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Special Education Teacher Perceptions on the Nature of Resources of Respective Programs Across Contexts

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Across Contexts

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Abstract

Special education teachers must have access to adequate resources in order to provide their students with the opportunities they need to succeed. However, there are significant disparities in the access to resources across different contexts. Previous literature has identified team support, administrative support, and training to be significant resources perceived by special education teachers. The purpose of my study was to examine the perceived nature of resources by special education teachers and investigate the variation of these perceptions across different socioeconomic contexts. I conducted seven interviews with special education teachers in Massachusetts to gain greater insight into this topic. This paper attempts to answer the questions: How do special education teachers perceive the nature of resources for special education in their context? How do perceptions of resources vary across higher-income and lower-income school contexts? Through my interviews and after analyzing my qualitative data, I found that special education teachers perceived support and training to be extremely important resources for their special education programs but perceived administrative support to be lacking and training to be ineffective. While teachers had similar perceptions of resources on the surface, a deeper analysis of teacher perceptions found that the negative perception of resources was intensified in the lower-income context compared to the higher-income context. These differences point to the fundamental role that funding plays in resources for special education programs.

Introduction

Special Education teachers have an immensely important role in their students' education, acting as their advocates and educators for a multitude of different learning, emotional, physical, and behavioral needs. With such a tremendous amount of responsibility, it is

important that special education teachers are supported and recognized for their contribution to their students and to the field of education broadly. Special education teachers must have access to tools that support them as educators so they can continue to provide high-quality education to their students. However, burnout among special education teachers is at an all-time high, indicating that special education teachers are struggling with the resources they are provided (Cavendish, 2019).

This research study aims to examine the perceived nature of resources by teachers, as well as the variation of these perceptions across different socioeconomic contexts. I chose to focus on teacher perceptions on the topic of resources because teachers work firsthand in the classroom with their students and their perceptions are crucial to understanding special education programs. Teacher perception is particularly valuable in the discussion of resources because teachers directly interact with students and use these resources to facilitate learning. Therefore, teachers can provide insight into which resources are beneficial and which ones need improvement in their teaching. By gaining an understanding of how resources are effective or ineffective, special education programs can make changes to support the teachers in the way they need. It is important to research the topic of resources in terms of different socioeconomic contexts to establish what areas of special education programs can improve for the future to fully benefit both teachers and students.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how special education teachers perceive the nature of resources for their special education programs and investigate potential similarities and differences in these perceptions across contexts. For the purpose of this study, resources will be generally defined as support (social and administrative), training, and funding.

With the understanding that resources are extremely important for special education programs, I ask the following research questions: How do special education teachers perceive the nature of resources for special education in their context? How do perceptions of resources vary across higher-income and lower-income school contexts?

Literature Review

How do we define special education?

In this paper, special education refers to the education that students with special needs receive, where special needs can include learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, behavioral and emotional disorders, speech or language impairments, and physical disabilities (Benitez Ojeda & Carugno, 2022). Special education typically involves the placement of students in either a specialized classroom, an inclusive classroom, or a combination of the two. A specialized classroom "may include fewer students in the classroom, more teachers, or a higher level of support" (Benitez Ojeda & Carugno, 2022). An inclusive classroom may also be referred to as mainstreaming, where "the environment in which the student typically receives their education is the same as general education students" (Benitez Ojeda & Carugno, 2022). When referring to general education, it is "the standard curriculum without any special arrangements or modifications" (Benitez Ojeda & Carugno, 2022). It is important for the needs of the students to be met, and emphasis should be put on finding a balance of meeting the student's needs in the least restrictive environment (Benitez Ojeda & Carugno, 2022). This research provides context into what is meant by special education throughout this study and the environments in which the students are in to best support their learning.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act are federal laws in the United States that rule "public schools must provide free, appropriate public

education to students with disabilities" (Benitez Ojeda & Carugno, 2022). This law applies to children ages 3 to 21 years old who meet the specific eligibility criteria for special education services. Students who qualify for these services receive accommodations, adaptations to improve student academic success, and in most cases, an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP is a "legally binding document by which the public school system, after an interprofessional evaluation, identifies the educational needs of a student the intervention that will help achieve this goal and the method for monitoring of progress" (Benitez Ojeda & Carugno, 2022). Special education teachers are involved on the IEP team for the child and provide insight into the child's academic performance if their education goals are met or if the IEP needs to be modified to maximize the student's ability for success.

How do we define high-income schools and low-income schools?

It is important to conceptualize what is meant by a high-income school and a low-income school in this study. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, "low-poverty schools are defined as public schools where 25% or less of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. High-poverty schools are those where more than 75% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). Prior research might also refer to different school contexts as urban or suburban areas. Urban schools can be defined as under-resourced schools "situated in areas with economic hardship and concentrated poverty" (Welsh and Swain, 2020). Essentially, the urban context is one defined by considerable education debt (Welsh and Swain, 2020). Additionally, higher-income districts "typically have greater property wealth" and in turn receive more resources than lower-income districts due to revenues from income and sales taxes (Owens, 2017). For this study, we will

think about a high-income school as low-poverty or in the suburban context, and a low-income school as high-poverty or in the urban context.

Cost comparisons of special education and general education

  Special education services are intended to provide free, public education to students with disabilities in the same way that general education students are provided with free, public education. There have been several studies, although now slightly outdated due to limited data available, to evaluate the cost of special education compared to general education, with an emphasis on the topic of special education service cost requirements. Although special education costs have proved to grow in the overall share of school spending, in the past 20 years, "the ratio of the average cost for all special education students to the average per-student cost in regular education appears to be remarkably consistent over the same time span" (Chaikind, 1993). Essentially, changes in special education costs are mostly due to the increase of students needing special education services rather than striking cost increases for each student. On average, the total per-student special education costs are about 2.3 times the cost of regular education (Chaikind, 1993). In 1990, the average total per-pupil expenditures for special education was $4,262 for all programs, while the average for general education was $3,247. Within special education, low-incidence disabilities tend to have higher costs than high-incidence disabilities, where higher-cost placements are "typically ones with lower pupil-teacher ratios and occur in programs generally serving students with intense service needs" (Chaikind, 1993). The excess per-pupil cost for special education students in 1990 was $4,153 (Chaikind, 1993). These data indicate that special education costs have steadily remained higher than general education costs, especially for students with more intense service needs. Special education students need extra

resources and support to succeed academically, and it is important for these resources to be appropriately allocated to special education programs to bolster student success.

