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# Professional Development and Special Education: A Comparison of Special Education and General Education Teachers' Experiences

Angela Gill

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SPECIAL EDUCATION:  
A COMPARISON OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND GENERAL EDUCATION  
TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES

by

Angela D. Gill

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of Education and Human Sciences  
and the School of Education  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

This quantitative study was completed to compare the professional development experiences of special education teachers and general education teachers. The researcher reviewed literature related to the history of professional development, various professional development organizations, the standards of professional development used in Mississippi, and an overview of special education. Consent was obtained from various school districts in Mississippi. Qualtrics was used as the platform for the questionnaire. Participating school districts were emailed a link to the survey instrument. Data from the completed questionnaire were analyzed for levels of satisfaction for topics and utilization of PD information. Information was gathered concerning participants years of teaching experience as well as their highest degree level, current teaching assignment, grade levels taught, and certification route. Overall results indicated there were differences in the professional development experiences of special education teachers and general education teachers, but they were not significant.

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## DEDICATION

It has truly taken a village for me to see this degree through to completion. I could not have done it without them. This dissertation is dedicated to my village. First and foremost, I thank my Savior, Jesus Christ, for putting the right people in my path to encourage me and not let me quit. Gail Carr has kindly read every word I have written for two degrees and never complained. Her skills are impeccable; I am blessed to call her my friend. My children and husband dealt with late nights and less than agreeable moods as I strived to complete my time as a student at The University of Southern Mississippi. Without them, I would not have attempted any type of graduate degree. Thank you, my ever-faithful Gill family.

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## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

One of the ideas behind a college education is to learn as much as possible about a specific skill or area of study. Once an individual earns a degree and enters the job-field, he or she should possess the knowledge to be successful in his chosen profession. The idea is to learn everything he or she needs to know to do a job well. This train of thought relies on the information learned during any training or college program being the most up to date for that particular field (Morgan, 2015). Many years ago, it was assumed individuals learned everything they needed to know in their designated training program. In today's society, particularly in education, strategies change and policies are updated on a regular basis. In order to stay abreast of the latest trends, strategies, and policies in education, teachers participate in professional development (Mizell, 2010).

### Background

Professional development (PD) was not considered to be a "hot topic" forty years ago when teachers had work days without students. An individual who was considered to be an expert would speak to teachers on a day or two before school started or on a teacher work day during the school year (Darling-Hammond, 2005). School district personnel and school leaders had their own ideas for professional development and did not rely on any guidance from established professional development standards. The overall goal of any type of PD was to increase student achievement by improving teaching practices (Task Force for Educational Excellence in Mississippi, 1983).

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) established standards for PD in an effort to guide school leaders and teachers on what is expected from learning sessions with *Professional Development for the New Millennium*. The definition of PD was

outlined in this document as “a growth-promoting learning process that empowers stakeholders to improve the educational organization” (MDE, 1998). School leaders and teachers then had guidelines for what was to be expected from PD sessions throughout the school year. School leaders were also charged with ensuring teachers in general education and special education were provided with PD that met the standards outlined by MDE.

An increased focus on professional development came about with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). School leaders recognized that teachers needed assistance to better teach and meet the needs of students in general education as well as special education. Specifically, special education teachers needed to increase their students’ access to general education curriculum. Additional training was necessary for special education teachers to increase pedagogical and content area knowledge (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Reducing achievement gaps, using evidence-based practices, and adequate yearly progress were topics introduced to teachers. These topics required increased teacher training. “One size fits all” training for all teachers could no longer be implemented if achievement gaps were to decrease and student achievement was going to increase. School leaders were forced to look at the individual PD needs of teachers (USDE, 2005).

The current PD standards in Mississippi adopted are from Learning Forward (2011). There are seven specific standards that should address PD are as follows: learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes. According to Mizell (2010), the desired results for PD are three-tiered: “(a) educators learn new knowledge and skills because of their participation; (b) educators use

what they learn to improve teaching and leadership; and (c) student learning and achievement increase because educators use what they learned in professional development” (p. 16). The logic behind the standards is that better teachers and leaders produce better student achievement.

Professional development has continued to revolve around the idea of improving student achievement by better equipping the teachers (Kaufman & Ring, 2011). Guiding and cultivating positive outlooks were cited as leadership skills teachers should develop as they maneuver through the school year with their many responsibilities. The current cycle of discussing student disposition while tending to the needs of teachers could be overwhelming regardless if the teacher is a novice or a veteran. Kaufman and Ring (2011) said, “Professional development is to be contextualized and designed to be relevant to teachers and the students they teach.”

