in an effort to separate the datum. Next, focused coding was used to determine the frequent or significant codes. As the process continued, the researcher defined what actions were happening in the data. Through the analysis process of reading line by line and re-reading the data and details from the transcribed interview, the researcher gained insights, separating the data into categories. The researcher reflected on what was meant by the data, and an emergent theory was formed through identification of common themes developed by participant descriptions.

Grounded theory accommodated for the in-depth analysis necessary to more fully address each of the research questions. Grounded theory was flexible, allowing the researcher to change the categories upon analysis when comparing datum to categories, datum to memos, or datum to datum. Yet, grounded theory design was a structured approach in the iterative and comparable process of collecting and analyzing data starting with open coding, focus coding and categories becoming more generalized through the process. In the constructionist grounded theory, focused codes and categories were constructed by the different perspectives and experiences gathered from the data, which

began through open coding while being aware of theoretical saturation once the data were coded and analyzed. This process was different from other methods where data analysis occurred after collecting the data. Moreover, categories were developed using the grounded theory approach, and a theory or comprehensive understanding of how districts in the researched county support high school special education while working to meet the CCSS could be established. Other methods began with a theory or hypothesis and develop a hypothesis from the theory.

Grounded theory systematic design was used to gain district-level SEAs' perspectives and experiences of using the CCSS with SWD in the researched county. This grounded theory design was chosen to achieve a deep understanding of the problem, using multiple sources of evidence from real-life participant narratives. Further, when the data were collected, grounded theory was used to develop the theory based on the data. Also, the researcher was interested in the subject matter, and according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), in grounded theory, there was the possibility for innovative discovery, insight into the lives of the participants, and the ability to make a systematic difference in the lives of those involved.

Instruments

The two main data collection methods used by the researcher for this study were semi-structured, one-on-one interviews and surveys. In addition, the researcher used a field journal throughout the current study. The survey questions were created using the survey questions from Van Boxtel's (2017) quantitative study. The current study was based on Van Boxtel's (2017) with researched literature to create a new set of survey questions for the current survey. Van Boxtel (2017) gave the researcher permission to use

and adapt the questions to the current qualitative study to create open-ended questions. Further, an interview guide was developed by the researcher to use for the interview of the participants' survey data and the district website data.

The researcher used surveys as a preliminary tool to develop an interview guide for more in-depth interview information related to the research questions and to respect the time of the participants. The questions included topics from the CCSS, such as collaboration, communication, professional development, reading, writing, and math. English (reading and writing) and math were three subjects addressed in the CCSS and were the same areas SWD can qualify for on IEPs.

In an article on publishing successful surveys and research, Fawcett et al. (2014) stated surveys were a common method to compare data to gain a deeper understanding of a person's views and experiences. Beginning with Van Boxtel's (2017) demographics and 22 questions and reviewing the current study's four research questions, the researcher used a survey comprising of demographics and eight questions. Van Boxtel's (2017) questions were primarily Likert scale questions combined with yes or no questions which were divided up into topic areas related to the researched topics. The researcher for the current study focused on the same topics related to the current studies' literature and findings from Van Boxtel (2017), but created all open-ended questions. The current studies' questions were developed based on those areas which were related to the research questions. Fowler (2014) said to take advantage of questions already used, but make sure the questions fit the context, population, and goals of the research to be completed. Two questions were used to identify the high school district location and participant questions related to the research. After the demographic questions, eight

remaining open-ended questions corresponded to the requirements in the CCSS. The remaining survey questions' main ideas were on collaboration and communication; professional development; CCSS reading, writing and math; and the teachers of SWD needs (see Appendix A). District websites were used as a source to guide the interview and establish triangulation.

Interviews

Initially, SEAs completed a survey with two demographic questions and eight open-ended questions. Charmez (2014a) claimed an interview guide was a flexible tool the researcher develops prior to the interview to help think through the types of questions needed to ask, how to ask and what to ask that fulfills the goals of the researched study. Upon receiving the completed surveys, the researcher developed an interview guide related to the purpose of the study which would be used in the in-depth interviews. The main points raised from the survey were used to form an interview guide for the questions asked in the in-depth interview. The researcher used reflection and clarification to understand the areas in the in-depth interview to obtain more needed data. The researcher developed a guide based on the districts' website and answers to the survey.

Fowler (2014) claimed individual interviews were the best method to use to obtain high quality data. The goal was to use face-to-face, individual interviews, since the face-to-face interview allows the researcher to understand the presence of the respondent. The presence of the respondent can provide insight to the researcher and help clarify questions or answers given by respondent. SEA participants were constrained by time, and one participant was not able to complete an individual, face-to-face interview after

completing the survey, so an alternative method (telephone) was used, based on the SEA's request.

Field Journal

Charmez (2014b) stated journals used throughout the research process should be used analytically to record methodological dilemma, directions, and decisions. Charmez claimed the field journal guides, directs and commits the researcher to action. The field journal was the third source of data used and had the purpose of allowing for reflection on preliminary observations, experiences, and ideas. The field journal aided in the reflexivity to avoid preconceiving the data. Also, the journal was used to record any applicable questions about what was happening in the data and the interviews. The journal was similarly used to record any relevant information from the websites, which could aid in developing further in-depth questions.

Sampling Method

Staff in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI, 2017) reported there were 15 school districts in the researched county. Accordingly, it was important to note two of the researched county school districts did not have high schools. The current study sought to gather survey results from 13 of the 15 school districts. The two school districts without high schools did not meet the criteria of employed staff who had a special education administrative role with responsibilities for the high schools. The report indicated in the 13 districts, there were 43 high schools in the researched county, which collectively enrolled 3,692 SWD (OSPI, 2017). Ballotpedia Public Education staff (2018) in the researched state reported there was one administrator for every 369 students in the state, indicating there were between 11 and 28 SEAs in the researched county.

For the current study, all SEAs were given a survey with the goal of at least a six-participant completion rate; a rate of nine participants completed the interviews for saturation. Subsequently, the researcher conducted nine one-on-one, in-depth interviews with participants which represented 33 high schools. The ultimate goal when acquiring participants for the current study was for the researcher to create a sample rich and descriptive or theoretical saturation, addressing the research questions.

Participants

The operational definition for SEA included leaders located at the central administration building or at the district level who had direct responsibilities for special education staff in high schools. Due to the size of the district, some of the participants had multiple leadership roles. One example was a participant who was the director of both special education and ELLs. The dual role of the SEA enabled the leader to meld funds to provide similar services or training to both the teachers of SWD and teachers of ELL. The researcher relied on the superintendent or appointee to identify SEAs to participate. Patton (2015) attested, regarding sample size, the priority was not the number of participants, but rather the richness of the information gathered. The Educational School District (ESD) staff oversaw the 15 researched county school districts. Each leader who oversaw the high schools' special education program for the district was contacted using the database acquired from the online ESD website. Once each district was contacted, and the superintendent gave organizational consent, the superintendent designee was responsible for identifying potential participants who qualified to participate in the current study. The theoretical sampling method was used to gain rich,

extensive data from interviewed participants. Most participants were directors or executive directors with one participant being an assistant director.

Although participants were all responsible for special education programs in high schools in each district, many of the participants were also responsible for other department areas such as ELL or testing. Having multiple leadership roles gave some of the leaders a different perspective and experience. For example, a participant who had responsibility for both special education and ELLs combined funding and had professional development for both types of teachers using best practice strategies often used for the ELL students, but worked for both group of students.

Data Collection

The data were collected and guided by the grounded theory approach using the constant-comparative process. The constant-comparative, iterative process involved constantly comparing the fresh datum to coded datum, to focused datum, to categories. The data collected by the researcher used systematic and consistent procedures to align with the grounded theory process for analysis. The data were collected at different sites at different times of the day.

Survey Data Collection

The data collection process began with the surveys being completed by the SEAs. The surveys were used to obtain an initial understanding of the problem of addressing the SWD meeting CCSS. The surveys were also used as a preliminary tool to create an interview guide for the interview. The participants' Survey Monkey responses from the interviews were copied onto a word document for line by line coding. As surveys were completed the analysis process continued with open coding and comparing data.

Interview Data Collection

To obtain rich, descriptive stories from SEAs, the primary data collection method was in-depth, face-to-face interviews. Once the survey data were collected, the in-depth face to face interview was set up in the natural setting of the SEAs' workplace. SEAs requested to delay the interviews until June when schools had closed for the summer. The interviews were used to provide an in-depth understanding and to support data from interviews. The participant interviews provided communication of interviewees' statements. The data were collected at different sites at different times of the day.

All interviews were recorded using an audio recording device and a smart phone except the phone interview, which was not recorded, but notes were taken during the interview. After the interview, the audio file was downloaded to the Temi app which generated a Microsoft Word document (Temi, 2018). The transcription word document was manually corrected for any errors using the audio recording. Once the transcription was corrected, the document was emailed back to participants to ensure the words transcribed were the intended words used during the interview.

Each interview took approximately one hour. The researcher of the current study used open ended questions from information from the interview guide to further the richness of information for in-depth questions with face-to-face interviews. If key questions were not answered, the interviewees were asked for additional time to answer key questions. In one interview, the SEA reported the survey was not completed ahead of time but provide additional time to respond to the in-depth interview questions.

Field Journal

A field journal was a way to keep a record of observations from meetings involving SEAs. Throughout the data gathering process, it was important for the researcher to maintain objectivity and to be neutral and unbiased. The researcher recorded any observations and insights in the field journal prior to the interview from the district website which was related to the current research and would aid in the development of future interview questions. The recording of information always occurred after the survey was completed and a date for the interview was put on the calendar. Eight of the nine surveys were completed by districts.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the grounded theory method to analyze the data in developing a theory. Charmez (2014a) said through a systematic process of reading and rereading the data, similarities and differences emerged into concepts. Open coding was used to create a list of central statements given by the participants. The initial stages of analysis involved a constructionist grounded theory approach which considered the following questions: What did the data indicate? What was happening in the data? Whose viewpoint was the data coming. (Thornburg, 2014). Noble and Mitchell (2016) attested data should be coded to develop collective key ideas and concepts that were grouped and placed into categories. Through the patterns in the data, the researcher developed the grounded theory. The analysis began in the initial stages of the study through the use of an iterative process of data collection and analysis with the goal of creating a theory from the coded and categorized data. The primary data gathered was from in-depth interviews. Although the open coded data began with a short gerund phrase and new data were

developed, the researcher made decisions about which open codes made the most analytical sense for the developed concepts called focused coding. The process used by the researcher sometimes required coding the open codes to generalize the data into similar categories. The grounded theory design included an active approach from the researcher when gathering and analyzing data. The theory was grounded in the data gathered from various sources without preconceived notions. The outcomes of the current study were based on the analyzed data.

The researcher used focus codes to further develop the concepts from the analyzed data. Charmez (2014a) said focused coding directs the path of the analysis process and the researcher tests the new data against the initial codes or the expansion of another path. As the interviews were completed, each sentence was open coded to focused coding to categories. Repeated statements and concepts emergent from the hand-coded data demonstrated the importance of those statements, and the researcher needed to determine whether the repeated coded statements were taking the direction needed in the analysis process to develop another category. Temporary categories began to emerge with like threads intertwining the categories. The theory was grounded in the data gathered from various sources, but by looking for patterns and determining where there were gaps in the coded data and where there were comparisons, and what the researcher determined the comparisons indicated. The researcher developed categories from the focused coding and explained the relationship between the codes and categories. The outcomes of the current study were based on the analyzed data.

As a result of collecting data, and coding data, the constant comparison and iterative process of the data from surveys and interviews allowed the researcher to

determine whether saturation of information had occurred and the researcher determined if more data were needed to be collected to answer the research questions. Determining an adequate level of saturation was based on the complexity of the research questions (Aldiabat & Navenec, 2018). The theoretical saturation of analyzed data was satisfied. The researcher continued with one more interview to ensure the new data did not reveal any further categories or insights when analyzed with categories and comparing the large amounts of coded and categorized data to ensure theoretical saturation. Although, the researcher determined theoretical saturation had occurred, the categories still needed to be sorted to make sure the categories were linked and the relationship between the categories could be explained into a theory. The grounded theory design included an active approach from the researcher by sorting and analyzing data. Theory development occurred when the categories were saturated, which supported or expanded on Van Boxtel's (2017) research. The final results were reported from the research questions in narrative format and tables, including concept mapping. Results of triangulation of the three data sources—survey, interview, and journal—were reported in Appendix H. Triangulation of the data was also prioritized given the data were gathered from methods and data sources. In an article on trustworthiness of qualitative research, Korstjens and Moser (2018) said there were three types of triangulation—data, interpretation, and method—for the purpose of ensuring the research is valid with the cross verification of data from two or more sources. Using triangulation by collecting survey, interview, and observation data assisted with both the validity and reliability of the information.

Trustworthiness

In a naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba (1988) found to consider a study trustworthy, the researcher needs to include the following criteria: (a) credibility, (b) reflexivity, (c) transferability, (d) confirmability, and (e) dependability, which ensure validity and reliability. Each of the trustworthiness criteria was reviewed for the current study.

Credibility was established using several procedures. First, once the data were gathered and analyzed, the conclusions were shared with the participants for member checking to ensure the transcripts were accurate portrayals of the participants' contributions. Also, the researcher was transparent with participants to establish a relationship of trust, ensure the information was credible, and capture holistic perspectives. Then, credibility was documented during the surveys and interview process by asking similar questions about the same topic that were asked of the participants and the researcher reviewed the district websites thoroughly and developed an interview guide based on the survey and district web site which enabled the researcher to become familiar with the district and establish credibility.

Reflexivity, according to Korstjens and Moser (2018) involved personal reflection on the part of the researcher to ensure the study was not biased by the researcher's experiences and perspectives. Reflexivity was critical to the research process, Korstjens and Moser (2018) claimed, and lent insights about the research by journaling insights, preconceptions, assumptions and values. Berger (2015) said reflection was vital to incorporate or to remove any biases or beliefs of the researcher to enhance the accuracy and credibility of the study. Several strategies in reflexivity were utilized for the current

study. A field journal was maintained by the researcher to record insights to contribute to the reflexivity process. Reflexivity prompted reflective thinking throughout the survey or interview questions (Charmaz, 2015). By being attentive to the information or data in the surveys, in-depth interviews, and memos, subjective information related to the study arose. This information was journaled and noted as to whether the data aided in the theory development of the study. Another reflexivity strategy used for the current study was journaling to write opinions, thoughts, observations, and questions.