Disparities of funding across different socioeconomic districts

There are significant disparities in special education across different contexts, particularly in funding and allocation of resources. Deborah Voltz led a study examining the context of urban special education and implementing standards-based reform. Many students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are educated in urban schools (Voltz, 2006). This barrier is an example of how resources need to be allocated to provide for these students in an urban education environment. The magnitude of need must be considered for support services in high-poverty schools, particularly in urban areas. For students with disabilities, "per-student expenditures have been estimated at $12,581 and $11,933 in suburban and urban areas, respectively" (Voltz, 2006). Essentially, urban areas have a higher need for resources but receive less funding than suburban areas, creating a discrepancy in funding for high-income and low-income districts. As a result, schools with a higher need are forced to "do more" with fewer resources. This research aims to understand how this discrepancy in funding in urban and suburban areas can have an effect on the perceptions of resources by special education teachers.

Key factors contributing to student success

Inclusive environments have proved to benefit students in terms of their academic and social success in an educational setting. Children with disabilities are able to experience "the full range of interactions and friendships with their peers when attending inclusive schools" (Fisher and Frey, 2001). Access to the core curriculum is a goal for students with disabilities, yet there is an issue of access for students with significant disabilities. One particular study focused on classroom observation and interviews with teachers, parents, and peers to identify key factors

necessary for student success. The findings found four themes that were identified for students with disabilities accessing the core curriculum, which were "individualized, content-specific accommodations and modifications, collaboration among the teaching team, involving peers, and a disconnect between the IEP process and classroom implementation of curriculum and instruction" (Fisher and Frey, 2001). Student success was strengthened by peer support networks that allowed them to participate in general education classes, appropriate accommodations and modifications for the student, and cooperative learning (Fisher and Frey, 2001). Their findings also found that the IEP goals and objectives should be improved to bridge the gap between the IEP and the implementation of a curriculum that will benefit the student. Overall, inclusive learning is a factor of success for students with disabilities. However, for inclusive learning to be effective, special education programs must have the appropriate resources to do so. This study will further investigate how having resources, or a lack of resources, can impact the success of students and how teachers perceive the resources they are provided.

Factors affecting teacher satisfaction and retention

Teachers working in special education have the highest rate of attrition in the education field, especially in recent years. There are a multitude of factors that affect teacher satisfaction and retention, including professional support, teacher satisfaction, and job commitment as the most significant factors. One study by Ann Berry investigated the relationship of perceived support to satisfaction and commitment for Special Education teachers in rural areas. This article investigated work-related support in rural school settings and the potential correlation to teacher commitment in special education. The teachers completed a survey that indicated the different types of support they received as well as what is most available and most helpful to them. In their findings, they found that significant relationships between professional support, teacher

satisfaction, and job commitment were most beneficial to teachers in rural school contexts (Berry, 2012). Particularly, teachers frequently reported other special educators in the building as the most helpful sources of support. Additionally, 90% of teachers who found positive support in their rural school district agreed that given another chance to choose a profession, they would stick to teaching special education (Berry, 2012). These findings indicate that support for special education teachers is extremely important and an indication of teacher satisfaction and willingness to continue teaching special education. This prior research will be considered when investigating teachers' perceptions of support and how support can influence a teacher's motivation to stay in the special education field.

Additionally, the same researcher, Ann Berry, sought to understand issues in special education teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development in rural areas. They found that over half of administrators struggled to fill special education teacher vacancies, and 72% of administrators reported difficulty with teacher retention (Berry, 2011). Teachers identified what would be helpful in terms of professional development, including more training in working with paraprofessionals, working with parents, training in a specific disability category, and including students with disabilities in the general education curriculum" (Berry, 2011). In order to retain teachers in special education programs, it is important to understand what teachers value for their own professional development and support, including training that focused on things they encounter in their role as special educators.

Similarly to my own research, one particular study focused on teacher perceptions of implementation practices that support special education students. This study examined the perceptions of nine special education teachers related to their interpretation of assessment, progress monitoring, and transition mandates in a large urban district. Three themes emerged

from the data, including teachers' determination of needs, supports, and services, the provision

of student support, and the implementation of support through collaboration and partnerships.

Teachers expressed a desire to feel heard and be involved in the educational decisions that

impact classroom practice, with one stating that "the people making decisions in education are

not educators… I think we need to take that back, and we need to make those effective policies

and changes. Not them" (Cavendish, 2019). Many teachers described their efforts to be active

participants in decision-making but were ultimately not given the chance to do so. Additionally,

these teachers felt that they had to "wear many hats and had constantly changing roles and

responsibilities" (Cavendish, 2019). In addition to teachers feeling disconnected from policy

decisions that directly impacted them, they also felt overwhelmed with the responsibilities they

were assumed to take as a special educator.

Special education teachers' intentions to leave, as previously stated, has been a growing

concern in the education system. Sharon Conley and Sukkyung You evaluated the key influences

on special education teachers' intentions to leave. Their key findings were administrative support

and teacher team efficacy as important indicators of teachers' intentions to leave. The lack of

administrative support is "the most frequently cited reason for special educators to leave the

profession or to indicate their intention to leave" (Conley and You, 2016). In this study, teachers

who perceived "less than positive supervision" were not motivated to enhance their commitment

to teaching (Conley and You, 2016). These findings indicate that administrative support is

extremely important and valued for teachers, and less than satisfactory support is a leading

reason that teachers choose to leave the special education profession.

The relationship between teacher characteristics and attrition has been extensively studied

in recent years, and age is the only demographic variable consistently linked to attrition

(Billingsley, 2004). Research consistently shows that younger special education teachers are more likely to leave or express intent to leave than their older, more experienced counterparts. Essentially, teacher attrition patterns "follow a U-shaped curve", where attrition is "highest among younger teachers, low for teachers during the midcareer period, and high again as teachers retired" (Billingsley, 2004). The reasons for high levels of attrition among young teachers include initial frustrations and difficulties that discourage them from continuing in their position, or because they are yet to become so invested in the occupation or location. However older, more experienced teachers who leave face higher consequences, such as the loss of tenure or an experienced teacher's salary (Billingsley, 2004). The more experienced teacher, the more there is to lose. This research will be interesting in my own study to determine if there is a relationship between age and motivation to continue teaching in the special education field and what role resources play in teacher retention.

The Support Gap in High-Income and Low-Income Schools

Researchers have identified that there is a "support gap" that exists between new teachers in low-income schools and high-income schools (Johnson et al., 2004). The authors identify three sources of support for new teachers: hiring practices, relationships with colleagues, and curriculum. In prior research, these key sources have been found to influence teacher satisfaction and eventual retention in their job (Johnson et al., 2004). This study found that new teachers in high-income areas encounter more supportive hiring practices, which increases the likelihood of a good match between teacher and school. Their hiring process is rich in information and the hiring happens early, giving teachers adequate time to prepare for their teaching responsibilities (Johnson et al., 2004). Additionally, mentors are assigned to teachers in Massachusetts to provide support for teachers. Teachers in high-income schools are more likely to have a mentor

who teaches the same grade level and subject as the new teacher, while mentors in low-income schools are more likely to teach different grade levels and subjects (Johnson et al., 2004). Finally, insufficient curriculum guidance for low-income schools was identified, creating problems for new teachers compared to teachers in higher-income schools who receive more guidance.