Lieberman (1995) discussed the idea of attitudes impacting collaboration between school leaders and teachers in regards to PD. More than 50 years later, Rushing (2012) also found that teachers’ attitudes toward PD impacted their beliefs of the effectiveness of it. The more teachers believe in the benefits of PD, the more likely they were to follow the guidance provided in the PD sessions. Their attitudes toward PD were also impacted by the level of support they felt from school leaders (Rushing, 2012).

To assist school leaders and teachers with PD, many educator organizations provide guidance regarding PD for teachers. One such organization is the National Education Association (NEA). Teachers are able to receive information regarding PD opportunities, peruse publications, and attend a yearly conference regardless of their membership in the NEA (NEA, n.d). Another organization is Learning Forward. The



organization's website provides detailed information regarding the seven PD standards as well as information to help school leaders plan and implement effective PD for teachers (Learning Forward, 2015).

Even with access to professional organizations to assist with PD opportunities, school leaders face various obstacles with teacher participation in PD sessions. The reported obstacles include lack of time outside of the mandated teacher work days, lack of interest, and lack of motivation (Masuda, Ebersole, & Barrett, 2013). A lack of time referred to teachers having only a specified number of days during the school year that were not consecutive enough to provide a real impact for professional learning. The lack of interest highlighted teachers' attending sessions that were not specifically related to their collective and/or individual needs in the classrooms (Masuda et al., 2013).

According to Abilock, Harada, & Fontichiaro (2013), the more the topic related to teachers' specific PD needs the more motivated teachers were to attend non-mandated PD sessions. In relation to participation in PD, the overall effectiveness of PD was found to be related to teachers' ability and opportunities to practice the new techniques and strategies in their classrooms (Burke, 2013).

The components of effective PD are engagement, collaboration, coaching, and job-embedded learning (Burke, 2013; Devlin-Scherer & Sardone, 2013; Nolan & Hoover, 2004; Kaufman & Ring, 2011; Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013). Each of these researchers suggested ways to increase the effectiveness of PD while helping to create a positive outlook among teachers regarding the requirements of PD during the school year. The benefits teachers would see would outweigh their concerns noted in the obstacles to PD (Kaufman & Ring, 2011). They further propose teachers, whether general education or

special education, could benefit from the effective implementation of the discussed PD components.

The unique nature of special education began many years ago before any type of regulations or suggestions were well known regarding PD standards and practices. School leaders and teachers became familiar with laws set in place to protect and ensure the adequate education of individuals with disabilities. The most notable of the laws is the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004). It is the latest version of an act that was created to protect individuals with disabilities as well as ensure they were educated regardless of the type of disability (Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975; IDEA, 1997; IDEA, 2004). Teachers in special education may teach students in a variety of settings according to service delivery options which are as follows: full-inclusion, inclusion with pull-out support, resource, self-contained, special school, homebound, or hospital (IDEA, 2004).

In order to properly service students with disabilities, special education teachers require PD sessions related to the needs of students in their classrooms. Further, according to Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010), general education teachers rely on special education teachers to help them with students placed in their classrooms. However, special education teachers may struggle to provide support with the general education curriculum. For example, special education teachers receive a great deal of training regarding laws and procedures yet may lack the pedagogical knowledge that is necessary for making appropriate academic decisions for students in the classroom. This lack of knowledge was also noted regarding special education teachers who obtained certification through an alternate route (Leko & Brownell, 2009). Special education

teachers, despite the certification route or years of teaching experience, typically receive ongoing PD to stay abreast of the latest laws and procedures for special education. This area of PD also frequently encompasses student assessments (IDEA, 2004; Leko & Brownell, 2009; MDE, 2015; USDE, 2006).

The history of PD along with the various obstacles and components highlights the need for continued quality professional learning for teachers regardless of their discipline. Changes in accountability for student achievement reflects an increased need for more targeted PD topics and practices. The literature also shows the specific needs of special education teachers and what obstacles they may face in regard to being able to participate in appropriate PD related to their specific needs.

#### Problem Statement

General education teachers no longer teach only general education students. Students with disabilities have increasingly been placed in general education classrooms with sometimes little to no support provided by a special education teacher other than pull-out services for testing. According to Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010), the needs of special education teachers have not been met because of the typical “one topic fits all” approach to professional development sessions. In order for students and teachers to be successful with a partnering such as inclusion, the appropriate training must take place for all teachers involved in the student’s education (Jenkins, & Yoshimura, 2010).