Confirmability was used to ensure the data were believable by accurately recording the participants' actual words. Decisions made for coding and categorizing through the analysis of the data were documented with reasons for confirmability. Each step used is accompanied by a detailed rationale. Confirmability was completed through the recording of the in-depth interviews and copying of the surveys which were coded; concepts were then used followed by categories which became more generalized throughout the process of analysis.

The researcher confirmed the data was dependable and reliable from start to finish. Dependability, Korstjens and Moser (2018) said, was transparent by describing and recording each step of the research study from beginning to completion of the process. Therefore, the study was dependable based on the recording of the information from the findings, interpretations and conclusions. The researcher of current study used dependability by explaining each step of the process, from the beginning when describing the research steps to the final stages of describing conclusions and making recommendations.

Transferability ensured the evidence of the data was applicable to other high schools with similar characteristics of the researched county demographics. Given the study encompassed a small number of participants, thick descriptions were used in detail. By using thick descriptions, the transferability was increased and applicable to similar high schools.

In the current study, the researcher created trustworthiness defined as following the criteria of credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and reflexivity. Defining trustworthiness improved the validity and reliability of the current research study. Also, using the tools of credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability and reflexivity helped the researcher explore the experiences and views of SEAs located in district offices.

Limitations

The current study added to the research of SEAs' leadership perspectives on the CCSS and SWD, but findings were confined to the demographics in the Northwest region, more specifically the researched county high schools. A larger sample size or national study may be demographically more generalizable or significantly noteworthy in findings.

Another limitation was the current research was not quantitative. The current study did not provide any numerical data to observe or see patterns. Instead the current study was qualitative. The data were nonnumerical and was derived from in-depth interviews from SEAs. The purpose of the current research study was to explore strategies and methods used from the SEAs' perspectives and experiences in using the CCSS with SWD which could not be solved by using a quantitative methodology.

A limitation was due to the researcher being a novice with grounded theory and has theoretical knowledge, but no experience using the grounded theory research method. Grounded theory was an exhaustive process, and there may have been limitations, by the researcher's possible blurring of the analytical process or theoretical development.

Summary

In this qualitative study, the purpose was to explore the perspectives and experiences of SEAs through the in-depth interviews and surveys, to give meaning and understanding to the strategies for working with SWD to meet the CCSS. Qualitative methodology was used to gain an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the SEAs and give insights into problems. Special education administrators addressed the problem of working to support SWD in meeting the CCSS.

Grounded theory was used in the study since the design purpose is to ground a theory from the context of the data. The researcher of the grounded theory method used a comparative, iterative and strategic process to analyze the data while collecting data from in-depth interviews until a theory was developed for the problem. This method was used to develop a theory, since other methods start with a theory, but with only one other related research study, grounded theory was the best choice to meet the purpose of the study.

There was little research from the perspectives of SEAs and CCSS. There was no research related to CCSS and SEAs in which the sole focus was on high schools. One other study, Van Boxtel (2017), focused on SEAs and CCSS and explored the alignment between the CCSS' recommended research studies to SEAs' strategies and methods used in districts. The current study was built on Van Boxtel's (2017) California study through

rich descriptions which used various forms of data and provided the necessary insight of direction needed in some schools through the interviews and surveys. The data collection began with the completion of a preliminary survey with 10 questions. The researcher developed an interview guide based on the survey and findings on the district website. Following the survey was the in-depth face to face interviews and a field journal.

The participants in this study were SEAs, leaders of district administrators in special education or student services departments. The researcher needed participants who were district-level administrators, had responsibilities in district high schools and responsibilities in special education in the researched county.

The data analysis process started with concurrently interviewing participants while coding data. The researcher used the grounded theory analysis process of iteratively, comparatively and inductively. In the active analysis approach, data were compared to codes, codes were compared to categories, and codes were compared to codes. Analysis began with open coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding.

The limitations of the current study were reviewed. The researcher was a novice of the grounded theory design and only had theoretical knowledge without prior grounded theory design experience.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to describe the research findings. The researcher used a constant-comparative analysis process while looking at continuous patterns of behavior in the transcripts to answer the research questions. In this chapter, the methodology was summarized, the analytic process was explained, findings were shared, and the researcher presented the theory developed inductively from the data.

Research Questions

The researcher explored the problem in this research that there had been few research studies reflecting the voice of special education administrators (SEAs). Yet, district-level SEAs have knowledge of strategies to use when leading teachers of SWD and school administration (school principals and assistant principals). The bigger problem was without multiple perspectives and experiences of SEAs, there was not a tool for educators to gain knowledge and learn what has worked in assisting students with disabilities (SWD) in meeting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Gathering multiple SEA perspectives and experiences was important to increase awareness of the problems and solutions. The SEA voices provide the expertise and understanding of the strengths and concerns in meeting the CCSS for SWD. Special education administrators play a critical role in leading teachers of SWD and school administrators toward academic improvement of SWD. Yet, few researchers explored the perspectives and experiences of SEAs related to aiding teachers of SWD in meeting the CCSS with SWD. Instead, the literature was saturated with the perspectives and experiences of teachers of SWD and principals. The researcher found only one notable quantitative study on SEAs from Van Boxtel (2017).

The purpose of using a qualitative research approach in the current study was to determine a theory of SEAs' leadership perspectives and experiences related to the implementation of the CCSS. Specifically, the researcher explored SEA perspectives on collaboration and communication; reading, writing, and math; professional development; and the alignment of IEPs for teachers of SWD in a county in the Northwest. The following research questions guided the current study:

- RQ1. How do SEA leaders view best practice strategies and methods to address the CCSS for collaboration and communication with teachers of SWD?
- RQ2. How do SEA leaders perceive the expertise of teachers of SWD meeting the CCSS in reading, writing, and math?
- RQ3. How do SEA leaders manage IEP alignment with teachers of SWD to meet the CCSS?
- RQ4. How do SEA leaders perceive the need for teachers of SWD to meet the CCSS?

Methodology

Using a qualitative methodology, a grounded theory design, allowed the researcher to consider the perspectives and experiences of district-level SEAs who completed both preliminary surveys and in-depth interviews. The sample included nine of the 13 district SEAs: three executive directors of special services, five directors of special services, and one assistant director of special education. Participating SEAs were selected, purposefully, based on their job descriptions and roles as district administrators. All participants were leaders directly responsible for working with high school teachers of SWD with SWD (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Districts' Job Title

Pseudonyms	Role of Participant
SEA A	Director of Special Services
SEA B	Executive Director of Student Services
SEA C	Director of Special Education
SEA D	Executive Director of Student Services
SEA E	Director of Special Services
SEA F	Director of Special Services
SEA G	Director of Student Support Services
SEA H	Assistant Director of Special Education
SEA I	Executive Director of Special Services

Note. Due to confidentiality, no other information will be revealed about districts.

Data Collection

The researcher began data collection by thinking about the purpose, problem, and research questions and reviewed the process to take to gather data to produce a rich and strong research product. Evidence was compiled from various data sources to augment and support triangulation. The data collection was comprised of sources including a survey, analytical memos, field journaling, district and school websites, articles and supplements, and in-depth interview transcripts.

In preparation of the in-depth interviews, the researcher viewed the participant survey results and district website to take notes in the field journal and develop more in-depth questions to produce rich data. The interviews were recorded using a recording device and a smart phone. Once an interview was recorded, the recording device was inserted into the computer and the researcher opened the Temi.com app. The app recorded the sound and transcribed the sound into words. When the Temi app was

completed, the researcher opened the audio file which produced a download opening to a Microsoft Word document. The researcher then reviewed the Microsoft Word document line by line, checking for any errors on the document while listening to the recorded sound. The Microsoft Word document was sent to the participant for member checking and for verification following the in-depth interviews to ensure accuracy.

As data was gathered, the analysis happened right after each interview. The researcher was flexible in the analytical process as the interviews were completed, open coded data would enable the researcher to produce new categories or new coding. Sometimes the open codes were coded due to the analytic process and the reflection of deciding the intended meaning of the analyzed data. As the researcher developed new coding or categories, the researcher would follow up with subsequent interviews on questions that arose from the previously coded data. After each in-depth interview, the researcher analyzed the data and was more focused with subsequent interviews. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached and no new data emerged.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted based on a constructionist grounded theory approach. An iterative, comparative, interactive approach was used during the initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding analyses. In an iterative process, the researcher went back and forth from initial coding to focused coding to categories during the analysis process. As new participants were interviewed, the researcher repeated the iterative and interactive process by comparing the coded data with the new data, existing data to new categories, and new categories to existing categories. Charmez (2014a) claimed the process for the researcher was interactive between gathering data and making

sense of the data through coding. As the researcher conducted the analysis, a deeper engagement with the data led to new codes (Charmez, 2014a). In rereading the data, the researcher was reminded of each interview, which then led to a new idea, making sense of the *what* and *why* of the data.

When the researcher gathered and coded the data, the researcher focused on all the data by constantly comparing any new data. The researcher examined each piece of datum sentence by sentence. Initially, the researcher used open coding, which involved assigning a short phrase of three to five words, beginning with a gerund, to the data. The researcher continued to analyze the data and used focused coding by asking what was implied or revealed by the open coding, which was a process called interacting with the data. As each level of analysis occurred, the categories became more abstract with the goal of explaining the data through a comprehensive lens and develop a theory, which was grounded in the data. As a result of the category, a theory emerged from the data.

Findings

There were three findings from the current quantitative grounded theory research study. The first finding was for SWD to make academic gain in CCSS, the teachers of SWD would be expected to learn the instructional pedagogy of the general education curriculum. The second finding included the support of administrators to regularly use the PLC framework for the teachers of SWD and the general education teachers to co-plan. The third finding involved the teachers of SWD providing rigor and high expectation for SWD to improve CCSS. The three findings were discussed further and included the SEAs' statements that support the findings.

Finding 1

Finding 1 was teachers of SWD were experts in the field of special education but were expected to be experts in instructional pedagogy for SWD to meet the CCSS. Teachers of SWD had traditionally trained and focused on the learning resource model which included meeting federal special education regulations for SWD, and individualizing based on students' needs. The teachers of SWD did not necessarily receive core content training of subjects and did not have the instructional pedagogy or pacing needed to meet CCSS. SEAs H said:

You also have to have that special [education] teacher with some level of math pedagogy because when you have special [education] teachers, they generally don't go through an extensive math background or English for English background. The second thing is around a clear understanding of instructional pedagogy, that really matters. It's not about knowing your tricks about modifications and accommodations. It is not about that. It's about really being a good teacher in math or ELA.

The discussion of teachers of SWD from SEA I continued explaining about the expertise being in the special education and not in general education content as SEA I said, "They just don't, and matter of fact they're probably your least abled content experts; they're just not content experts." In continuing to discuss the need for teachers to have the instructional pedagogy, SEA A said, "You just don't want the regular [education] teacher planning the scope and sequence. You want the special [education] teacher to be part of that too."

Some SEAs discussed how, in recent years, there was a focus on teachers of SWD using the general education curriculum. Some SWD qualified for special education services in all main content areas. When students were testing for special education services, the test scores were compared to averages to determine qualification for special

education services. The qualifications for SWD determine the area of special education service by the teachers of SWD in one or all areas of SDI for reading, writing, and/or math. SEA H stated, “A frustration is about the upcoming training, as I looked at the list of people attending and there were no special [education] teachers attending. “

Special education administrators included teachers of SWD in general education curriculum trainings, provided support for co-planning—focusing on unpacking, scaffolded the CCSS, and wrote quality, federally required IEPs. SEA A said:

We did it with the algebra program, where the general education teacher attended the same training as the special ed teachers. When the teachers met as a department, they understood. They basically went to the same training and understood the same concepts and the pacing calendar. So that helped tremendously. It was not about co-teaching training.

Similarly, some districts set up plans for helping teachers of SWD to learn the instructional pedagogy. Some of those plans included trainings; some of the plans included special [education] coaches to provide support; and others used outside resources to aid all teachers. SEA I said:

Building special [education] teachers’ capacity in the core curriculum, we have worked hard to make sure our special [education] resource teachers were incorporated into any of the professional development that offered to the [general education] teachers.

Outside resources can provide a different perspective in helping teachers. Math Labs works with districts to improve instructional pedagogy with teachers by showing how the instructional process was done and then observing teachers teaching a lesson.

SEA C stated:

It is out of the University of Washington. They have been coming down [to our district]. It’s called Math Labs, but all the teachers were participating in the Math Labs. We have Math Labs at all levels.

Finding 2

Finding 2 was SEAs were using professional learning communities (PLCs) for teachers of SWD to be involved in co-planning with general education teachers.

Professional learning communities are a best practice and are a systematic process of educator groups who meet to collaborate with the purpose of improving teaching skills and academic performance for students. The concept was initially discussed as a learning organization by Senge (1994) which focused on learning by experience. Later, Dufour (1999) updated the organizational learning communities to focus on school communities with staff learning to increase skills and published articles on the framework.

In support of co-planning as a method during PLC to not only improve teaching skills, but improve instructional pedagogy for teachers of SWD, teachers of SWD were developing a relationship with the general education teachers and working together on the same goals for students. SEA B stated, “The strengths come down to teachers coming together.” SEA E said, “Teachers can’t do it alone and it has to be done as part of a professional learning community. SEA E continued by claiming:

We have a PLC every Friday for 2 hours. First is teachers come together. It’s really kind of time to work on their common formative assessments. So, they were all on the same page for the way it is supposed to be.