Addressing a gap in the literature

While many studies have assessed urban and suburban school districts respectively, there has been little research regarding teacher perceptions of resources across these two contexts. I believe it is important to examine the similarities and differences in these contexts from a teacher's perspective and determine how resources play a role in the perceived effectiveness of a special education program. Additionally, I am interested to see if there is a connection between the perception of resources and teacher motivation to continue teaching in the special education field. I will be operationalizing resources to mean support, training, and funding, which I believe provides a unique dimension to my study. I am interested to see how these dimensions come together in terms of the perceptions of these resources and how they might differ across the higher-income and lower-income school contexts that I will be investigating.

Methods

Methodology

I conducted a qualitative study that explored special education teachers' perceptions of the nature of resources and the similarities and differences that might arise across different socioeconomic contexts. I chose to use qualitative research for this study because I was investigating teachers' subjective perceptions that required in-depth, individualized communication with each teacher. By conducting and gathering qualitative research for my

study, I found this to be the most effective way to obtain comprehensive and emotional responses from the teachers that would strengthen my findings.

I gathered my qualitative data by conducting interviews with seven special education teachers in the state of Massachusetts. I sought to understand teachers' perceptions of their special education programs, so speaking directly to teachers about this topic enabled me to gain an extensive understanding of their perceptions. I chose to use interviewing as a means of collecting data because I wanted to use a small sample of teachers, which allowed me to have more time with each participant and gather detailed responses from each individual that were rich in quality. Each interview lasted anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes and were conducted over Zoom. I conducted all of my interviews over Zoom for a few different reasons. Since I was doing my research on campus in Connecticut, it would have been extremely challenging to conduct in-person interviews with seven teachers in Massachusetts, so Zoom enabled me to interview participants in another state without difficulty. Interviewing over Zoom allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling both on my end and for the teachers I interviewed, especially because the workday of a teacher typically does not end until about 4 pm. Additionally, using Zoom's platform allowed me to easily record the interview and generate a transcript automatically.

Participants

The participants in this study are special education teachers who work at a public school in either a higher-income or lower-income school district. I chose to focus on two different socioeconomic contexts because of my experience teaching in both types of districts. I worked as an instructional assistant in special education for three years throughout my college experience at various public schools in my hometown. Additionally, I had the opportunity to be placed in a kindergarten classroom at an elementary school in Hartford, Connecticut for my community

learning placement. Through my experience in both of these settings, I noticed similarities and differences in the schools, and it sparked my interest to learn about how teachers perceive their respective programs in both of these settings.

I selected my participants based on the criteria that they were a teacher teaching special education in grades pre-K through 12th grade. It was important that all participants were full-time special education teachers and currently working at a public school. I identified participants as teaching in either a higher-income school district or a lower-income school district because that was a main focus of my study. By using special education teachers directly for my sample, I was able to understand the perceptions these teachers have about the special education program they work in. I was seeking to understand if teachers in higher-income and lower-income communities have similar perceptions about their programs and if there are differences within and across contexts.

Data Collection

I selected my sample through means of my own contacts and through snowball sampling. Since I had previously worked in the Kingston Public School district, specifically in the special education program, I reached out to the program director, Mary Conway, whom I knew from my prior experience. I communicated with Mary through email, and she helped me to get my research request approved by the executive director of special services. Once it was approved by the director, Mary sent an email to 14 special education teachers in Kingston containing a blurb that I wrote explaining the research and purpose of the study, along with my contact information (Appendix A). I had worked with many of these teachers in the past that were included in the email which was helpful because they were more inclined to participate.

Teachers that were interested in participating emailed me individually, where I began the process of organizing an interview time that worked best for our schedules.

I was also put into contact with a peer's mother, who is the president and executive director of LearnLaunch Institute, and she agreed to help me reach out to teachers in lower-income school districts. I had been in contact with her via email and she connected me with another woman, Aliza Preston, who I met with for a Zoom call. Aliza gave me recommendations on how to recruit participants since she was also conducting research at the time, and she suggested putting out a tweet on Twitter on a page dedicated to special education teachers. Aliza helped me draft a tweet and I sent it to her so she could pass it along to someone who would post it. However, I did not hear anything from any prospective participants using this method.

I also used snowball sampling for recruiting my participants by encouraging teachers that I interviewed to reach out to any special education teachers they know who might be interested in participating. A few of the teachers in the Kingston district had friends in either higher-income or lower-income school districts and upon completing their interview, reached out to them and gave them my contact information if they were interested in participating.

For my interview protocol, I created an interview guide (Appendix B) that I used for the questions I asked the participants. I used a written guide to ensure I was asking the same questions to each participant, with the exception of individualized follow-up questions dependent on the responses to the fixed questions. I also created a consent form (Appendix C) that I read to each participant and had them sign on the computer prior to the beginning of the interview. Additionally, each participant verbally consented to be recorded through the Zoom recording program. I also recorded using the voice memo application on my iPhone to ensure I would have two copies of the interview. After each interview was completed, the Zoom recording program

automatically transcribed the interview within a few minutes. I was then able to edit each transcript for accuracy by listening to the audio recording of the interview to edit it reliably.

Limitations

Although I believe that interviewing was the most effective to obtain the data I was looking for, there were limitations to my methodology. One limitation of my methods is that I chose to only interview as a means of collecting data. Initially, I also wanted to include observation so I could get a greater understanding of the teachers' environment and program from a perspective that differs from their own. I anticipated that there might be aspects of the program that the teachers might not be consciously aware of that I might find from my own field observation. However, observation was not plausible because I did not have the time or resources to observe teachers in MA while I am in CT. Additionally, a limitation associated with only using interviews to get data was that my participants did not always offer enough information to specific questions I had proposed because they did not understand the meaning of the question or because they did not elaborate on the answer they provided.

Another considerable limitation I encountered while conducting my research was finding participants for the study. Since I had connections with the Kingston Public School system, it was fairly easy to connect with teachers in the district because I had either worked with them in the past or was put into contact with them through the program director. However, I had difficulty getting into contact with teachers outside of the Kingston school district. Initially, I was hoping to have about 4-5 participants in the higher socioeconomic school context and 4-5 participants in the lower socioeconomic school context to allow for a more balanced sample. The challenge in finding teachers from lower socioeconomic districts to participate created a sample that was much greater in teachers from higher-income areas than lower-income areas.