School leaders should be aware of the change in federal mandates regarding the expectations for students with disabilities. All teachers have been tasked with “growing” their students. School leaders should also know the specific strengths and weaknesses of their faculties before planning the school year’s topics for Professional Learning

Community (PLC) sessions and professional development days (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010). Not being aware of teachers' needs for support can result in a lack in student achievement as well as morale among the teachers (Erickson, Noonan, & McCall, 2012).

Many times special education and general education teachers seek training sessions on their own. Principals typically allow teachers to go to specific trainings, but often the special education teachers have to seek it themselves. The unfortunate side to this is special education teachers are still being required to attend general education trainings and PLC sessions that are not relevant to their needs. Although there is ample evidence that special education teachers attend general education PD, there is little literature showing that general education teachers participate in PD regarding special education topics.

School leaders typically do not seek out the needs of their special education teachers in isolation when making decisions concerning PD topics (Firestone, Hayes, Robinson, & Shalaby, 2008). Without knowing the specific needs of special education teachers, school leaders are less likely to address the specific needs of those teachers. The lack of knowledge regarding the needs of special education teachers as well as general education teachers could lead to ineffective PD for all teachers. Another part of PD that has not been fully explored is the difference in trainings for teachers in regards to their degree levels or type of certification.

#### Purpose

The New Teacher Project (2015) completed a study on PD in order to gather information concerning teachers' opinions of provided training as well as the perceived improved classroom teaching strategies. The researchers in that study concluded that

because teachers did not fully understand their own weaknesses, they were unable to fully realize the benefits of the provided PD (The New Teacher Project, 2015). In addition, they suggest that well-planned and executed PD produced more successful outcomes for all teachers regardless of time spent. The information gathered from this 2015 study supported the overall purpose for this research which is to evaluate the need for effective PD topics on special education for teachers regardless of their certification track, years' experience, or type of classroom. In addition, teacher satisfaction with the amount of PD provided is useful knowledge for school leaders.

#### Research Questions

1. To what degree do teachers report the presence of the seven professional development standards during an academic school year?
2. Is there a significant difference in the number of special education PD topics and general education topics provided to teachers?
3. Is there a difference in the amount of PD related to their degree levels?
4. Is there a significant difference in teacher satisfaction with PD based on
  - a. School leader versus district leader chosen PD topics
  - b. Years' experience as a teacher
  - c. Certification route
5. To what degree do teachers utilize information presented in PD sessions?
6. For research questions 1 – 5 above are there significant differences between responses between special education teachers and general education teachers?

## Justification

The justification of this research is the need for appropriate professional development on special education topics. Special education teachers and general education teachers are called upon to work together for the benefit of all students. General education teachers do not always understand the requirements and methods of special education teachers just as special education teachers do not always understand or agree with general education methodology (Leko & Brownell, 2009). The literature and previous research show how professional development looks in typical public schools, what professional development should look like for special education teachers, and the implications of professional development when well-designed versus poorly designed.

This research study could benefit school leaders as well as district office personnel when planning PD for teachers. The data collected from the study could highlight the areas teachers feel are lacking for their professional knowledge. School leaders would be able to use the information gathered in this study to outline the specific needs for special education teachers. Specifically, school leaders could ascertain whether special education teachers' needs are being met regardless of their type of certification, years' experience, or current job placement.

Leko and Brownell (2009) have reported that information obtained about general education needs for professional development can be used to help determine the needs of special education teachers by looking at the enrollment in a classroom regarding special education students. Those teachers who are charged with inclusion should be aware of trends in general education as well as special education. The general education teacher

may be best served to attend professional development sessions with his/her special education counterpart.

Alternate route teachers may have strong content knowledge but lack the skills to deliver it to their students (Leko & Brownell, 2009). Their professional development may need to be centered on skill delivery systems for content. Their strengths in content knowledge could help provide the connection to keep the students on track in regards to subject area testing in elementary and secondary classrooms. This information could be supplied by this researcher's study.

#### Definition of Terms

*Accountability* – For the purpose of this study accountability is the act of districts and schools being held accountable for student achievement through the wise use of resources such as money and personnel.

*Collaboration*- In this study collaboration is school leaders and others working together for a common goal.

*Professional development* – “The strategy schools and school districts use to ensure that educators continue to strengthen their practice throughout their career” (Mizell, 2010).

*Education Reform Act*- “The Act was designed to achieve educational excellence through the following four means: improved state school governance, leadership and finance, improved professional preparation and growth of school personnel, improved school performance, and higher student achievement” (TFEEM, 1983).