Special education administrators said the first step of meeting the CCSS was for teachers of SWD to improve skills by coming together with other teachers. The teachers of SWD can teach the same lesson in the resource classroom but still understand the common lesson plan. SEA A said, “They have to work as a PLC in order to take, and keep the high, high standards, but they don’t necessarily have to work in the same classroom during the same period of the day.” When collaborative efforts were used with teachers

of SWD, academic gains can be made for students when teachers increase instructional pedagogy. Special education administrators discussed the co-teaching model and although it was used in some districts, the success of the model was when both teachers worked and learned from each other, and the teachers of SWD knew the content and could apply it with rigor. SEA G alleged:

It's also the importance of when that's happening in the PLC for that special [education] teacher to be mindful that even though it may appear, it's not part of our expertise. It's really vital that the [special education] teacher is there because if you don't, you're going to be left in the dust and then your kids are left in the dust. So then, they have to be part of it.

Some SEAs have not found success or questioned the co-teaching model and have instead focused on co-planning. SEA D said, "The valuable time is our PLC. It is every Monday morning for an hour and a half. So that gives them [the teachers of SWD] time with the [general education] to really to do the PLC." The PLC seems to be a model used for teachers involved in other collaborative models mentioned by SEAs, such as co-teaching, double dose, or side by side. Special education teachers developed a relationship with the general education content areas, and staff developed a pacing guide and lesson plans and worked with other content teachers to consider data and discuss the next plans. A special education administrator [SEA C] reported that occasionally "the co-teaching occurs naturally through the relationships developed from the co-planning."

Co-planning not only improved teachers' skills but offers more access options for SWD who were not ready for general education classes. Students with disabilities who were ready for the co-teaching model were placed in the general education setting. However, teachers of SWD still needed to ensure the IEP was followed. Double dose or an SDI class could provide the SDI for SWD who were enrolled in the general education

class, but still needed (and were required by IEPs) to have the individualized instruction. Regarding SWD getting a general education class and a special education class for one area, SEA H claimed:

We double up a lot especially in high school. We double that where they're getting it from their special ed teacher and then they go in the next room [to the general education teacher] and say, Oh, I remember that . . .

Some districts had regular PLCs, and the focus changed depending on the schedule or need of the building. SEA F stated, "Planning side by side, I mean how do you not—why would we think we would get great results by teaching down? Why do we think that should even happen by lowering the standards?"

One week, the PLC schedule may be the PLC department level, or PLC grade level, or PLC content level, or RTI/MTSS. If teachers of SWD taught English in the LRC setting, teachers of SWD would attend the English content PLC where using data and co-planning would occur. SEA C claimed, "This should be accomplished while ensuring compliance with special education regulations and using data for the PLC framework." The PLC is a best practice collaborative process for staff with the goal of improving teacher capacity and students' performance. By collaborating or co-planning with other teachers, teachers of SWD could learn instructional pedagogy. Teachers of SWD could learn how to divide the standards into steps or scaffold the standards, combined with pacing so SWD were provided the rigor and high expectations along with differentiating the instruction. The most critical element was offering options to best meet the needs of SWD while teachers of SWD made gains in content, standards, and pacing of the general education curriculum.

Within the PLC, some districts either used the RTI/MTSS strategy by using a student support team (SST) or PLC that implements the RTI/MTSS. SEA B claimed an entire three ringed binder was developed by the district level administrators for principals and staff to support as a guide in shaping and defining the building practices and support CCSS. SEA G said the RTI/MTSS was in the schools, but the buildings tended to focus on behavior and not for both academics and behavior like the RTI/MTSS strategy was developed for initially. SEA B stated another district implemented the RTI/MTSS as a strategy through the special education program not infused as an entire school support for behavior and academics.

Special education administrators discussed the co-teaching model and although co-teaching was used in some districts, the model was successful when the general education and teachers of SWD worked and learned from each other and when the teachers of SWD knew the content and could apply it with rigor. Some SEAs had not found success or had questioned the co-teaching model, instead focused on co-planning. The co-planning model could be used for teachers using other models mentioned by SEAs, such as co-teaching, double dose, or side by side. Special education teachers developed a relationship with the general education content area teachers, and all staff developed a pacing guide and lesson plans with other content teachers to consider data and discuss the next plans. Special education administrators reported occasionally the co-teaching occurs naturally through the relationships developed from the co-planning.

Although access or increasing LRE was a theme discussed by SEAs, some options for SWD involved co-planning. Special education administrators had used methods that incorporated access in the general education curriculum and/or access to

both the general education setting. Special education administrators incorporated the methods aligned with collaboration and involved side-by-side classes, double dose, or double dip.

The term *side by side* referred to teachers planning side by side and teaching the two classes in different rooms, side by side. The side-by-side classes reinforced using the general education curriculum and co-planning, but SWD attend the LRC to get access to the general education curriculum. The side by side classes occurred when the IEP team deemed the special education setting using the general education curriculum was best for student.

The *double dose* or sometimes called *double dip* classes occurred for SWD who received the general education curriculum in the general education setting, and either before or afterwards, SWD had another class addressing the same content in the LRC setting. The double dose enabled SWD to have access to both the general education curriculum and setting and allowed more processing time for SWD in the LRC setting. Both methods were different from co-teaching but were similar in that all require co-planning. Unlike co-teaching, which was when two certificated teachers were in the same class, side by side, double dose/ double dip does not involve two teachers in the same class. The two methods—side by side and double dose/double dip—were not terms found in research but were terms SEAs used in the high school.

Finding 3

Finding 3 was teachers of SWD needed to increase rigor and high expectations for SWD to meet CCSS. Special education administrators voiced an important step required balancing for the teachers of SWD to provide rigor and high expectations and be able to

be accountable by providing the accommodations and specially designed instruction of the IEP. Rigor and high expectations were voiced by SEAs as an area of focus through training and discussions with staff. SEA F stated:

I'm teaching our staff about rigor and enabling. I think getting the right assessments in place, so they can see where their students are and connect to the common core and then get them curriculum that's aligned to the common core is the next step.

SEA C said, "It's about that rigor and pace." SEA H claimed: "Higher expectations would be important. I mean, tough love is what it is about. A kid who's being held accountable with love absolutely is going to respond better than a kid who's not held responsible."

The behaviors SEAs discussed included collaboration, rigor, high expectations, monitoring data, and pacing through trainings. Teachers of SWD needed to increase access for SWD by using multiple collaborative methods and providing rigor, high expectations, and pacing while using best practices; however, the rigor and high expectations would need to show through teaching practices. SEA I said:

Philosophically, it starts with instruction, explicit instruction, a lot of it. . . rigor. There's exposure and there's explicit instruction. So, needing to remediate the areas that are difficult for students and really going through and teaching them either strategies or the skills or at their pace. So, you're bringing them up that way, but then they also, the second part is they have to have exposure to some of the content.

In discussing the alternative to rigor and high expectations, SEA B stated, "Just because you're special [education] doesn't mean you can't have rigor and high expectations." Discussing why the SWD are not able to meet standards, SEA A stated:

The special [education] teachers sometimes don't have as high expectations for the rigor that our kids need to be able to access [general education]. So, it's easier to say, "Oh, well they can't do it," instead of finding ways that they can. We are making some good progress.

SEA E echoed a similar statement:

I go back to the bar being lowered at a young age. We, as a system, have created groups of kids where the expectations have been lowered. As a result, people have moved to that goal. . . We always have an excuse not to [have rigor and high expectations]. They have a disability.

Sometimes the setting students were in, could make a difference according to SEAs. The results in a general education class versus a special education class can have different outcomes. SEA G asserted:

I think when [teachers are] pushed and they have that expectation of you can do this. . . That is made up of all general education peers. . . that higher expectations help them [SWD] rise to the occasion where if it's the resource class, it's like, "Oh, other kids are like me, on IEPs, and I don't have that higher leveled expectations."

Categories

Three categories emerged from the data addressing SEAs' perceptions and experiences of meeting the CCSS: (a) SEAs leading district-level and school staff with cultural change, (b) teachers of SWD collaborate in instructional pedagogy and support SWD in accessing general education curriculum and/or setting, and (c) SEAs managing special education requirements.

The categories and a grounded theory were developed using theoretical coding and by constantly comparing the data through the iterative analysis. Each emergent category from the data analyses helped the researcher answer the four research questions and ultimately addressed the purpose of the study. A concept map was developed to provide a visual representation of the overall theory, based on the data analysis process (see Figure 4.1).

Four categories emerged from the data analysis: (a) SEAs leading district-level staff and school staff with cultural change, (b) SWD accessing general education curriculum and settings while using best practice strategies and methods, (c) staff engaged in collaborative methods, and (d) SEAs managing special education requirements with a focus on transition.

Category 1

Category 1 was SEAs leading district-level and school staff with cultural change. Changing school culture is essential if all students are to be treated with equitable practices of having the general education curriculum and setting. Special education administrators discussed changing the district environment and the schools to be inclusive versus inclusive being a special education program only. The SEAs viewed inclusive education as a paradigm shift. The most significant element regarding communication was a common culture and a common language. When discussing the importance of building culture, SEA A stated:

I mean, if a [school] building is such that the special [education] classes are out in the portable [furthest instructional space in schools, located outside of main area] or they're in the special [education] wing and never the twain shall meet, it's really hard to express upon the gen ed. side of that population, how important it is for the students in that wing, quote unquote to reach those standards. You know, that us and them. It's theirs, not really our mentality. We invite them in to be nice or we'd like to call ourselves inclusive, but, in fact, some of our practices aren't very inclusive.

Building the common culture means SEAs must work with all types of staff both in the district and school buildings. When SEAs were able to be included in top-level meetings to build the inclusive education culture from the top, everyone uses the same language and makes the decisions regarding SWD. A

common culture continued to be supported through the voice of SEA B, who commented:



Figure 4.1. SWDs meeting standards concept map.

So, we're just sort of shifting the focus here. In terms of building collaboration between [general education] and [special education], I've been working with the building principals and district administration to really work on the role of the special [education] teacher. Again, it's a work in progress because they asked the same questions and the communication is good between this office and the building admin and it's just a constant message and constant follow up.

Special education administrators provided support to both building administrators and teachers of SWD. Special education administrators communicated to help school staff meet standards. District SEAs created a presence in the building by meeting and communicating with teachers of SWD to enhance academic progress. Further, SEAs articulated the importance of the leadership roles of district administrators to meet district standards. Given the trusting relationship with both principals and district administrators, SEA C claimed: "It takes me, Number 1, to show the work is important, and Number 2, I need to be involved."

SEA D stated when discussing the involvement with the schools with teachers of SWD and building administration, "My involvement there does matter." SEAs continued to verbalize similar messages needed by building administrators and teachers of SWD to lead the way in helping SWD to meet CCSS. SEA E stated:

As a leader, I need the boots-on-the-ground leadership, whether it's with building principals or their bosses, to be able to really communicate and build that [school] culture by saying, "Hey, this isn't an option folks." All of our students need to reach this standard whether it's our African American boys, whether it's our low-income students, or whether it's our students with disabilities. We need to be coming into it with our CAP [continuous achievement plan] this year and having really some targeted attention for the students that aren't accessing those classes. That's a big step in helping to shake up that [school] culture.

When building the culture, SEAs said the support from the executive director up to the superintendent was important. Building a school culture meant all levels of administration used inclusive language and kept in mind SWD needs when making decisions. SEA G explained the culture change needed district wide by saying:

I do feel I'm getting a closer grasp on it as time goes by. It is not just a growth mindset, but there are certain mentalities around special education where it's kind of your problem kind of thing [mindset]. It has been going on for a very long time and it not that way everywhere. A lot of time you get, okay, you're in charge of special education, but it doesn't work that way.

SEAs working to build the culture involved providing support through communication, training, or other supportive measures. Building the culture was all part of how administrators were communicating in working to build the culture in the school districts and the relationships. SEA A explained, "It really did start off with those conversations with a couple of building principals that would really embrace the idea and some teachers that we knew would be on board." When discussing the importance of SEAs getting support from higher level administrators, SEA G stated:

I've had the support of our district admin this year to hire a second coordinator. So, next year I'll have two coordinators. . . We felt to have concentrated effort to give teachers the skills and the training they needed, we had to restructure here because otherwise people are just stretched too thin and you don't get work done. We can continue to put band aids on things if that's how we want to respond. I'm not sure we can sustain ourselves that way. . . They were like, "Yes, let's do it." You'll get a certain amount of progress, but you're not going to get the kind of progress we need to see. So, then, I need to be in every meeting that has anything to do with instruction, assessment, any curriculum. All those pieces, and I need to try to align what I'm doing with my staff and their work with the general [education] and what they do. Being on cabinet as a special education director is crucial. I sit with our superintendent, our assistant superintendent, head of HR, head of finance, head of equity and achievement and we all work together to try to align what we do and the more aligned we are, the better for our students.

Changing the culture starts at the district level with all staff learning the language and being inclusive in district practices. One way to change the culture at the

district level was through actions geared toward district-level staff. SEA H

commented:

One of the things we're really excited about with this is we are actually doing a training; I believe it's next Friday. We're doing a co-teaching presentation and training all our teachers on special assignment at the district level because this has been an ELL and special education initiative where we have really been partnering with buildings.

For all district staff to change the culture meant to be inclusive when addressing any curriculum or meetings before inclusive education got to the school buildings.

For district staff, being inclusive was a mind shift since historically special education had been a separate program from general education. It takes SEAs to bring about that change at both levels the district level and the school building level. SEA I discussed the importance of district-level support to help teachers of SWD meet standards:

Otherwise, I feel I'm just spinning my wheels and it becomes very frustrating. I have support here and what I see is every time we do a leadership meeting with all the principals and our teachers, we have our principals there, we have our TOSAS there, we have all the instructional leaders there. We are taught every time special [education] comes up, how are we working with these kids? So, it's not over here in the corner, this big elephant in the room that no people talk about. So that support can get me driving. What has happened, it's evolving where we're trying to find ways to get the instruction really good out of our special education teachers. Of course, those are the right people. Too often, not always, I see the worst teachers being put in some of these positions, these special [education] positions rather than your most trained individuals, which you're working with the hardest kid. You need to have good staff. That mentality, we need to have strong people in these positions that know what they're doing. It's my job to make sure they get all the training they need and then I'm working with general ed. to bring them into work with my teachers.