Data Analysis

During each participant interview, I took notes on any responses that deviated from the interview questions that I wanted to follow up on. I curated probing questions based on this information to further understand a particular perceived experience and asked the participant these questions during the interview. Following the interviews, I analyzed my data by first editing all my interview transcripts that were created on Zoom. Once each interview was accurately transcribed, I began with my first round of coding to identify similar patterns and themes among all participant interviews. Prior to the interviews, I created a codebook of deductive codes, which were anticipated themes I would identify from the interview (Saldaña, 2017). Examples of these deductive codes included support (positive support: PS and negative support: NS), training (low training: LT, adequate training: AT, and high training: HT), administration (positive figure: PF and negative figure: NF), and school environment (positive environment: PE and negative environment: NE). I created a table that I used to organize the quotes of each participant into the different coded categories. I found that multiple codes overlapped with others, so certain quotes from the interview were placed under a few different codes. While most of the codes were applicable to these interviews, I did not code for a few of my original codes as they were not as relevant as I anticipated them to be. In addition to deductive coding in the first round, I also highlighted any particularly interesting quotes that seemed of importance but did not fit into any deductive code categories. While this first round of coding was broad, my second round of coding was more specific, identifying additional themes that I had not originally anticipated and creating inductive codes based on those themes. The two inductive codes I identified that were relevant to most of the interviews were pay inequality and understaffing (See Appendix D for full codebook). Multiple teachers acknowledged the pay

inequalities that are present in the education field, particularly special education, so I felt that it was an important theme although it did not necessarily fit into my research questions. Additionally, I found understaffing to be a prevalent issue in special education teacher perceptions, so I included that as an inductive code.

I organized the demographic criteria of each participant into a table in order to identify the individual's name, school district, school, number of years teaching, and the context of their particular school: high-income or low-income (Appendix E). I color-coded the context portion of the table, where green indicates that the teacher currently works in a high-income school and has only worked in that context, red indicates the teacher currently works in a low-income school and has only worked in that context, and purple indicates the teacher currently works in a high-income school but has worked in both contexts at one point in their professional career.

Findings

Special education teachers perceived support and training to be extremely important resources for their special education programs. However, in both contexts, teachers perceived administrative support to be lacking and training to be ineffective. While teachers had similar perceptions of resources on the surface, the degree to which these resources were perceived to be lacking was exacerbated in the lower-income context compared to the higher-income context. These differences demonstrate the role of funding in the nature of resources and how funding makes a difference in teacher perceptions across contexts. In these interviews, three main themes emerged in respect to the nature of resources in these contexts. Teachers in both contexts expressed that support from colleagues and administration is particularly beneficial when working in the special education field. Additionally, teachers described that there is a lack of

administrative support in their program and that the training offered is ineffective for the work they are doing as special education teachers.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Nature of Resources in Respective Programs

Support as the most beneficial resource

Through my analysis of the seven interviews I conducted, I concluded that all special education teachers perceived support among coworkers and administrators to be the most beneficial resource, even if that support wasn't necessarily present at their school. Five out of the seven teachers found support to be positive at their school, with support coming from either colleagues or the administration. Susanne Love, a teacher currently working in a high-income school, explained how "we're our own little community. So where I teach right now is like a family, and we all are there for each other, helping each other". Love explained how in her school, all of the special education teachers meet multiple times a week to "bounce ideas off of each other, get materials for each other, and just support each other constantly throughout". Love is describing that positive support at her school arises strongly from her colleagues in terms of both emotional support and physical support in terms of helping with a student in the classroom, providing materials, or working on educational plans for their students. As a result of this positive support among special education teachers, there is a "community feel" that is present in the school. Similarly, Kelly Frazier, another teacher currently working in a high-income district, discusses the importance of support, particularly from colleagues. Frazier explains, "I certainly think that having administrative support is important but having been in other schools where that wasn't there, it's as long as you work with people both within my classroom and colleagues in other classrooms who are supportive, that is definitely probably the most important". Frazier recognizes the importance of having support from the administration, but supportive colleagues

emerged as the most important form of support from her perspective. Another teacher who emphasized the importance of supportive colleagues was Gabrielle Tate, who explained that "not having people that you can rely on and help support you through those times would make it near impossible". Tate provides another perspective on how support from colleagues working in is important, particularly in a field as physically and emotionally demanding as special education.

In addition to positive support from colleagues, teachers identified the importance of having a supportive administration within their program. For Lillian Cook, a teacher working in a lower-income school, her school has proved to be "a rare model of support". She describes the personal relationship she has with the principal of the school and how the principal is "very much teachers first". Cook describes how her principal strongly supports the teachers because if they are supported, they will do their best for the students. One example Cook describes is when she was struggling with a particular student in her classroom. She sent the student to the office, where the principal then kept the child for a period of time and allowed Cook to recollect herself and take space from that particular student. Cook noted how she really appreciated her principal doing that because it showed her the genuine care that comes from the administration at her school.

Susanne Love also describes the positive support in her school, stating that "the director of the preschool is absolutely amazing, and is very supportive, and is always here to help us. And I'm very grateful for that". Love explained how her school is mainly inclusive classrooms and special education programs, so their program head is very involved. Additionally, the director of the preschool has certifications working in special education, which seemingly contributes to the overall support of the administration. The location of administrative figures as well as previous experience working in special education are factors that contribute to this perceived positive

administrative support. While positive support from both colleagues and administrators may have not been present in all school settings, support was nonetheless perceived as an extremely beneficial resource for teachers working in special education.

Lack of administrative support

Despite perceptions of support being an essential resource, four out of seven teachers perceived administrative support to be lacking across both contexts. Elizabeth Wright, a teacher at a higher-income school, explains that "they put a lot of faith in us as teachers, which is great. But you know, I'm new, and sometimes I'm like 'I would like you to be a little bit more on top of me, or give me a little bit more training, or guide me, or just tell me about other ways I can be doing things'". For Wright, there is a lack of help from the administration as a new teacher navigating this field, and she describes how she wishes they would provide more guidance and feedback so she can better support her students. While Wright appreciates the trust that the administration puts in her, she wishes that the administration could be more supportive in terms of helping her with a student or expressing how to improve in a particular area.

One large area of frustration in terms of where administrative support is lacking is in the communication between the administration and teachers. Lori Baker, a teacher working in a lower-income school, explained that "everybody has that same mentality this year that we're not being listened to, we're not being heard". Baker described how the principal of her school does not take the time to come into her classroom and get to know her students but is rather "stuck away in his office". She explains that although the principal is physically in the building, he is not a "presence" in the building. In addition to this lack of involvement with teachers and students, Baker recounted how the administration often makes decisions about what is going on in the classroom without consulting the teachers, leading to the frustration of not feeling heard.

She told the story of how the administration decided to move a student from one group to the other and when Baker tried to push back on that, explaining why it would be more effective for the student to be in the other group, the administration essentially said, "no, this is how it is going to be". Baker was not given the liberty to communicate her feelings on the matter but rather shut down when she tried doing so. Baker, along with other teachers perceiving a lack of administrative support, acknowledged that they are not given the opportunity to express their opinions despite the fact that these decisions directly affect them and their students.