SEAs support cultural change through concentrating on training and support for teachers of SWD. SEA I stated, "We are shifting the focus" by building good communication between the district special education department and the school

buildings. One of those ways SEAs show support was through training. The need for the continuous training involved a study on the administrators responsible for the CCSS. The support and training happened at various levels, either through professional development, PLCs, learning improvement time (LIT), or teachers on special assignment (TOSAS) working with teachers of SWD throughout the district. In discussing the culture change by concentrating on co-teaching training, SEA A stated, “We really knew it was important for us to make sure our teachers were prepared and really understood what co-teaching was, what co-teaching wasn’t and how we could support them to have that done.”

In discussing the support provided for teachers of SWD, SEA B said, “They actually walk in and observe lessons being done by teachers.” SEA C said, “We have learning improvement time, which is a monthly time for professional development between teachers.” SEA D reported, “We have worked hard to make sure our teachers of SWD are incorporated into any of the professional development offered to [general education] teachers.” SEA E explained the complexity of the issues that arose from training and supportive measures, claiming, “It’s very difficult to tier the training for new incoming teachers and motivating the experienced teachers.” Improvement for teachers of SWD requires ongoing support and training. SEA F commented, “Co-teaching requires initial and ongoing training.”

Special education administrators provided ongoing support, training, and communication at all levels to change the culture in the district. Changing the culture was a change in progress and changing the culture was a mindset change of how special education or even the word had derogatory meaning to many people. The terms special

education is a term that can be viewed as exceptional without derogatory connotations. The SEA role provided the leadership to work with staff to have an inclusive education mindset throughout the district not only for SWD, but for the staff.

Category 2

Category 2 was SWD accessing general education curriculum and settings while teachers of SWD gained skills in instructional pedagogy. Most districts were focused on having optional models for SWD to have access to the general education curriculum and setting. Co-teaching was one of those options for SEAs in working with school administration and staff. In co-teaching, two certificated teachers were in the same classroom. One of the certificated teachers focused on instruction and another certificated teacher focused on individualizing and differentiating instruction with SWD and other struggling students while sharing all classroom responsibilities. The co-teaching model has been able to provide access to some districts, as SEA B said:

We have co-teaching for language arts and math. Then, for the other subjects like social studies and science we don't have co-teaching, but we have kids going in there. We have [paraprofessional] support in there, and they can also, depending on the student get some help in their support classes with those subjects by their special ed teacher. So, they're getting we feel, like, a good coverage of all the subjects for a student who qualifies in special [education].

District SEAs discussed many different methods and strategies used by teachers of SWD in both general and special education settings (see Appendix I). Access to general education curriculum and environments were important to SEAs who viewed access to general education curriculum and setting to meet full human potential and the CCSS. Strategies were principles used as guidance to solve a problem; whereas, methods were the steps or actions to take place for that situation. SEAs discussed co-teaching, dual endorsed teachers, learning lab, and double dose as strategies to provide access for SWD

with either the general education curriculum and/or setting. Dual endorsed is when a teacher has the certification in general education and special education. So, the teacher can teach both the general education students and SWD in the same classroom. Learning Lab is a class period that allows SWD to get extra help during the time the SWD is in the general education class whether the student needs it quiet time to take a test or needs help with a particular assignment. The SWD do not have to stay in the learning lab the entire period. Double dose is when a SWD has a general education English class; then, sometime during the day, the SWD also has an English special education class to support the general education concepts. In the discussion of strategies, SEA H voiced, "One of the most important things to help get our kids to standard is having access."

Understanding the complexity of this concept, the SEA continued, saying:

There are multiple ways to do co-teaching and inclusion, but it has to be appropriate too. I don't believe in inclusion just to sit a kid in the room, just so there might be social, emotional reasons for that. If it's way beyond their level, I don't think they're getting much out of it. Just having them sit over here and do a separate assignment that is not inclusion to me. So really, it needs to be appropriate.

Access can be achieved in multiple ways, as described by SEA C, who discussed a teacher who was certificated in special education and general education. SEA H stated:

Something else that's worked well, has been the teacher who meshes both classes where they have dual endorsement. He's doing more of the inclusion model with the special [education] included because he's a really, really good math teacher and that's where the pedagogy comes in. He's a really good math teacher and a really good special [education] teacher. So, he has both.

Access or otherwise known as increasing least restrictive environment was a concept discussed by the majority of SEAs. With access as the main goal, another SEA [G] described the format in the high school and stated:

Each high school, they have a class called learning lab, and they usually try and run one every period. So, they might come in and get a touch base and work a little bit on some goal work and then they have their materials from their class, and they can have direct support, or they can get the instruction, or they just need a quiet place to come take a test or to work. I would say it's pretty flexible; as flexible as you can be within a high school schedule. Especially at the high school, our students are out and there's no special [education] history. There's no special [education] science, they are in those content area classes. So, using those learning labs. . . These are our social emotional students that we don't really touch any other way, but we're going to bring them in and they're going to get some explicit instruction in social behavioral skills. Then, that's the time when we touch those students because that's a big need. When do we teach? It's not about perfection. It's about teaching ahead of time.

Another strategy was double dose or double dip, which was when the SWD took a general education English class as a requirement and as an elective took the follow up class in the resource class to support the lesson from the general education English class. The teachers of SWD co-plan with the general education teachers, were aware of the daily lesson plan in general education classes and worked to support the class in the special education setting.

Access to the general education curriculum and settings was a complex issue and sometimes involved the pace at which the general education teacher delivered instruction. SEA H said, "So how do we maximize their time? Because we really do believe having access to the core is probably the thing that is going to make the greatest difference." The pace can differ in the general education setting versus the special education setting, which could be more individualized. A SWD' learning pace could impact the proficiency of learning. If the rate at which co-teachers presents newly learned information was too fast or too slow, the pace could impact individual student learning. The complexity of the issue of access and meeting students' needs for learning was voiced through the views of SEA I who said, "It's about that rigor and pace, that's where we see a lot of our students

fall down. It's just the pace and isn't that [a sign the students' need] extra processing time." Viewing access as a path for SWD to gain skills, another SEA G claimed:

When you're working with special education staff, it depends on the district that you're in and what leadership is doing, but it is becoming more and more evident that kids have to have access to the common core. Otherwise, they'll stay behind forever and will never be able to make gains. They must have access [to the general education curriculum and setting].

Special education administrators voiced the need to have several ways for SWD to gain access of the general education curriculum and setting and collaboration between teachers of SWD and general education staff. Multiple methods for access were needed, according to SEAS, due to the multiple types of SWD needs. According to SEAs, co-teaching was one method used in some districts for students to gain access to general education curriculum and setting. SEA A discussed the importance of having options when considering access and the need for both the general education teachers and special education teacher to develop a plan, SEA B said:

Our district is shifting toward what skills do we need to get the [special education] teachers to teach the curriculum to the special education kids. What does that look like and how does that change the role of the case manager? It is going to change and that isn't co-teaching; but, it is collaboration sitting down and planning with the teacher. The curriculum with specially designed instruction embedded in it and have the gen [education] teacher teach the material.

While the SEAs were focused on access, SEAs also concentrated on providing best practice strategies and methods to teachers of SWD. Special education administrators voiced methods to help teachers of SWD to increase instructional pedagogy through best practice strategies and methods. Some of those best practice methods SEAs discussed were called Balanced Literacy (Bingham, & Hall, 2013), Math Labs (Posamentier, Jaye, & Krulik, 2007), and Project Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD; Project GLAD, 2018) (see Appendix I). Balanced Literacy was an instructional literacy program

and Math Labs was an instructional math program where teachers attend the training, learn the skills and were observed while teachers teach the lesson using best strategies. Balanced Literacy was comprised of seven elements: (a) shared reading, (b) guided reading, (c) closed reading, (d) vocabulary instruction, (e) interactive writing, (f) readers' workshops, and (g) writers' workshops. Project GLAD and has five components: (a) focused motivational strategies, (b) input strategies, (c) guided oral practice strategies, (d) reading and writing strategies, and (e) closure activities. All three strategies reinforce group-interactive work. SEA C stated:

Balanced Literacy is the same as Math Labs. It's basically instructional pedagogy and then they're expected to attend that same training. It goes back to the alternative strategy from the focus on co-teaching. What I found to be most successful is in that common language and utilizing the same methodologies. Now, they may have a different role, but to understand clearly, it's like teaching GLAD. Project GLAD is a strategy which a lot of special [education] teachers here use GLAD strategies. It's common instructional pedagogy.

Another instructional pedagogy for teachers of SWD to become more aware of skills involved reading the research from Hattie (2017) (see Appendix I) and completed a self-assessment and plan to improve. Some SEAs used the researched list through a training and had teachers of SWD who reviewed, discussed, and self-assessed elements on Hattie's list to help teachers of SWD gain skills in instructional pedagogy. SEA E said, "We spent a lot of time looking at Hattie. What are effective teaching practices?" For those classes where SWD may struggle, the district piloted an inclusive strategy, where SWD brought the general education work back to the special education class called SDI. SEA F said:

They know what to bring back to their classrooms and we're doing it at high school next year too. Each building has the option with their special education teachers, depending on the needs of their population and how many SDI courses they have to offer to meet IEP needs. So, every teacher gets a planning; but they

have the option to have what we call an SDI period. That is a time the students aren't scheduled to them, but the expectation is that they are out collaborating with teachers. They are out pushing into [general education] classes and pulling out kids who need extra time. So, it is a, you're doing something about student learning period.

Special education administrators used various strategies and methods in different districts to access the general education environment and curriculum to meet the CCSS. Strategies were overarching approaches, whereas, methods encompassed the actual steps necessary for particular objectives or needs. Many districts determine the curriculum used in general education classes, which was usually aligned to the CCSS. Several SEAs frequently discussed the curriculum and alignment of CCSS subject matter and included teachers of SWD in the core curriculum training, which was traditionally only available to the general education staff. The strategies and methods were listed together and reported by all SEAs (see Appendix I).

Co-Teaching

Some districts do not depend on co-teaching to meet the CCSS, given researchers' recommendations of what was needed to create a successful program. Co-teaching was often cumbersome to connect two staff members who could each serve shared roles, such as focusing on instructional content and focusing on individual needs while sharing responsibilities. SEA G stated, "Co-teaching requires initial and ongoing training, time to collaborate and plan, and the team members have to agree to work together because it's like a marriage." SEA H developed a method for the partnership to happen naturally between teachers of SWD and the general education teacher, saying:

They [teachers of SWD and general education teachers] attended the same training; the expectations were that they all attend the same training. There was no expectation that they work together, but sometimes what happens is that it

happened naturally. It happens naturally because they're attending the same training and have the same interests.

SEA A described how the co-teaching developed over the years. The co-teaching provided the access for SWD to be in the general education setting receiving the general education curriculum. SEA A claimed:

We have started doing co-teaching, it's probably been about 5 or 6 years now when we first started with some pilot classes at one of our high schools. We really knew it was important for us to make sure our teachers were prepared and really understood what co-teaching was, what co-teaching wasn't and how we could support them to have that done.

SEA B voiced an important outcome for the co-teaching model at one of the high schools. In discussing the relationship between the teachers of SWD and the general education teacher, SEA B stated:

Their [SWD] scores were higher than the [general education] scores of the students, not in that class. The special [education] students' scores were higher than the general [education] students throughout the rest of that building when and frankly throughout the rest of the district. I think the most significant factor is the skill set of the instructor.

Co-Planning

Some SEAs discovered other methods to assist SWD with gaining access to the general education curriculum and/or setting. Access was a key term used in the schools when addressing SWD accessing the general education curriculum and/or setting.

Successful co-planning was described in the framework as having three principles: (a) all teaching work is divided, (b) planning was completed together, which outlined both daily and long-term plans, and (c) both teachers used the expertise of each individual during planning. Many SEAs reported the district staff were using the co-planning framework while using various access models to improve SWD success. Although all districts were not using co-teaching, most districts were using co-planning. SEA D said, "There is a lot

of talk about co-planning as being an indicator of a way to help increase the standards.” SEA E echoed the same view and stated, “The most valuable time for co-planning is our PLC every Monday morning.” In describing important methods and working to improve teachers of SWD’ content expertise, SEA F stated, “Planning together side by side, why would you not? Why would we think we would get great results by teaching down?” Other SEAs used co-planning through PLCs. The PLC format was popular because the PLC format empowered teachers to make decisions to increase outcomes while sharing leadership, using the distributive leadership model (Bush, 2018). SEA C who used co-planning said, “We have PLC every Friday for 2 hours. First, teachers start by coming together. It’s really working on their common formative assessments. So, they’re on the same page for the way it is supposed to be.”

While using other options beside co-teaching to improve access, SEA G said, “We have groups where their focus is on co-teaching; as well as, we have looked at when we have PLCs which gives co-teachers time for planning.” In another district, SEA H replied, “We set aside an hour on Mondays for collaboration whether you’re general [education] or special [education] staff.” Nearby, from another district, SEA I claimed, “Many of our teachers use the PLC time for the co-planning.” Co-planning could be a format that not only helped teachers of SWD understand rigor and pacing, but improved relationships with general education teachers. Additionally, and consequently, sometimes other access formats were activated, such as learning labs, side-by-side teaching, SDI class, or inclusion. Other times, a class called double dose or double dip took place with co-planning. SEA A claimed, “I can’t have a dual language program in every high school. So, we’ve really done a look at how we’re supporting mainstream.” SEA D said,

“I think those are the kids that are perfect to do a ‘push them in’ now. Like, we’re not, because if we continue to provide them replacement core, I don’t see them making progress.”

Special education administrators discussed alternative strategies for teachers of SWD to increase access while ensuring SDI time as required by IEPs. An alternative strategy to co-teaching was for SWD to have access to the general education curriculum and/or setting, which type of access to the general education setting and/or curriculum depended on the needs of the SWD and the transition plan of the SWD. SEA A discussed side by side as a way for SWD to have access to general education curriculum science and history:

We do side by side, so you have this special education teacher and the general ed teacher. They’re not in the same classroom. They have two different sections, but they do lots of mutual planning together, which we call side by side.

SEA B described the format used at the high school:

It’s kind of the inclusion with the side by side with pre and post because the students are being included with the inclusion. So, they’re included in the [general education], but they get some pre or post [class] for [Learning Resource Center] LRC from the special [education] teacher in the LRC. Whether they do that for both English and Math would depend on the student. If they qualify for the areas, then it would be looking at what each individual area they qualify. What do they need?

District SEAs used a variety of strategies to increase access into the general education curriculum and setting. One way to access general education curriculum and/or setting was by having a class called specially designed instruction which was derived from the IEP requirement. SWD were included in the general education class and in the SDI class.

SEA F explained:

SDI period is used well. We just started, so we did it as a pilot last year in the middle school with some good success and so this year. Now, that’s been opened

up to the high school and then they decide. Is it every teacher that gets that? Do you just have one or two? Each building gets to determine how they fit their model.

Another collaborative strategy often used in high schools to achieve access was double dose, specifically when an SWD was in a general education English class, and had English in a special education class with the purpose of supporting the general education concepts. For example, a SWD may be in general education for history and science and special education for English. However, both English teachers co-plan, so the teachers of SWD were using a general education curriculum. Students who needed extra processing time or extra support could receive the access and support. The general education English teachers and teachers of SWD co-plan, so the teachers were doing the same lesson and the teachers of SWD were supporting the lesson in the special education classroom. SEA D claimed:

[SWD] have two different classes. They go to [general education] class, but then they either go to the special [education] class before or after, a pre or post. So, they get a double dose, but they're getting that exposure to the content and then they're learning the vocabulary or literacy terms.

Most SEAs discussed needing access options besides co-teaching to meet the various SWD needs while supporting an inclusive education environment. Special education administrators used the idea of the co-planning for a variety of purposes. Special education administrators discussed co-planning as a method of developing relationships to increase the likeliness of voluntary co-teaching between special educators and general educators. Other SEAs used co-planning for the double dose/dip model. SEA H described the advantage of the double dose/dip strategy:

That would be the goal. Having the IEP team really talk about what the student needs, what is the service delivery model. For that particular student that is not

getting it, it's a hard thing to do when you have a wide variety of needs; but we try to expand the continuum. So that there are options to meet the students' needs.

In discussing the double dose strategy, SEA B reaffirmed the use in the high school and stated, "We double up a lot especially in the high schools. We double that where they were getting it from in their special ed teacher and then they into the next room and say, Oh, I remember that."

Category 3

Category 3 was SEAs managing special education requirements. In the special education field, managing IEPs was generally the primary responsibility of teachers of SWD. A prominent category for the perspectives of SEAs was increasing the least restrictive environment (LRE) and a subcategory was transition plans. The IEP involves a team of people who work with the SWD and parents to develop and agree upon an annual education plan for each student who qualifies for special education. Special education administrators were responsible for monitoring the compliance of the IEPs, and SEA H mentioned, "The regulations tell us, the team decides who delivers that SDI and if it's a general education teacher, that's fine, but we have to be strategic about it. So, that's a new concept for them."

The SEAs all wanted IEPs that followed the regulations. SEA I stated: I've spent a year getting our IEPs in shape. . . So, I developed an IEP development training. I trained my elementary and secondary staff on a waiver day last year, all the same expectations. Then, I'm developing a handbook now that matches. So, we monitor the IEP when they come in as best, we can. It's hard to do that.

However, there were other areas of concern besides IEP compliance for SEAs. SEA A stated:

I want teachers to get away from the total focus on compliance and focus more on instructional methodology. That's hard because people had been trained in special

[education] to focus on a compliance and I don't think you have compliance problems if kids are learning.

Special education teachers' area of strength was the ability to follow the IEP requirements. For some SEAs increasing LRE was equally important to providing the access, rigor and high expectations to meet the CCSS. Synonymous to LRE was increasing access in the general education curriculum and/or setting. The teachers of SWD work to maintain federal requirements of the IEP. The IEP partially includes the SDI, LRE, and transition plan. SEA B shared a similar sentiment by saying, "I would say LRE is the target, global strategy and professional development will really help teachers." Similarly, another SEA participant commented, "I am a 100% behind increasing LRE as the number 1 solution with important strategies and methods for SWD to be successful." Working on the increasing of LRE, a SEA H claimed, "We've got some buildings with minimal time in resource. There's definitely more support within and increased co-teach classes." Considering solutions to increase LRE in the IEP, a SEA C stated, "A kid who's held accountable with love is going to respond better." The SEA continued, "Higher expectations would be important." With a similar perspective regarding the IEP, a SEA B said, "We have really been looking at the LRE." This was followed by the statement, "We need to increase LRE." Finally, SEA C explained:

Our secondary LRE isn't where we want it. As a district, we're hovering at about 65%. But, I want to say our high schools are just above 50% and our middle schools are in the forties. So, to suggest that we still have many kids who don't have access to the [general education] content, we want them to change their expectations. I think it's a cultural reflection that kids can't make it in my class because I have high standards.

A subcategory in the IEP was the transition plan. The transition plan is a section in the IEP that encompasses requirements from the federal regulations. Special education

students were required to have a post high school transition plan regarding what the SWD will do after graduating high school. Some SEAs voiced having pathways for SWD. Therefore, one path may exclude a student from access based on the SWD' needs. Another high school pathway to courses may increase access, thereby increasing LRE to the general education curriculum and/or setting. For instance, a student with severe multiple disabilities may not be on a pathway to attend college. This student with a disability may have more time in the special education classroom working on daily living skills, which means teachers of SWD would be working to reduce the gap in attaining daily living skills. The environmental setting of SWD would depend on the decisions from the IEP team. Another student with learning disabilities may be on the path to a 2- or 4-year college after graduation. Therefore, in this case, SWD could include more access and spend the majority of the time in the general education classroom because that environment may best meet his or her needs. SEA D said:

Our teachers at the high school level are focused on graduation and making sure that kids are connected to their post school outcome, along with making sure they are getting all the needed credits. Transition planning is very much teachers' strength.

When discussing the students with a variety of disabilities, SEA H stated, "We look outside the district with other options for kids' transition needs." SEA A stated, "We have to be aware of where they are going after high school." Major effort is placed on the transition plan since districts have to report this information. However, most school districts expect IEPs to comply with regulations in the time frame expected while making sure students were challenged with rigor and high expectations. The IEP is required to have goals based on the SDI. Only one SEA reported an online IEP tool that teachers of SWD used to connect CCSS to the goal the student would be working on through the

IEP. A second SEA mentioned the alignment of goals scaffolded to standards would begin in September. Most SEAs reported alignment of standards was not a priority until teachers of SWD had a clear and in-depth understanding of CCSS and how to unpack and scaffold. SEAs perceived the focus for teachers of SWD was to do quality work when writing the IEPs and follow up on the transition plan.

Theory

The purpose of the theory in the current study was to explain the analyzed findings from the SEAs' experiences and perceptions. The theory was the researcher of the current study's view and interpretation; but, Charmez (2014a) claimed the constructionist grounded theorist assumes the gathered data and the analyzed data were collective concepts that reflect the situations of the SEAs construction.

For SWD to meet CCSS, staff will need to change from the inside out. The ability for SWD to create the change from within will initially require the SEAs to continue to provide training to administrators and teachers to change the internal outlooks of the SWD by changing communication and actions from the top down, which was already happening in districts and schools. The change begins with cultural change throughout the district. SEAs discussed the importance of SWD being "our" students, not "my" students. Through professional development and reflection addressing rigor and high expectations while providing accommodations, teachers could change by increasing rigor and high expectations in communication and actions. Over time, the SWD will increase their own self-perspectives and self-worth to make academic gain because the teachers believed the SWD could increase academically before the SWD actually believed in their own ability. The SWD will begin to have the internal high expectations of themselves

because teachers of SWD had the expectation and belief that the SWD could increase academically to meet full human potential, after giving up and struggling academically. Access or increasing LRE's main difference between access of the general education curriculum and/or setting is that increasing LREs also involves the documentation in the IEP. Access would begin with ensuring access was communicated in the IEP through collaborative strategies. SEAs continue to provide the support by reinforcing teachers were given the time to learn from each other through professional collaborative strategies such as PLCs, co-planning, and creatively use the multiple methods of collaboration strategies. By the district staff focused change from the inside out in communication and actions, students will benefit leading to proficiency of CCSS or to meeting full human potential.

Teachers of SWD may be changing the traditional special education role and overtime teachers training may have a combination of both the special education knowledge requirements with the instructional pedagogy to provide the rigor and high expectation needed to access the general education curriculum and/or setting. All in all, SWD meeting CCSS will take leadership, collaboration, time and consistency from district staff to believe meeting CCSS is possible.

Findings

SEAs were leading district-level and school staff with cultural change. Some SEAs discussed changing the outlook at the district office by being a member of the higher leveled district meetings. Some SEAs were aware of the change needing to happen not only by teachers of SWD but by administrators on all levels. The cultural change means changing the outlook on the inside by visualizing a variety of ways to improve

SWD academic growth. Access to general education and/or curriculum can take many forms in the classroom.

Special education administrators discussed the ways for SWD to meet the CCSS was with rigor and high expectations, by increasing access in general education setting and/or curriculum and using best practices. Teachers of SWD also need to change from the inside out to provide the opportunities and growth and continually, giving the students positive feedback. Perhaps that means allowing the SWD to write part of the IEPs.

Teachers of SWD were experts in the field of special education and can learn to be experts in general education content. Therefore, teachers of SWD need to increase understanding of instructional pedagogy through collaboration with general education peers through co-teaching, co-planning, or professional development. Professional learning communities can be a vehicle for teachers of SWD to participate in co-planning with general education teachers.

Teachers of SWD engage in the collaborative dimensions of both professional collaborations outside of the classroom and through co-planning and collaborative teaching in the classroom, using the plan in the IEPs to increase the rigor and high expectations and providing access in curriculum and/or setting. Changing from the inside out as administrators and teachers of SWD need to collaborate with staff, community and parents who work together to improve the SWD' skills and grow academically.

Summary

The problem in the current study was there was little research which reflected the voices of SEAs on experiences and perspectives in SWD meeting the CCSS, even though SEAs were leaders with knowledge and experience in the special education field. Raising

the academic scores of SWD to meet the CCSS can be very challenging and requires the leadership and perspectives and experiences of SEA. Special education administrators play a critical role in raising the academic scores of SWD. The researcher of the findings from the current study provided methods and strategies from the data analysis of what needed to happen to help SWD meet full potential as humans.

The researcher of the current study used a qualitative methodology with a grounded theory design. Participants completed a preliminary survey and a follow-up in-depth interview in the SEAs' natural work setting in a Northwest county. In addition, a field journal was used throughout the data collection and analysis process. The researcher of the findings presented categories of the current study followed by the theory.

In Chapter 5, the findings were merged with the research questions and categories. The findings were aligned to the problem statement. Also, the findings were applied to the leadership role of the special education administrator. This will be followed by recommendations and a discussion of problems that need further examination.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter included an overview of the current study, the relevant literature, the research questions, findings, conclusions, and resulting theory. The problem the researcher addressed was supporting students with disabilities (SWD) to meet the lack of intentional strategies to support Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Special education administrators' perspectives and experiences of the strategies and methods were needed to lead teachers of SWD, so SWD could meet the CCSS. The three findings included (a) teachers of SWD were experts in the special education field, not in content or pacing of general education curriculum, (b) SEAs were implementing the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for teachers of SWD to be involved in co-planning with general education teachers, and (c) teachers of SWD needed to increase rigor, and high expectations for SWD to meet CCSS. However, SEAs expressed all students with disabilities would not be able to meet grade-level CCSS due to severity of disabilities. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) SEAs leading district level staff and school staff with cultural change, (b) SWD accessing general education curriculum and/or setting while teachers of SWD gained skills in instructional pedagogy, and (c) SEAs managing special education requirements.

Teachers of SWD need SEA perspectives to help SWD meet the CCSS. The researcher used surveys and in-depth interviewing in a qualitative study in Pacific Northwest school districts. The purpose of developing a theory from the data of the SEA perspectives on collaboration and communication between teachers, reading, writing and math, the professional development and alignment of individual education programs (IEPs) for teachers of SWD was fulfilled through the grounded theory process. The data

from in-depth interviews of SEAs were used to answer the following four research questions:

1. How do SEA leaders view best practice strategies and methods to address CCSS for collaboration and communication with teachers of SWD?
2. How do SEA leaders perceive the expertise of teachers of SWD meeting CCSS in reading, writing, and math?
3. How do SEA leaders manage IEP alignment with teachers of SWD to meet CCSS?
4. How do SEA leaders perceive the need for teachers of SWD to meet CCSS?

The analyzed data derived from SEA surveys and interviews were used to answer the research questions and determine the three main findings. The major findings included teachers of SWD as being experts in the special education field, rather than as experts of content or pacing of general education curriculum. Yet, SEAs discussed the need for teachers of SWD to have proficiency of both roles' special education expert and content expert with rigor and pacing through the PLCs for teachers of SWD to be involved in co-planning with general education teachers. Finally, the third finding was for SEAs to support the need for teachers of SWD to address an increase of access, rigor, and high expectations; however, SEAS expressed that all students with disabilities will not be able to meet grade-level CCSS due to severity of disabilities. The severity of students' disabilities and meeting grade level CCSS was an indication there needed to be a balance between SWD' needs based on the IEP and access to the general education setting. There will be times when the IEP team decides the general education access will be best served by teachers of SWDs. Many SWD may excel academically when access to the general

education curriculum and/or environment is assured. However, increasing the SWD LRE provides rigor and high expectations using best practice strategies and methods.

The discussion of the findings in relationship to the literature research were discussed followed by application of the findings and conclusion to the problem statement. The research questions were examined and the application to leadership will be stated. Finally, recommendations for action and future research were discussed with closing comments.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in the current study's purpose was to explain the key categories in the grounded theory design. In this discussion of findings, each finding was stated, and followed by a thorough discussion of the finding in relationship to the researched literature from Chapter 2. The findings were:

1. SEAs discussed the role of teachers of SWD who needed general education curriculum content expertise to increase access of general education curriculum and/or setting while maintaining as special education experts.
2. SEAs were implementing the PLCs for teachers of SWD to be involved in co-planning with general education teachers.
3. SEAs promoted teachers of SWD increasing rigor, high expectations and access for SWD to meet CCSS.