Kelly Frazier described a similar feeling about administration making decisions, explaining that "sometimes there are decisions made about our classrooms or about the program, and they're made just with administrative viewpoints. And it's not exactly like, let's get your input. It's more like, 'This is what we're doing, how do you feel about it?" These teachers perceive a disconnect in communication between teachers and administration, leading to teachers' feelings of being unsupported and not valued by those in administrative positions.

Susanne Love also discussed her frustration with the administration and their failure to include teachers in the decision-making process, saying that "they try to just tell us what to do instead of really listening and understanding that we are doing things a certain way because we know what we're doing". She also notes that "the big thing is the breakdown between admin and the teachers not being taken as seriously as they should when they're the experts in this and not necessarily administration". Similarly to Baker and Frazier, Love described how the administration does not consider the opinions and recommendations of teachers when making decisions about the students or the curriculum. This is particularly discouraging for teachers because they are the ones working so closely with the students, but also because many of these administrative figures do not have a background in special education. These perceptions of poor

administrative support stem from the fact that the administration does not try to get to know the students and teachers, they do not communicate with teachers about important decisions, and the frustration of administrative leaders making decisions without the special education knowledge or experience that these teachers have.

Training as an ineffective resource

All seven of the special education teachers interviewed perceived training to be an ineffective resource for their respective programs. These teachers mainly described that the professional development being offered to them usually did not pertain to their field but rather to general education. Lillian Cook recounts a time she attended a science professional development day. However, she explained, "I didn't teach science at that point, so it was really a waste of my time. We special ed teachers at that point were kind of forgotten. They're like, oh, right, they exist. And it really wasn't beneficial". While professional development is offered for special education teachers, it is not a beneficial resource because it does not focus on things that would be used in special education programs.

Nolan Austin, a teacher in a high-income district, agrees with the fact that the offered training is not relevant to his teaching or his students, expressing that "because I feel like I teach such a specialized program, often when me or my staff will go to like training it can seem a little basic just because it might be teaching how to deal with a behavior or a student on an IEP where that is something we do every day". Austin perceives the training that is offered in his program to be too basic, particularly because it is training on things that they encounter and handle day to day in this field.

Gabrielle Tate concurs that in terms of professional development, "that's where there's not a whole lot that's directed for us, and that's where the district could do better a better job of

saying, you know, we've got this budget. Let's see what we can do for training for you". Tate finds that training in her program is not effective and is directed mainly toward general education teachers. She mentions budgeting in her interview and how her school should use this budget to create training that is a helpful resource for special education teachers. This theme of training being insufficient for the special education field came up in all interviews, indicating a greater need to reform professional development across the board.

When looking further into these perceptions of inadequate training, teachers also mentioned certain areas that they would like to be trained more extensively in. Lillian Cook describes that she would "love more training for kids with emotional disturbances, trauma, or just kids on the spectrum and how to facilitate my interactions with them to a better degree, and my students' interactions with them". Many of these teachers are already knowledgeable about the subjects they are offered training for because they experience them every day in the classroom. Therefore, teachers would like to see more professional development relevant to what they perceive as helpful for their program, including training for trauma and emotional disturbances.

Varying perceptions of resources among high-income and low-income contexts

These interviews concluded that there are similar perceptions of resources in both high-income and low-income contexts, however, there is a gap in resources between these contexts that negatively affects the perceptions of teachers working in lower-income contexts. This gap in resources became particularly evident through the teachers' descriptions of access to resources and materials, curriculum and administrative support, and the acknowledgement of understaffing issues in the lower-income context.

Similar perceptions of the nature of resources across contexts

The three main perceptions of the nature of resources that were present in both contexts were positive emotional support, a lack of administrative support, and ineffective training for special education teachers. These findings were previously discussed and outline how there are similar aspects of special education programs that are either beneficial or particularly lacking across both contexts.

Purchasing own items for classroom

In addition to these findings, all teachers across both contexts also reported purchasing their own items for their classrooms. Elizabeth Wright said, "I buy almost everything in my room, except for, like, the furniture". Other teachers agreed that they bought many items for their classroom using their own money, including prizes, books, decorations, new markers or glue sticks, etc. Although these teachers are given a budget for classroom supplies, many of them end up buying materials with their own money. Some teachers explained how if they asked for the materials for their classroom from the administration, they would get them. However, it often took a long time to receive the materials, so it typically was easier and more efficient to buy them on their own. Nolan Austin discusses how he has "never been told to buy anything. It's always something I feel like I need to do". Many of the teachers agreed with Austin's sentiment, explaining how they knew the school would provide them with the materials, but they often just felt like it was something they wanted to do on their own. This finding speaks to the compassion of special education teachers and their willingness to go the extra mile for their students, even if it involves using money that comes from their own pockets.

Understaffing

One finding that I did not initially anticipate from these interviews is the topic of understaffing in the special education field. Although I did not specifically ask any questions

about understaffing, it came up in four of the interviews. Elizabeth Wright commented how when there is a shortage of staff and substitutes, the administration is like "Oh, well, like you're taking one for the team, or like we appreciate that you did this" but she would rather them do something else to combat these issues because "this shouldn't be the norm as to what we should be doing as educators". However, Wright, as well as other teachers, acknowledged that the shortage of teachers is an issue in the education field in general, not just in special education.

Does funding exacerbate these perceptions in low-income school contexts?

Although there were similar perceptions of the nature of resources in both high-income and low-income school districts, they were similarities only to an extent. Upon deeper analysis of teachers' perceptions of resources, it is evident that funding exacerbated differences in the perceptions of resources across different contexts. More specifically, the lack of funding in lower-income school districts is the driving factor in negative perceptions of resources, even if these teachers in lower-income districts did not explicitly mention funding as a contributing factor to perceived barriers in the nature of resources. For this portion of my findings, I largely focused on the perceptions of teachers who have worked in both the higher-income and the lower-income school context at some point in their teaching career. Teachers that worked in both contexts offered a unique comparison of resources and the differences they have experienced working in both contexts. While some teachers directly mentioned the impact of funding (often labeled as "resources"), other teachers mentioned resources that are explicitly linked to the funding of a school district. Although some of these perceptions of resources were found in high-income school districts, they were perceived to be amplified in lower-income school districts, particularly by teachers who had previously worked in that context. Poor curriculum support, insufficient administrative support, limited access to resources, and inadequate staff-to-student

ratio were all perceived to be areas where resources were lacking in the low-income districts compared to the high-income districts. Evidently, these negative perceptions of resources all relate to the lack of funding in low-income school districts and the role funding plays in having adequate resources for special education teachers.

Curriculum support

Teachers who had worked in both contexts expressed how there was a significant difference in curriculum support in lower-income districts, where there is not much guidance on the curriculum. Elizabeth Wright acknowledged these differences, stating that "In Kingston, program wise, we have a math program, a science program, a history program… At [redacted school name], it was pretty much like, make it up as long as you're following the standards". In the lower-income district Wright taught at, there was no formal guidance on how to format the curriculum, and the administration did not seem to care as long as the basic standards were followed. However, she shared that Andover has specific curriculums on different subjects for the special education teachers to follow.

Nolan Austin seconds this claim as he described his own experience in a low-income school, "where it's definitely a much lower economic status for everything" and "you kinda had to get by on your own". Austin adds that "there is not enough money to go around. So, I found a lot of asking for help and people attempting to help and trying to help but usually you're making your own curriculum". Similarly to Wright, Austin found that the low-income school lacked the proper curriculum support that special education teachers needed. These two perceptions of how curriculum support was lacking indirectly point to funding as the overarching issue. Schools with more funding are able to have the time and resources to provide curriculum support to teachers,

while schools with less funding do not. A lack of curriculum support can make it very difficult for teachers to give students the education they deserve.

Administrative support

It was particularly interesting to hear from the teachers who have worked in both contexts in terms of their perceptions of administrative support. Two teachers who had worked in a low-income school at one point in their career explicitly discussed the poor administrative support they received while at that school. Nolan Austin, who praised his current school for its high level of support, explained that "it's really hard to build that kind of positivity and community without resources. When I was in [redacted school name], there was a lot of support, but it was not exactly positive or healthy support. It was a little more like survival. There are just no resources, and everyone's kind of just keeping their head above the water". Austin acknowledges the impact that resources have on the ability to support teachers, especially in terms of support from the administration. This access to resources in high-income schools is linked to the funding they receive, indicating that funding is crucial for positive administrative support.

Kelly Frazier also discussed how administrative support was lacking in the low-income school she had worked in. She said, "In terms of administrative support in that setting, it was virtually non-existent. When we would go to them asking for help or asking for more resources, it was not met with supportive help at all. It was pretty much shut down". Frazier's experience in a low-income school demonstrates the severity of the poor administrative support they received compared to her current high-income school. Although teachers in high-income schools had similar perceptions of poor administrative support, the absence of support in low-income contexts was heightened due to the inadequate funding that is provided to those schools.

Access to resources and classroom materials

Teachers who had worked in both contexts perceived the access to resources and classroom materials to be more significantly lacking in the lower-income school compared to the higher-income school. Susanne Love described how she has "a lot more resources here when it comes down to it. In [redacted school name], we got nothing, like absolutely nothing". Love found that the school she currently works at has an abundance of resources compared to the low-income school she worked at. Essentially, teachers in low-income schools were not given any resources to work with, which again can be attributed to the level of funding the school has.

Gabrielle Tate acknowledged the privilege she has of working in a high-income school. Although she had never worked in a low-income school, when describing her current school she said "I feel really lucky to be here, especially knowing what I know from friends who teach not here, and from my own experiences, that this is like the gold star of what's out there resource-wise, so I try really hard not to take that for granted". Tate recognized how her current school has access to resources that lower-income schools do not have, and she mentions how she does not take that for granted. Overall, funding contributes to the sufficient or insufficient access to resources that special education teachers receive in their context.

Staff-to-student ratio

Finally, issues in understaffing that were present in both high-income and low-income school districts were exacerbated by the lack of funding in the low-income schools. For the low-income districts, the staff-to-student ratio was considered a significant problem by multiple teachers that have worked in a low-income school. Lori Baker, one of the teachers who currently work in a low-income school, explained that "the way things are structured, there's just not enough of me or other people to be able to give them that support that they need". Baker is describing the problem of understaffing that is present in the special education particular field.

However, it is even more difficult in the low-income context because it strongly impacts their ability to give all students the support that they need.

Other teachers who had worked in both contexts describe the insufficient staff-to-student ratio as something that they do not experience nearly to the same degree in their current high-income schools. Nolan Austin said that in his previous, low-income school, "there was me and one other adult for 14 kids. So that was wild. That was crazy". He goes on to say that would never occur in the Kingston district. In Kingston, there is a one-to-one ratio of teachers to students in almost every special education classroom. Similarly, when Susanne Love was describing the low-income school she used to work at, she remarked that "my students were not one-to-one when my students should have been one-to-one". Although there was a high need for students to be given individualized support in the low-income districts, the lack of funding prevented those students from getting the support they needed and deserved. While understaffing was an issue in both contexts, it was typical for the staff-to-student ratio to be inadequate in the low-income districts, whereas the high-income districts were able to provide more individualized support for their students.

Pay inequality between Special Ed, Gen Ed, and Assistants

Another finding that I did not expect to come up in our discussion of resources across contexts is the pay inequality of special education teachers and assistants compared to general education teachers and assistants. These teachers also noted that they believe all teachers do not get paid enough in this profession overall. Special education teachers agreed that assistants in special education classes should be getting paid higher than they currently are. Susanne Love stated that "their job is a lot more than the job of an assistant in a gen ed classroom". Special

education teachers and assistants endure physical and emotional harm from students on a daily basis, as that type of behavior is usually not present in a general education classroom.

Similarly, Gabrielle Tate remarked that "the staff could afford to be paid more than what they are for sure, given their job responsibilities and what they're doing day to day". Additionally, Tate added that "every year, it's hard to retain people in this district because the district doesn't do a nice job paying people for the work that they're doing". The responsibilities of special education teachers are vastly different from general education teachers, and these teachers acknowledged that special ed teachers deserve to be appropriately compensated for the work they do. While this finding did not necessarily pertain to the nature of resources across contexts, I felt that it was an important finding to include in my study.

High motivation to continue teaching in the Special Education Field

The most surprising but compelling finding from these interviews was the high motivation to continue to teach in the special education field. Six out of the seven teachers I interviewed expressed a strong motivation to continue teaching. One reason for this high motivation was the students. Lori Baker explained, "I think, as I see the kids struggle more, it makes me more motivated". Similarly, when asked about her motivation to continue to teach, Lillian Cook describes that she has "even more motivation because the system is broken. But kids are still in the system". These teachers believe the students to be a strong motivating factor for their desire to continue teaching.

Additionally, teachers are motivated by their coworkers and the environment they work in. Lori Baker said how "the team that I work with is great and I am so motivated by them". Kelly Frazier agrees with the fact that her coworkers make a difference, explaining how she is "more excited to go to work because of the building and the people that I work with than I ever used to be because we have more resources". As a teacher who has worked in both contexts,

Frazier acknowledged how having access to resources has impacted her motivation to teach in special education. Another teacher, Nolan Austin, who had worked in both contexts, described how his motivation is "probably about as strong as it was when I started. The first couple of years it went down really fast. In [redacted school name] I definitely lost a lot of that. But I'd say that coming to Kingston, I'm like, oh, I love this. I forgot about this". Austin expressed how his motivation quickly dwindled when working in a lower-income district during his first few years of teaching. However, coming to a higher-income school district like Kingston, his motivation was strengthened. This increase in motivation ties back to having more resources and a better support system available in a higher-income school district compared to the lower-income school district he previously worked in.