Finding 1

In finding 1, SEAs discussed the role of teachers of SWD who needed general education curriculum content expertise to increase access of general education curriculum and/or setting while maintaining as special education experts. Teachers of SWD were

needed to increase expertise with the general education curriculum to broaden the options for the SWD, since there were many different types of disabilities and there were many different needs of specially designed instruction.

With knowledge of the CCSS aligned curriculum, the SWD who were prepared for access to the general education curriculum could stay in the smaller classroom setting or learning resource setting (LRC) while receiving lessons from the teachers of SWD using with grade level text called side by side. Other SWD could have more access to the general education curriculum and setting in multiple ways. One strategy could be through inclusion and later having a period with the LRC setting while the teachers of SWD followed up on any general education classwork. This collaborative strategy would require the teachers of SWD to have the knowledge of the text to follow up or reteach the lesson. Another option would be the teachers of SWD co-teaching with the general education teacher requiring shared responsibilities where sometimes the teachers of SWD would teach the lesson. Another collaborative option SEAs discussed was SWD could be in the inclusion (general education class) and the para was in the general education classroom to assist SWD. The teachers of SWD would oversee to ensure the SWD' needs were being met. The last collaborative option involved the inclusive education allowing the SWD to go to the learning lab or (special education lab) for short or long periods of time during the general education class which could allow the students to get help from the teachers of SWD. This option would require the teacher of SWD to develop the general education curriculum knowledge so whenever the students came into the lab, the teachers were readily available to follow up with the lesson. Most SEAs were aware of the need for multiple methods and teachers needing the general education curriculum

expertise and to maintain the special education knowledge of various disabilities, what works for the SWD and staying in compliance with federal regulations.

In a national study with teachers of SWD and general education teachers' perception of implementation of the CCSS, Endacott et al. (2016) claimed 42% of teachers who were positive about implementing the CCSS had district and building leaders who were open and active. However, the opposite was also true. Endacott et al. (2016) said those districts and building leaders who were not open and active with teachers, had higher attrition among the teachers who left the profession early. Another 30% variance among the teachers' involvement in collaboration was related to the district and building administrators being open and active with teachers (Endacott et al., 2016). SEAs voiced the need for more expertise of general education curriculum among teachers of SWD and Endacott et al. (2016) supported this finding as long as both the district and building administrators were open and active with the teachers. The implications of the finding may indicate the schools with building and/or district leaders who believe in a traditional model of leadership instead of the open and active leadership in the Endacott et al. (2016) study, may have higher attrition among the teachers of SWD.

Finding 2

In finding 2 SEAs were implementing the PLCs for teachers of SWD to be involved in co-planning with general education teachers. Many of the SEAs found the PLC framework with the co-planning model enabled both the teachers of SWD and general education teachers to learn from each other through the consistency of the PLC meetings. By providing a regular, PLC meeting time throughout the year, teachers of

SWD were able to begin to build the relationship with the general education teacher while sharing resources and planning lessons together.

A PLC study, according to Bush (2018) found that although PLCs were an alternative model from the top down leadership approach, PLCs framework created a genuine teacher collaboration in schools and provided an opportunity for teachers to participate in discussions that impacted the teachers' professional lives. Bush (2018) claimed the PLC framework with teachers contributed to academic growth among students. If the PLC model was supported and implemented by the SEAs using the framework in the high schools, the implication of the finding may contribute towards SWD increasing academically to meet CCSS.

Finding 3

In finding 3, SEAs promoted teachers of SWD increasing rigor, and high expectations for SWD to meet CCSS. SEAs talked about how teachers of SWD needed to be more rigorous and have higher expectation when developing lessons and IEPs. By providing more rigor and higher expectations, the SWD may meet the challenge of increasing academically to meet CCSS.

In a literature research study of secondary administrators and special education, Weber and Young (2017) found there was a philosophical basis for special education and little research related to special education that was rigorous. SEAs described the need for teachers of SWD to provide rigor and high expectation. Without any research study, there may be an indication with the first time for national standards and the collaborative efforts, the rigor and high expectations may be new roads being established for the improvement of education for the SWD.

Answers to the Research Questions

The answers to the research questions section of the current study, were listed below along with each stated the question. Then, the researcher summarized the statements made by special education administrators (SEAs). Afterwards, the SEAs' summarized data was described in relationship to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: How do SEA leaders view best practice strategies and methods to address Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for collaboration and communication with teachers of students with disabilities (SWD)? An overview of the SEAs' experiences and perspectives were explained, followed by research literature and how the SEAs' answers to the research questions connected to the studies. When asked about strategies and methods used to address collaboration in the schools, SEAs talked about multiple strategies and methods or best practices used in the schools to increase access to the general education curriculum and setting for SWD. (see Appendix I). Although access to the general education curriculum and/or setting was a main finding, SEAs emphasized how access needed to involve multiple methods from co-teaching to co-planning to double dose, to side by side class to meet the needs of the students with various mild to severe disabilities and would be an ongoing training process which would take time. SEAs discussed the use of co-planning which is a collaboration between the two certificated teachers in planning the lessons using the general education curriculum, discussion of the differentiation needed for the SWD and aligning formative and summative assessments.

In an empirical study, on secondary schools providing access Olson et al. (2016) defined access to the general education curriculum using four methods: (a) instructional and social contexts, (b) collaboration, (c) instruction, and (d) curriculum. Olson et al. (2016) emphasized the importance was to view the work with SWD as a “shared responsibility” and not as a responsibility only for teachers of SWD. SEAs found access to the general education curriculum and/or setting as the top requirement for SWD to meet CCSS.

In a study, on the equity of SWD of the “capability approach,” Broderick (2018) explained the importance of equity and an inclusive environment for SWD to meet full human potential. Sen (1984), who developed the capability approach theory, claimed the capability approach was the belief that SWD had equal rights to those without disabilities, rights that were needed to meet full capabilities. The capability theory is related to SWD having access to the general education setting and curriculum, which was a category discussed by SEAs. Also, the main collaborative methods in research was related to co-teaching. There were no other collaborative methods such as double dose, or side by side teaching in research studies.

In an article on co-planning, Pratt, Imbody, Wolf, and Patterson (2017) claimed there were several components that made co-teaching successful. Pratt et al. (2017) found one of the biggest concerns about the success of co-planning was to ensure both teachers are in sync, understand the lesson, know the instructional model, and know how to incorporate appropriate accommodations and modifications into the lessons. However, researchers did not address co-planning used outside of co-teaching, but as an element in co-teaching. SEAs talked about various methods, such as side by side where the general

education English teachers teach in a classroom and next door is the special education teacher who teaches the same English lesson to SWD. The element that connects both teachers is co-planning. Teachers of SWD were learning instructional pedagogy from the English teacher and the English teachers were learning differentiation from the teacher of SWD through regular co-planning.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: How do SEA leaders perceive the knowledge of teachers of SWD meeting CCSS in English (reading, and writing), and math? An overview of the SEAs' experiences and perspectives were explained, followed by research literature and how the SEAs' answers to the research questions connected to the studies.

SEAs talked about teachers of SWD having the knowledge of summative and formative assessments, using the English or math curriculum and the importance of SWD coming together with the general education teachers to co-plan through the PLC framework and using the curriculum while having multiple strategies for accessing the general education curriculum to meet CCSS in English and math. The area of knowledge SEAs claimed was not in the context of meeting CCSS in English and Math. The focus was on rigor, high expectations and access to the general education curriculum or setting.

In a study to improve high school CCSS reading scores for SWD, Garwood et al. (2017) said teachers in the study used five strategies in the classroom which were needed since the SWD had struggled since elementary grades and had not progressed as high school students. Special education administrators communicated the importance of teachers of SWD gaining knowledge in the instructional pedagogy of English and math.

Often, the SEAs stated general education English and math were not areas the teachers of SWDs were experts on unless the teachers of the SWD were dual certified.

Santangelo (2014) researched the problems in meeting writing CCSS and claimed there were four contributing factors, most of which were related to the writing process, and the final reason due to lack of SWD motivation. The knowledge in meeting CCSS in English and math for teachers of SWD, according to SEAs was an ongoing process which would improve through co-planning, PLCs, professional development and gaining knowledge in instructional pedagogy while providing access of general education curriculum and/or setting for SWD. Writing CCSS was an area according to SEAs where the teachers of SWD were working to gain the knowledge and skills. SEAs were focused on teachers of SWD providing rigor and high expectations while using the curriculum and best practice methods whether focused on the context of reading, writing or math.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was: How do SEA leaders manage IEP alignment with teachers of SWD to meet CCSS? An overview of the SEAs' experiences and perspectives were explained, followed by research literature and how the SEAs' answers to the research questions connected to the studies.

SEAs managed the IEP alignment with the teachers of SWD to meet CCSS as a work in progress. The first step was to be able to unpack and apply the standards. SEAs said the next step was to align the standards to the curriculum. Finally, SEAs stated aligning the CCSS to IEPs would be formulated once the teachers of SWD mastered the other steps which would include rigor and high expectations.

Caruana (2015) researched the process of teachers of SWD aligning the IEP to CCSS and described the five-step process to writing goals aligned to the standards. Flexible language was also discussed in writing the IEP goals using the standards which kept the SWD' needs in mind while making the goals achievable, but using some of the words in the standards. A couple of the SEAs discussed how the teachers of SWD were aligning the IEP goals to the standards, but most of the SEAs were still working to make sure the teachers of SWD could unpack the standards to the lessons before adding the IEP component. Most SEAs planned on having teachers of SWD align the standards to the IEP goals but knew aligning the IEP to standards would be in the near future.

In a book for speech language pathologists to unpack the standards for lessons and goals, Power-de Fur (2015) stated approximately 35% of SWD needed speech and the pathologist was required to write goals for the IEP. Therefore, the pathologist needed to understand how to unpack and apply the CCSS. Alignment of the CCSS to the IEP was secondary to understanding the CCSS thoroughly enough for teachers to break them down and use them in daily lessons. Power-de Fur (2015) claimed making gains where a SWD' performances could be documented in the IEP and could be a source of measurement. While SEAs discussed either in the process of aligning the CCSS to IEP training or having already completed aligning the IEPs to standards training, the SEAs voiced the importance of closing the academic gap between where a SWD performed and the grade level of the SWD. However, SEAs did not discuss other staff who are part of writing the IEP such as the speech pathologist aligning the standards to the IEPs when writing IEP goals.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 was: How do SEA leaders perceive the need for teachers of SWD to meet CCSS? An overview of the SEAs' experiences and perspectives were explained, followed by research literature and how the SEAs' answers to the research questions connected to the studies.

Most SEAs discussed the need of teachers of SWD to provide SWD with continued access into general education curriculum/setting, and IEP compliance to include an IEP transition plan. Some SEAs discussed the implementation of RTI/MTSS.

Caruana (2015) said teachers of SWD needed to write standards based IEPs and provide access for SWD. It has been a decade, Caruana (2015) claimed and teachers of SWD were still struggling with writing standard based IEPs. When standard based IEPs are written, Caruana (2015) claimed the linkage to the CCSS provides strong evidence the SWD are improving academically to meet standards. SEAs supported the study when stating the teachers of SWD needed to scaffold and unpack the standards and align not only to lessons but to IEPs. The study was also supported by SEAs when discussing the need for SWD to increase access of the general education curriculum and/or setting.

Initially known as RTI, more often the framework was referred to as Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS). In a study on the equity and fairness of the RTI/MTSS framework in schools, Avant (2016) claimed RTI/MTSS involved the ability to establish a collaborative team to assess students and implement interventions while establishing an alternative method to address behavior and academics instead of initially referring students to special education, thereby leading to students' success in meeting the CCSS. Some SEAs' intent was to implement the RTI/MTSS, but initially the focus was on rigor

and high expectations for SWD to access the CCSS in an inclusive education and IEP compliance. Other SEAs had the RTI/MTSS framework in place and the collaborative team worked through the framework on PLC days.

Although RTI/MTSS can be used as an intervention level prior to referral to special education, during the Bush Administration the RTI/MTSS was promoted as a method to identify at-risk students for academics and behaviors, Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) claimed the service delivery framework had no serious evaluation and was a complex tool to implement which caused overidentification. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) the RTI/MTSS needed an evaluation by educators used with fidelity. All SEAs were not using the RTI/MTSS model. This supports the Van Boxtel (2017) study which the current study was based. Only some SEAs' schools were using the MTSS framework which supports Fuchs and Fuchs (2017) since the framework may still need further work by educators. Some were using the MTSS framework in high schools while other schools used the functional behavior assessment (FBA) and behavior intervention plan (BIP) which were part of the tools in the special education regulations. Although the FBA and BIP have similarities to the MTSS the tools are also very different.

Application to Leadership

An overview of the SEAs' experiences and perspectives was explained in the application to leadership section to provide explanation of how the findings were related to leadership practices. The explanation was followed by research literature and how the SEAs' experiences relate to the leadership role.

Special education administrators' perceptions of the leadership role were to increase academic standards among SWD through access of curriculum and/or setting and to increase rigor and high expectations among teachers of SWD. The leadership role includes overseeing special education regulations, supporting building administration and teachers of SWD. The SEAs' role was a multitiered leadership role that included viewing data, developing a CAP of improvement, implementing professional development, assessment, and reporting. SEAs provided leadership to coordinators and teachers on special assignment.

In a qualitative study, on Pennsylvania school administrators' understanding of the steps to take to meet the CCSS, Mahfouz et al. (2017) said leaders had to balance understanding the policies related to the standards, work to change district and school culture while addressing diversity issues and ensuring teachers had the tools to align the standards. SEAs perceived meeting the CCSS as a cultural change and focused on aligning every school and district staff accordingly. SEAs had been intentional, using planned training, providing resources to support teachers of SWD by using the framework of the PLCs.