Of all seven teachers that were interviewed, only one teacher reported decreasing motivation to teach in the special education field. This teacher was Elizabeth Wright, and she discussed feeling very underappreciated by both school administrators and parents. She discussed how during Covid, "people loved us. We were like heroes, and now parents do not feel that way, which is just like very discouraging". Wright goes on to say that Covid changed a lot of things in the education field and she "doesn't feel like we've bounced back from it yet". Overall, teachers in both high and low-income districts reported having as strong a motivation to teach, if not stronger, as when they first began teaching. Only Elizabeth Wright, who works in a high-income district, reported not being as motivated as when she first started. Interestingly, Wright has been teaching for the least amount of time, only four years, while the other teachers have been teaching for up to 22 years.

Discussion

Based on my findings, there were multiple overall themes that highlight perceptions of resources across contexts, as well as inequalities present in the nature of resources in high-income and low-income school contexts. Overall, special education teachers perceived support to be a beneficial resource, administrative support to be lacking, and training to be ineffective in both contexts. However, these perceptions, along with other perceptions of resources, were exacerbated in the lower-income districts as a result of the limited, inadequate funding that they receive compared to higher-income districts. Despite the fact that there were perceived problems in the nature of resources across both contexts, particularly in the lower-income contexts, teacher motivation remained considerably high to continue teaching in t the special education field.

Although not all teachers perceived the support in their school to be positive, all teachers found support to be the most beneficial resource in this field. This finding connects to previous research that other special education teachers in the building and professional support were the most helpful sources of support (Berry, 2012). Many of the teachers described their colleagues as being their support system, which is essential in such a physically and emotionally demanding field. Prior research also found that 90% of teachers who found positive support in their school setting would choose to stay in the special education field if given another chance to choose a profession (Berry, 2012). For almost every special education teacher I interviewed, they responded to my interview question that asked where they see themselves in five or ten years by saying they were hoping they were doing the exact same thing or working in a more specialized role in special education. Therefore, positive support seems to be a contributor to teacher retention and motivation to stay in the special education field.

Teachers perceived ineffective training and a lack of administrative support to be the main problems in their respective contexts regarding the nature of resources. Similarly, in a

previous study in 2011, teachers also found these factors to be significant and impacted their desire to stay in the special education field (Berry, 2011). Teachers in the previous study indicated that more training in working with paraprofessionals and training in a specific disability would be beneficial. In my own study, all teachers indicated that they were not given relevant training in the field of special education and there are areas that they do want to be trained more extensively in. It is evident that ineffective training is a lasting problem for the special education teachers, yet training is considered to be a very important resource for teachers.

In conjunction with my own study, teachers in prior studies expressed that the administration was not supportive and did not communicate with them on important decisions. These teachers in the 2019 study also conveyed a desire to feel heard and communicated when decisions were being made about the classroom or the students (Cavendish, 2019). Teachers in my own study described the lack of administrative support offered to teachers as even more frustrating because of their limited experience and knowledge of special education. Therefore, it was particularly unfair that administrators would make decisions without consulting teachers because teachers are the ones working so closely with the student and in the classroom, while administrators are not.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that almost all of the teachers I interviewed still had a high motivation to teach and a desire to stay in their profession. Previous research did not align with these findings, as special ed has the highest rate of attrition in the field of education (Berry, 2012). Additionally, prior research studies found that a high percentage of administrators had trouble filling special education teacher vacancies, indicating that teachers were leaving the field at a high rate. The key reasons for special education teachers' intention to leave mentioned in Conley and You's research were a lack of administrative support and poor teacher team efficacy

(Conley and You, 2016). Teachers in the prior research who had "'less than positive supervision" were not motivated or committed to teaching. While these factors were also mentioned as being negative in the perceptions of resources for teachers in my study, they did not impact teachers' motivation to stay in the special education field. Instead, teachers reported their motivation to be as high or higher as when they tan teaching.

An interesting finding in the discussion of motivation that was similar to prior research was that age was linked to teacher attrition. The only teacher in my study who showed a decreased motivation to continue teaching in the special education field had been teaching for the lowest number of years. Since she is a newer teacher and has only been teaching for four years, it can also be assumed that she is fairly young. This coincides with the prior research that younger special education teachers are more likely to leave or express intent to leave than their older, more experienced counterparts (Billingsley, 2004). My study was consistent with the prior research that younger teachers are more likely to leave, while older, more experienced teachers are more likely to stay. Teachers who had been teaching for the most number of years in my study continued to have a strong motivation to teach. However, this link between age and attrition cannot be generalized to the greater population because of my small sample size, yet it was very interesting to see the similarities present in prior research and my own research.

Finally, it is important to note the growing conversation around using the term 'special education'. Although many schools continue to use 'special education' as a way to describe their programs, it is seen as an ineffective term that can be harmful to the individuals this term is referring to. Essentially, "special needs" has become a popular euphemism for disability (Gernsbacher et al., 2016). However, "the word special in relationship to those with disabilities is now widely considered offensive because it euphemistically stigmatizes persons with

disabilities" (Gernsbacher et al., 2016). Instead, some believe it would be more effective and less stigmatizing to cite the disability of the individual. This is a complicated topic, as some parents of children with disabilities and individuals with disabilities "don't like the word disabled or disability any better" and find the term "special needs" to be "less harsh than the reality of disabled" (Gernsbacher et al., 2016). In the future, I would love to look more deeply into this topic and identify a better way to refer to this type of education, as "special education" is seen to be ineffective and harmful to individuals in the disabled community.

Conclusion

This paper sought to understand the perceptions of the nature of resources across contexts, and how these perceptions may vary in a higher-income and lower-income context. The findings of this study demonstrated that there were similar perceptions of resources across contexts, including support as a beneficial resource, the lack of administrative support, and ineffective training as significant themes that arise from these interviews. These findings also highlighted the inequalities of resources in different contexts, and how these inequalities are connected to the funding of the school, as there were more negative perceptions of resources in the lower-income context.

Recommendations

The findings of my study demonstrate the areas of special education programs that need to be improved, regardless of socioeconomic context. One area of improvement that school districts need to consider for their special education programs is increased professional development that directly pertains to the special education curriculum. Specifically, teachers should be getting training on academics that will actually be used in special education to improve and enhance their method of teaching students to allow for greater student success. Additionally,

teachers should be getting more extensively trained on how to work with a variety of disabilities, including behavioral and emotional disabilities, trauma, etc., and should be provided with strategies to support all students in their classroom. Teachers should also be trained in positive behavior support strategies to create a positive and inclusive classroom environment. This might include techniques for managing challenging behaviors, promoting social-emotional development, and fostering self-regulation among students.

Another recommendation to improve the resources that are given to special education teachers is to provide training for the administration on how to effectively communicate and support special education teachers. As previously mentioned, the majority of administrators do not have any experience working as a special education teacher or in the special education field. As a result, teachers find that the administration is not equipped to make decisions about their classroom and their students without that common knowledge. To combat this disconnect between teachers and administrators, it would be beneficial for administrators to be trained and educated on basic aspects of special education so that they can better understand the teacher's perspective. Additionally, administrators should be required to take courses on how to better support their special education staff, as well as simply make a greater effort to get to know their staff and their students. A personal connection with the teachers and their students would make a vast difference in the teachers' perception of the administration. Finally, administrators should work more closely with teachers, allowing them to contribute to the decision-making process. This could be achieved by holding more meetings with special education teachers to discuss future decisions and allow teachers to provide their own insight given their role as teachers. This research only touches the surface of issues present in special education programs, and it is

imperative to continue to research teachers' perceptions of resources in both high and low-income contexts to find eventual solutions to these problems.

Appendix A

Dear (Name),

Hello! My name is Hannah Tjalsma and I am a senior at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. I am conducting a research study on teachers' perceptions of their respective special education programs in terms of their effectiveness for their student's needs. Additionally, I hope to investigate the perceived differences in these programs across higher-income and lower-income school districts (if any). I am looking for special education teachers that are interested in participating in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you are interested, you will participate in an interview via Zoom that will be audio-recorded and is anticipated to take about 30-60 minutes. You will receive an Amazon e-gift card as compensation for participating. This study is minimal risk and all personal information will remain confidential and un-identifiable as I will use pseudonyms to describe each individual. If you are interested in participating, please respond directly to this email or send an email to Hannah.tjalsma@trincoll.edu.

If you have any questions, please let me know!

Sincerely,

Hannah Tjalsma

Hannah.tjalsma@trincoll.edu

978-806-5515

Appendix B

Researcher: Before I begin recording, please say yes to verbally consent to being audio-recorded.

Opening Question/Background:
1. First, tell me a little bit about why you became a special education teacher. How long have you been teaching?
    1. What grade do you teach?
    2. Was this your first choice for the school you wanted to teach at? Why?

RESOURCES
Support

1. Do you feel supported by your colleagues also working in the special education program?
    1. If yes, can you give an example of what that support among coworkers looks like?
    2. How about colleagues who are outside of the special education program, do you feel supported by them?
2. Do you feel supported by school leadership in your work as a special education teacher? If so, how? Why or why not?
    1. The principal, program director, an instructional coach? Etc?
3. *Which types of support are most beneficial for you as an educator?*
    1. *Can you tell me about a time that you felt supported? How did that feel?*
4. How do you think your school could foster a more supportive community?

Training

5. Do you currently receive training related to special education?
    1. If so, how often?
    2. If yes, what was the nature of the training?
    3. Was it effective? How so?
6. *Have you received any other training since you started your position here at _____?*
7. Are there areas you would like to be trained more extensively in?

Funding

8. How would you describe the funding for special education at your school?
9. Do you ever purchase items for your classroom using your own money?
    1. What types of items do you buy?
    2. How often?

FINAL: Support, training, and funding

10. Do you believe the allocation of resources, in terms of support, training, and funding, are equal for general education and special education?
    1. Can you tell me more about that? / Do you have any examples that come to mind?

EFFECTIVENESS
Environment/Culture

11. How would you describe the culture of your school for someone who has never stepped foot inside?
12. Does the culture of your classroom differ from the overall school culture and climate?
    1. If so, how?
13. *Can you describe a typical day in your classroom. What does that look like?*

Student Success

14. Do you feel that your school's special education program does an adequate job providing for your students' needs?
15. *Do you feel your program encourages inclusivity for all of your students?*
16. Do you feel that special education students are supported by the school in the same way that general education students are supported?

Retention/Misc

17. What is the most challenging part of working as a special education teacher in your program?
18. Is your motivation to teach still as strong as when you began teaching? Why/why not?
    1. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

Final Question

19. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your work or your students that we didn't get a chance to discuss?

Thank you so much for meeting with me today, it was great to hear your thoughts about your experience as a special education teacher! In the coming weeks, I will send you an e- gift card to compensate you for your time!

***italicized questions were questions that were only asked if time permitted

Appendix C

Informed Consent to Participate in:
Special education teacher perceptions of respective programs in higher and lower income public schools.

The purpose of this research project is to learn if teachers perceive the socioeconomic status of their school community to impact their special education programs, and how these differences, if any, may affect students' needs.

The benefits of this research project include finding some of the perceptions about special education programs in higher-income and lower-income communities in hopes of identifying what challenges and benefits are present in respective programs. This study involves only minimal risk, meaning that the probability of harm or discomfort is not greater than ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Participants will be compensated after the interview in the form of an Amazon e-gift card.

By signing this form, the participant is aware that the entire process is voluntary, this interview will take about 30-60 minutes, and that you can stop or withdraw at any time, without being penalized. I would like your permission to record and transcribe your interview, with the reminder that I will not use your name.

By signing this form, the participant is aware that pseudonyms will be used, all of their responses in this study are confidential and to be used only for research purposes.

If the participant has questions or want more information about the study, they can contact the student Hannah Tjalsma at Hannah.tjalsma@trincoll.edu, her research supervisor Britney Jones at Britney.jones@trincoll.edu, or the Trinity College IRB administrator at irb@trincoll.edu.

Participant Name (printed): _____

Participant Name (signature): _____

Date: _____
 All signed forms will remain confidential. Participants may keep a blank form if desired.

Appendix D

Code	Description
Support - Positive support (PS) - Negative/lack of support (NS)	How the teachers describe the support they receive
School Environment - Positive environment (PE) - Negative environment (NE)	How the school environment is described
Training - Low training (LT) - Adequate training (AT) - High training (HT)	Teachers describe training as low/lacking, adequate, or high/effective training
Retention	Any instance a teacher mentions burnout or wanting to take a break/leave teaching
Motivation - High motivation (HM) - Low motivation (LM)	Teacher's description of their motivation to teach at this current point in time
Administration - Positive figure (PF) - Negative figure (NF)	Administration mentioned as either a positive figure or a negative figure for their special education program

Students	Any mention of students
Socioeconomic status	Any instance of SES being mentioned in their perception of resources or effectiveness
Understaffing	Any instance of teachers mentioning being understaffed or having an inadequate staff to student ratio
Pay inequality	Any mention of the unequal pay of special education teachers or assistants

Appendix E

Name	School	District	# of years teaching	High or low income school
Elizabeth Wright	Central	Kingston	4	High*
Lori Baker	Brightview	Granville	22	Low
Nolan Austin	Faber	Kingston	8	High*
Lillian Cook	Oak Ridge	Rochester	7	Low
Susanne Love	Somerset	Kingston	16	High*
Kelly Frazier	Somerset	Kingston	20	High*
Gabrielle Tate	Bellevue	Kingston	13	High

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