Embedded in all steps was the continual collaboration on all levels needed to change the culture in the district and schools. A strong culture is pertinent if SEA leaders work to change the culture at the school level. The same elements need to be visible by all leaders at the district level. In this way everyone's beliefs and practices are aligned in words and actions to support all students, not solely those in special education departments. Some SEAs vocalized part of the leadership role was to change the school

culture on all levels, so the special education department was not separate, but a closer intertwined group with the entire district.

In a study, on SEAs and teachers of SWD, Bettini et al. (2017) found when SEAs support teachers of SWD, there was a powerful impact on academic improvement. Bettini et al. (2017) stated SEAs had many pressing responsibilities, but the district administrators needed to consider the benefits for students by having SEAs at the district level and having SEAs at the school level. Cultivating effective teachers of SWD, Bettini et al. (2017) said provided the support to have an in-depth understanding of the role as teachers of SWD to support them through professional development or collaborative efforts.

Special education administrative planning had a vision and plan regarding how to support teachers of SWD to meet CCSS. This was evident when SEAs in the study discussed the Continuous Achievement Plan being assembled. The SEAs expressed curricular alignment to the CCSS was required by both the general education teachers and the teachers of SWD, and training was given during contractual time to ensure all teachers received the curricular alignment training. When SEAs set up training in the summer the training was noncontractual time, and teachers of SWD could not be required to attend an important training. Some SEAs discussed only having important training that all teachers of SWD needed to attend during contractual time. The SEAs had planned intentionally to make sure all teachers were given the skills to align standards with the curriculum. Conley and You (2016) supported SEAs by claiming teachers of SWD stayed in professions longer as opposed to leaving when the teachers of SWD received administrative support. The administrative support for teachers of SWD was an important

component for SEAs and discussed in the Bettini et al. (2017) study. SEAs voiced administrative support through the professional development and TOSAs provided to be available to support teachers of SWD.

Special education administrators discussed the PLC framework using the PLCs for ongoing co-planning, RTI, or professional development. Using the PLC framework allowed the structure and collaboration to be present as staff work and participate together using data and discussions to increase academic scores for SWD. Bush (2018) found the PLC framework was used for a variety of purposes but combined with leadership support provided genuine collaboration among teachers and was an avenue for SWD to make academic gain. SEAs discussed the variety of purposes PLC was used during the consistent times throughout the year for staff engagement in the PLCs. One time, there was a content-level PLC meeting on a late Wednesday. Other times, PLCs were department-level or grade-level PLCs. Special education teachers could gain momentum by being intentional about the use of the PLCs which allowed for the co-planning and/or collaboration with general education staff. The study by Bush (2018) supports SEAs in the implementation of the PLCs in the high schools.

Mahfouz et al. (2017) indicated SEAs have challenges meeting the needs of all teachers of SWD to understand and fulfill the district's plan of access for SWD. The study, Mahfouz et al. (2017) claimed pushes district administrators to concentrate on certain areas of the CCSS such as professional development or curricula although the district administrator was aware of the SWD' needs and CCSS. SEAs expressed the importance of providing support to teachers of SWD with new trainings strategies, by keeping the long-time teachers of SWD motivated and offering introductory trainings to

new teachers of SWD. Some SEAs talked about implementing the training information to ensure the complexity of the best practice strategies and methods involved deep authentic learning that would be applicable when teachers of SWD were back in the classroom after training.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of the recommendations for action section was to discuss how the findings could be used to address the problem of SWD meeting the CCSS. An overview was reviewed with the recommended actions resulting from the findings of the current study.

SEAs were very intent on making available professional development and training for staff and sometimes the training included district staff to increase awareness of the co-teaching efforts in the schools. After the professional development, teachers of SWD sometimes go back to try the newly developed skills and were faced with barriers. When SEAs focus on eliminating barriers the teachers of SWD could focus on mastery and application of the CCSS. Special education administrators could emphasize barriers to implementations for teachers of SWD when conducting training and professional development focused on the CCSS.

SEAs' focused CCSS training may help eliminate specific barriers and increase the knowledge of other teachers of SWD who develop ideas or suggestions for the barriers. When SEAs conduct focused ongoing levels of CCSS training or follow up training, the message of the ongoing trainings may illustrate to teachers of SWD the importance of a continued focus on the CCSS, so teachers of SWD do not return to former practices, but work to incorporate new best practice strategies. Special education

administrators could ensure teachers of SWD receive a clear set of directions on implementing the standards with SWD and the expectations needed to meet district benchmarks aligned to the state requirements. In addition, in a follow-up communication focused on the CCSS, SEAs could get feedback on how the implementation was going and ensuring the quality of the implementation.

The areas related to CCSS mastery, such as best practice strategies and collaboration, could have an ongoing focus on measures and data to determine which strategies were most successful with different disabilities of the SWD. Some of the SEAs discussed how the efforts of the changes implemented have not made a difference in SWD' academic progress whether when discussing co-teaching or specific best practice strategies. SEAs could work to improve assessment of the practice working to obtain a baseline prior to implementation and a post assessment. When the assessment of the implementation of practices were used, the results could be communicated to teachers of SWD or use a PLC framework to assist in reinforcing the gains being made in the district.

Special education administrators could provide various ways for teachers of SWD to acquire CCSS mastery or district-emphasized best practice strategies, whether online, during the school day, or during classroom visits, to give feedback or after-school professional development. The mastery of the standards and best practices could increase with enhanced engagement between SEAs and teachers of SWD.

Self-efficacy and motivation were two areas related to students' academic growth. Special education administrators could explore ways for teachers of SWD to help SWD develop self-efficacy and motivation. Exploring ways to develop self-efficacy and motivation in SWD could aid teachers of SWD in working with students and the students

in taking ownership of learning, which could improve progress in meeting standards. Special education administrators could explore ways for teachers of SWD to increase the motivation of SWD, which was empirically researched and showed an impact on students' achievement. Students with disabilities' increasing self-efficacy and motivation may have also had an impact on students' post high school years. When SWD have increased self-efficacy and motivation, SWD may be more engaged in school and the future jobs in the community.

Recommendations for Further Research

This qualitative methodology grounded theory study was based on Van Boxtel's (2017) research questions and instrument which was a quantitative study with permission. Researchers could replicate the study in other geographic areas to explore SEAs' perspectives and views. Also, researchers could study large school districts and small school districts of SEAs' views and perceptions to determine differences given that SEAs' roles vary depending on the district size. In addition, the current study could be replicated using a different method and larger sample size. Replicating the current study, researchers could expound upon the major concepts from the current study.

Future research studies by researchers could include the multiple strategies for achieving SWD' access of the general education curriculum and/or setting discussed in finding 2 including co-teaching, side-by-side teaching, double dose/double dip, and the SDI class. Research in these areas may provide more light on which methods were most effective for SWD. An additional area to study would be co-planning, which was the common element in the three methods and a best practice strategy.

Researchers of further studies could explore novice teacher or student teacher preparation programs in regard to collaboration, the CCSS, and the RTI/MTSS framework. With the role of teachers of SWD changing and teachers needing to use collaboration, apply the CCSS, use the RTI/MTSS, and become adept in complying with special education regulations, research on related topics from the viewpoint of postsecondary special education faculty perspectives may be important. Researchers could also study the best practice strategies used in different districts or different disabilities to determine necessary measures from first being trained to being comfortable in using the strategy regularly with students. Researchers could study the best practice strategies from different districts which could provide leaders with guidance on how much training on a certain topic is too extensive or too limited.

Limitations

There were some possible limitations of the current study which may have had influence or impacted the current researched study. A summary was drawn of some potential limitations of the current study.

The limitations of the current study included the survey. The purpose of the survey was for the researcher to obtain preliminary data which would allow the interview process to obtain more in-depth data during a short period of time. However, possibly due to the time to complete the survey due to the open questions, there was little data obtained from the completion of the survey. The researcher obtained preliminary data using the field journal by taking notes from district websites. In the future, the survey either needs to be omitted or the questions need to be reduced by having fewer topics which may produce more data for the fewer survey questions.

The findings of the current research were confined to the demographics in the Northwest region, more specifically the researched county high schools. The demographics may not be representative of the state or other counties. A larger sample size or national study may be demographically more generalizable or significantly noteworthy in findings. So, there was limited generalizability in the current study.

The current research was not quantitative, but it was a qualitative methodology grounded theory design. The researcher of the current study did not provide any numerical data to observe or see patterns. The data was nonnumerical and was derived from in-depth interviews from SEAs. The purpose of the current research study was to explore strategies and methods used from the SEAs' perspectives and experiences in using the CCSS with SWD which could not be solved by using a quantitative methodology.

The researcher being a novice with grounded theory and has theoretical knowledge is an additional limitation. The researcher of the current study did not have experience using the grounded theory research method. Grounded theory is an exhaustive process, and there may have been limitations, due to the possible blurring of the analytical process or theoretical development.

Concluding Statement

The general purpose of this study was to determine the SEAs' perspectives and experiences of high school SWD for teachers of SWD. The researcher in the current study explored the perceptions and experiences of SEAs in meeting CCSS for SWD.

Communication was an important element for cultural change whether in the district or with building staff. Some SEAs changed the term special education by

changing the district department as “Student Services.” Changing the district department name was a positive change and the term special education needs to change on all levels. The term was long time standing and has several negative connotations for students and parents. The National Board for Professional Teachers (Empower Teachers, 2019) did away with the terms and when Special Education teachers become Nationally Board certificated the term *exceptional* was used throughout the entire teacher certification process. There needs to be continued cultural change and some of those actions could be to change job title names, when the term is used in communication. Changing a name could have a positive impact on SWD as SEAs go forward to an inclusive education.

The RTI/MTSS model was used in some districts, but not in all districts, which supports Van Boxtel’s (2017) study that found RTI/MTSS was not a high priority in California school districts. There needs to be some type of documented, tiered framework prior to referral to special education services. SEAs could reconsider implementing this framework at all high schools to be used to screen interventions given to a student prior to a student referred for special education services or those students struggling academically.

For SEAs to have a strong impact on teachers’ learning and application of pedagogy, rigor, and high expectations, multiple layers of training will need to be established overtime. Many SEAs expressed the importance of supporting teachers of SWD through the use of contractual time for trainings and PLCs. Although not implemented by all SEAs, some SEAs also voiced RTI and MTSS being part of the time to support teachers in working with SWD. Supporting the teachers of SWD was important since the teachers of SWD was a career stated to have increased attrition while

ensuring multiple methods for SWD to access the general education curriculum and setting.

The researcher of the current study analyzed data that supported SEAs' perspective of teachers needing to change the traditional special education teachers' role to teacher of exceptional students who believed and acted with rigor and high expectations for SWD to increase access of the general education curriculum and/or setting through instructional pedagogy skills.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Below is a list of survey questions used with participants. The process was to ask the common set of questions to all 13 participants in the survey with five to seven participants for the in-depth interview. New questions surfaced during interviews based on survey responses. All three data sources (survey, interview, field journal) will be collected and included in the study.

1. What is your name and role?
2. Considering collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers in your high school (s) where both general and special education teachers are working together in the same classroom, can you discuss your views or experiences about collaborative teaching/co-teaching currently occurring in:
 - a. English-reading/writing classrooms (ELA)?
 - b. mathematics classrooms?
3. What collaborative strategies and methods has your district offered regarding PD needs for special education and general education teachers?
4. What helps you as a leader, regarding communication with special education teachers, about Common Core State Standards alignment in your high school(s)?
5. Considering professional development in Common Core State Standards for your special education teachers, what are some of the strengths and problems for special education teachers receiving professional development in:
 - a. English-reading/writing?
 - b. math content?
 - c. CCSS-aligning IEPs?
 - d. specific strategies and methods?
6. Of the Common Core Reading, Writing and Math Standards, what do special education teachers need to be proficient in:
 - a. implementing the instructional shifts?
 - b. teaching to grade-level?
 - c. adapting to grade-level?
 - d. co-teaching professional development?
7. What strategies and methods regarding essential Common Core State Standards instructional expertise, and special education are used in your high schools?

8. For students with disabilities, what do special education teachers need to be proficient in:
- a. implementing evidence-based practices (e.g., direct/explicit instruction, phonological awareness training, word problem solving instruction)?
 - b. developing Common Core aligned IEP goals?
 - c. learning targets for Common Core State Standards based instruction.
 - d. implementing RTI (Response To Intervention (RTI) is a process teachers use for students who are struggling with a lesson by intervening)?
9. What are the most important strategies and methods are successful regarding professional development of special education and general education teachers for:
- a. math?
 - b. English (reading & writing)?
 - c. collaborative teaching (co-teaching)?
10. Is there something else you think I should know to better understand your work in the high schools or Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

**Institutional Review Board
Certificate of Approval****IRB ID# Dommer_Malaret041219**

Principal Investigator (if faculty research):

Student Researcher: Kathleen Dommer

Faculty Advisor: Stacey Malaret

Department: SAL D. Ed.

Title: Special education administrator meets common core.

Approved on April 12, 2019

- Full Board Review
- X Expedited Review (US)
- Delegated Review (Can)
- Exempt (US)

CERTIFICATION

City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor Stacey Malaret and the student researcher Kathleen Dommer have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethical Review Protocol submitted for ethics review.

This **Certificate of Approval** is valid provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process, or documents. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures are required to be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board in advance of its implementation.



Brian Guthrie Ph D, RSW, RCSW
Chair, IRB City University of Seattle

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Kathleen Dommer, and I am a doctoral student in the School of Applied Leadership, Educational Leadership Program, at City University of Seattle. I am conducting research on the role of special education administrators' experiences in working with high school teachers of students with disabilities about the Common Core State Standards in promoting the academic achievement. Please know my research is only focusing on high schools within the ESD. I am requesting your permission to participate in the survey and interview. Please know the special education district leader must have firsthand experience with the role of the Common Core State Standards.

The survey (either mailed or online) would take about 30 minutes with a follow-up interview. The interview would last less than 1 hour. The interview would take place at your preferred time and place for convenience.

During the interview, I will be asking you further related questions about your strategies and methods you have used, you use now, and those that have been successful in implementing the Common Core State Standards in the high schools. At a later date, I would contact the special education leader to review notes and clarify any points for accuracy. Additionally, I would like to audiotape the interviews to help with my data collection. However, participation in this study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time, with no consequence or penalty for their removal from the study. Participants can also ask for recording not to occur or to stop at any time, and there will be no penalty. Interview notes, document analysis, and audio recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed. Electronic data will be stored on a secured server, password protected, and maintained on an encrypted flash drive and then destroyed after 5 years. The participation in this study is strictly confidential.

I have attached the consent form for you to review and complete. No one will be named in my study, nor will any school or district names be used. If you are willing to allow your special education district leader to participate, please reply to this email.

Please provide your signature on the consent form and check the boxes you agree with and return the document to me by email (a scanned document is acceptable) or respond to survey monkey link. Once I receive your email stating you are interested in participating and the completed consent form attached to the email.

Any findings will be available to any participant upon request. If you have any questions, please contact me at my email or the phone number listed below. This research received approval by City University of Seattle's Institutional Review Board prior to the beginning of the interviews occurring. At any time, you can also contact my Doctoral Chair, Dr. Stacey Malaret at [407-XXX-XXXX](tel:407-XXX-XXXX) or at XXXXXX@cityuniversity.edu with any questions.

Thank you for your time and effort in this matter. Your attention to the research study is appreciated.

Kathleen Dommer, Student Researcher
(253) XXX-XXXX or XXXXXX@cityuniversity.edu

APPENDIX D

ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

Name of Organization _____ School District
 Address
 City, State, Zip
 Telephone

By signing this consent form, I understand that Kathleen Dommer (researcher) is a candidate for an advanced degree, or a faculty member of City University of Seattle. I understand that the researcher is conducting a study entitled: Special Education Administrator Meets Common Core.

The purpose of this research is to develop a theory of district-level SEAs leadership views and experiences of implementation of CCSS regarding collaboration and communication, reading, writing and math, professional development and alignment of IEPs for teachers of SWD in the researched county in the Pacific Northwest.

I understand the findings of this research study are solely the responsibility of the researcher. It is understood that any and all information/data the researcher collects from contacts within and/or about our organization outside the research protocol will not be part of the research findings. I understand the researcher may publish findings following completion of this study. Any information published will be limited to the findings of the research. No research participants will participate in this study without organization and City University of Seattle Institutional Review Board (IRB) knowledge and approval.

I grant the researcher permission to contact members of the school district for the purpose of requesting participation in the study as required by the research design. I grant the researcher permission to use organizational premises as necessary to conduct the research. I grant the researcher permission to collect, use, and store documentation related to the project under study. I understand that in granting permission to access program documentation, the researcher may store copies in a secure manner outside of the organization. The researcher will maintain all documentation and findings regarding this organization in confidence and confine its use to this research study. On behalf of the organization, I request a final copy of this research report.

Representative and Signature Date

Print Name and Title _____

Organization _____

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Faculty Supervisor: Dr Stacey Malaret

Department: Educational Leadership

Telephone: 407-595-2221 City U E-mail: malaretstacey@cityu.edu

Title of Study: Special Education Administrators Meet Common Core

Name and Title of Researcher(s): Kathleen Dommer, Student Researcher

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Stacy Malaret and Dr. Nicole Ferry

Department: Educational leadership

Telephone: 407-XXX-XXXX

City U Email: XXXX@cityiniversity.edu

Program Director: Dr. Mary Dereshiwsky

Why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a district leader with special education responsibilities for high schools.

About 13 individuals will participate in this study.

This form contains important information that will help you decide whether to join the study. Take the time to carefully review this information. You should talk to the researchers about the study and ask them any questions you have. If you decide to join the study, you will be asked to sign this form before you can start study-related activities. To make your decision, you must consider all the information below:

The purpose of the research

The procedures of the research. What you will be asked to do.

The risks of participating in the research.

The benefits of participating in the research and if participation is worth the risk.

You do not have to participate in this research. It is your choice whether or not you want to participate in this research. Your participation is voluntary, and you can decide not to participate or withdraw your participation at any time without negative consequences.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to develop a theory of district-level SEAs leadership views and experiences of implementation of Common Core State Standards regarding collaboration and communication, reading, writing and math, professional development and alignment of IEPs for teachers of students with disabilities in the researched county in the Pacific Northwest.

Research Participation.

You will be asked to participate in the following procedures:

I understand I am being asked to participate in this study by completing an on-line survey. The survey consists of 25 questions and is expected to take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete. You may choose to answer as many questions as you decide, and each question will have a “no response” choice. You also may be asked to participate in an interview.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

Taking part in this research involves minimal risks which is equivalent to the risks in an ordinary day.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

I cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your participation in this research. However, possible benefits may include pertinent information related to your district leader responsibilities.

Your involvement is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without negative consequences, by refusing to answer any further questions or exiting from the survey entirely. You may request a copy of the final research study report. Should you request a copy, you may be asked to pay the costs of photocopying and mailing.

I have been advised that I may request a copy of the final research study report. Should I request a copy, I understand I may be asked to pay the costs of photocopying and mailing.

Confidentiality

I understand that participation is confidential to the limits of applicable privacy laws. No one except the student researcher, her supervisor and Program Director will be allowed to view any information or data collected whether by questionnaire, interview and/or other means.

Steps will be taken to protect your identity, however, information collected about you can never be 100% secure. All data (the questionnaires, audio/video tapes, typed records of the interview, interview notes, informed consent forms, computer discs, any backup of computer discs and any other storage devices) are kept locked and computer files will be encrypted and password protected by the researcher. The research data will be stored for 5 years. At the end of that time all data of whatever nature will be permanently destroyed. The published results of the study will contain data from which no individual participant can be identified.

You are advised that the company hosting this survey is located in the United States and as such is subject to U.S. laws, including the US Patriot Act which allows authorities access to the records of internet service providers. Therefore, anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. If you choose to participate in this survey, you understand that your responses to the survey questions will be stored and may be accessed in the USA.

Signature: _____

APPENDIX F

ONLINE CONSENT FORM

I have carefully reviewed and understand this consent form. I understand the description of the research protocol and consent process provided to me by the researcher. My signature on this form indicates that I understand to my satisfaction the information provided to me about my participation in this research project. My signature also indicates that I have been apprised of the potential risks involved in my participation. Lastly, my signature indicates that I agree to participate as a research subject. My consent to participate does not waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, and/or City University of Seattle from their legal and professional responsibilities with respect to this research. I understand I am free to withdraw from this research project at any time. I further understand that I may ask for clarification or new information throughout my participation at any time during this research.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "**agree**" button below indicates that:

- you have read and understand all of the above information, and
- you voluntarily agree to participate, and
- you are at least 18 years of age.

If you **do not wish to participate** in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "**disagree**" button.

Agree

Disagree

Thank you,

APPENDIX G

CODING KEY

CODING KEY				
CODE #	OPEN CODING	RQ #	FOCUSED CODING	THEORETICAL CODING
1	Experiencing coteaching	1	coteaching	access
2	Beginning coteaching	1	coteaching	access
3	Working with PLC	1	Collaborating to learn	access
4	Working together	1	Collaborating to learn	access
5	Planning coteaching	1	Collaborating to learn	Accessing
6	Using side by side	1	Collaborating & SDI	Accessing
7	Training core curriculum	1	Collaborating for all	Perceiving need
8	Using pedagogy	4	training	collaborating
9	Using core curriculum	4	training	Perceiving need
10	Planning core together	1	Collaborating and communicating	Accessing
11	Using balanced literacy	1	Training	access
12	Using GLAD strategies	1	Training	access
13	Using technology	3	Training	IEP requirements
14	Using ability levels	3	Using SDI	IEP requirements
15	Confusing standards	3	training	Perceiving need
16	Aligning assessment tools	3	training	Perceiving need
17	Coming together	1	Collaborating to learn	collaborating
18	Using PLC	1	Collaborating to learn	collaborating

19	breaking down CCSS	4	training	Perceiving need
20	Teaching to grade level	4	training	Perceiving need
21	Involving SEA	1	leading	leadership
22	Meshing funds	1	leading	leadership
23	Involving SEA	1	leading	leadership
24	Using RTI	1	intervening	collaborating
25	Improving sped learning	4	training	Perceiving need
26	Engaging to support mastery	1	Collaborating for pedagogy	collaborating
27	Planning together	1	Collaborating for pedagogy	collaborating
28	Having high expectations	4	Changing mindset	Perceiving need
29	Reflecting for SEA	1	leading	leadership
30	Using right indicators	4	training	Perceiving need
31	Having lower expectations	4	Questioning lower expectations	Perceiving need
32	Using RTI framework	1	collaborating	collaborating
33	Using PLC to problem solve	1	Collaborating to solve	collaborating
34	Training new and old	4	leading	leadership
35	Focusing on learning	2		SETS skills
36	Confusing standards, goals, objectives	3	training	Perceiving need
37	Using online with standards	4	training	Perceiving need
38	Using community resource	2	Expertise of SETS	IEP requirements
39	Using core & interventions	3	RTI/MTSS	Perceiving need
40	Varying differentiation	2	Expertise of SETS	IEP requirements

APPENDIX H

TRIANGULATION CHART

CATEGORIES	TRIANGULATION			
	SURVEY	INTERVIEW	JOURNAL	WEBSITE
SEA leadership is important		X	X	X
Leaders support through PLC development	X	X	X	X
Leaders support through training & data	X	X	X	
Leaders provide PD in CCSS & best practice strategies & IEP accuracy	X	X	X	X
Leaders need to role model behavior needed on district and school level to change culture	X	X	X	
Access into general education setting & general education curriculum is the way to close the gap	X	X	X	
Access is similar to increasing LRE but includes support from IEP team and documentation on special education forms and addresses SDI	X	X	X	5
SETs need to master proficiency of IEP writing & CCSS, before aligning standards to IEP	X	X	X	X
SETs need to increase rigor and high expectations	X	X	X	
SETs need to increase content pedagogy & adapt to change in role, confidence needed	X	X	X	
SETs are trained in providing SDI and transition plan which is also a priority	X	X	X	
Co-teaching	X	X	X	X
Double dose/double dip of English in both gen ed and LRC & co-plan together	X	X	X	
Side by side teaching in separate classes & co-plan together	X	X	X	
SDI class to meet IEP & student needs	X	X	X	
Learning lab-students go to ability level class	X	X	X	

RTI/MTSS intervention framework and equitable for all students		X	X	X
RTI/MTSS academics & behavior		X	X	X
RTI/MTSS working in progress	X	X	X	
RTI/MTSS Student Support Team	X	X	X	
In depth knowledge about standards	X	X	X	
Scaffolding & unpacking standards	X	X	X	
Relationship between pedagogy and standards	X	X	X	X
SETs Summative and formative assess	X	X	X	
Perceived need- rigor and high expectation		X	X	X
Perceived need using best practice strategies	X	X	X	X
PLCs using Dufour model intervention for all		X	X	X
PLCs for content co plan	X	X	X	
PLCs for grade level meetings	X	X	X	
PLC have administrative support	X	X	X	X
SWD increased LRE access to general education setting & curriculum based on IEP team, readiness	X	X	X	X
SWD need access based on transition in post high school years.	X	X	X	
SWD were given access to general education curriculum in special education training		X	X	X
SETs invited to general education curricula training	X	X	X	X

APPENDIX I

DISTRICTS REPORT ON STRATEGIES AND METHODS

- Achieve the Core: <https://achievethecore.org/>
- Achieve 3000: <http://www.achieve3000.com/qa/a-platform-of-all-students/>
- AVID: Advancement Via Individual Determination Program:
<https://www.avid.org/>
- Balanced Literacy
- Big Ideas: <https://www.bigideasmath.com>
- Co-Planning, Inclusive Core Curriculum training; Mutual planning
- Co-teaching, Coteaching Studio, or Maryland Co-teaching:
<https://marylandlearninglinks.org/co-teaching/>
- Utah Co-teaching:
<https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/SPED/451652b7-dbe4-4baa-bf9c-596eea73b546/UploadedImages/CoTeachingHandbook201519MT.pdf>
- Double Dose Class/Double Dip Class: (Gen ed class + one special ed class focusing on same goals such as English)
- Dual endorsed teachers-
- Eureka curriculum: <http://eurekalearning.com/>
- Evidence-based Practices:
- Fastbridge, iReady, Read 180, Corrective Reading, Read Naturally, Systems 44
- High-Leverage Practices in Special Education:
<http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/high-leverage-practices/>

- Inclusive classrooms- (SWD are included in general ed and have another SDI period)
- John Hattie- visible learning: <https://visible-learning.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/VLPLUS-252-Influences-Hattie-ranking-DEC-2017.pdf>
- Learning Labs: <https://tedd.org/learning-labs/>
- Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning (book)
- Math Labs: <https://www.teachingchannel.org/video/build-collaborate-learning-culture>
- National Speakers: Anita Archar, Marilyn Friend, Heather Friziellie, Julie Schmidt, Jeanne Spiller, Stetson & Associates, Inc.
- Pre-teaching of vocabulary and concepts of gen ed lessons in special ed classroom.
- Professional Learning Communities/ Professional Learning Networks, PLC/PLN, Continual support: Learning Improvement Time (LIT), Late start, **School Name Learns
- Project GLAD- GLAD: Guided Language Acquisition Design: <https://begladtraining.com/?>
- Increase LRE-(special education terms but synonymous to access)
- Response to Intervention (RTI) /Multi-Tiered System (MTSS);
UTAH MTSS: <https://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/umtss?mid=923&tid=0>
- Side by Side Teaching (co-planning and all teachers teach lesson in own class.)
SDI class (Specially Designed Instruction similar to LIT-learning improvement time)

- Springboard Curriculum
- Study Techniques: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/5-research-backed-studying-techniques>
- SIOP Model- The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
- Spirals: <https://spiral.ac/>
- System Guides- District created
- UDL- Universal Design Learning- <http://udlguidelines.cast.org/>
- Utah's evaluation of co-teaching: <https://www.utah.gov/pmn/files/357767.pdf>
- Understand by Design-Backwards Planning, back mapping, backwards design
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): <http://www.cast.org/>
- Using Technology: Chromebooks, Microsoft Teams, online Notebook