*Learning community*- A group of individuals that share the same goals and meet on a regular basis and share insights to reach their goals.

*Standards*- For the purpose of this study, standards are referred to as the requirements for a particular area. In this case the term refers to professional development standards.

*Special education eligibility*- A determination that is made that indicates an individual has one of the 13 disabilities recognized by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) and is able to receive specialized services from birth to age 21.

*Least restrictive environment*- The extent to which a special education student is able to be educated with his non-disabled peers.

*Individualized Education Plan (IEP)*- A document that is created which outlines the eligibility, current functioning, goals, and objectives of a special education student for an academic school year.

#### Delimitations

The following delimitations were imposed upon this study:

1. Special education and general education teachers in Mississippi were participants in this study.
2. The use of a questionnaire was the only method in this study.
3. Special education teachers employed during the 2016-2017 school year were the only individuals invited to participate in this study.
4. Years' experience and degree level varied among the participants.

#### Assumptions

The following assumptions were made as part of this study:

1. The amount of professional development days allocated to public schools during the school year are consistent among school districts.



2. Special education teachers and general education teachers are attending the PD sessions at their schools which are planned by their school leaders.
3. School leaders are responsible for the PD provided at their individual schools.
4. The participants in this study answered each question honestly.

## CHAPTER II -LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional development (PD) is defined as training and workshops geared to the acquisition of skills and knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Learning Forward, 2011; Leko & Brownell, 2009; Mizell, 2010). PD in education is designed to increase teachers' toolboxes of skills while keeping them up to date on current educational trends and regulations. It is referred to as staff development, in-service, continuing education, training, and professional learning (Hirsh & Killion, 2009). Regardless of what it is called, professional development in any field is the process of an individual increasing the knowledge in a particular profession. Doctors, nurses, and business professionals in many areas participate in professional development to increase their knowledge and expertise. In education, teachers' increased knowledge and expertise aids in improved student achievement (Mizell, 2010).

### The History of Professional Development

PD in education has changed with educational trends. Additionally, Firestone et al. (2008) reported that the approaches used to teach teachers have evolved over time. Prior to regulations for PD, school leaders typically used workshops as a way to introduce teachers to the latest innovations in the classroom (Schraw, 2010). Workshops four decades ago usually involved an outside expert speaking or working with a faculty during one of the designated professional development days built into the school calendar. This approach did not provide on-going assistance; rather it presented a new topic each time, following an "introduce, practice, and move on" approach. The topics of these workshops were typically decided by school leaders and reflected their interests and new ideas for the classroom (Schraw, 2010).

Acquiring expertise in any field does not, however, happen so quickly. According to Mizell (2010) and Firestone et al. (2008), years of practice and seeking effective methods requires conscious thought in implementing techniques learned in PD sessions whether they are from a one-shot delivery of workshops or a year-long training during designated PD days. Improvement requires action. Mizell (2010) stated, “Professional development is most effective when it occurs in the context of educators’ daily work” (p. 7). He reported the action needed by teachers was a conscious decision and part of teaching every day. This particular idea of PD is one of many that will be discussed later in this literature review.

As time progressed, regulations changed in education. School leaders are now accountable for providing professional development to their teachers, and the focus on student achievement has increased. The next section provides a brief history of PD in Mississippi through the years as well as a view of the current practices. As McKee, Johnson, Ritchie, and Tew (2013) stated, “It is hard to know where you are going if you are not sure of where you have been” (p. 15).

#### *History of PD in Mississippi*

Prior to the establishment of accountability standards for student achievement, teachers often attended PD sessions the day before students reported for the school year and the day after students were released for summer vacation. School procedures and class rosters were the focus of many meetings for beginning- of- the - year PD sessions. The PD at the end of the school year typically involved teachers cleaning out classrooms and performing close-out procedures such as summer maintenance requests, textbook inventory, and classroom inventory. Curriculum guides were not necessarily used to

guide the topics of any of the PD sessions (Darling-Hammond, 2005). Instead, teachers decided how best to learn the latest strategies through classes or workshops for the subjects they taught during the school year. Some teachers took the initiative to take classes at nearby universities to earn more endorsements or work towards a graduate degree (Schraw, 2010).

Standards for professional growth were adopted in 1970 with the passing of accreditation laws in Mississippi. The State Board of Education then had the power to determine schools' standards to achieve accreditation (MDE, 2005). Enforcing the standards for accreditation became the responsibility of the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) (MDE, 2010). MDE requirements included six college credit hours or 10 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to renew a teaching license for teachers with a Bachelor's degree (MDE, 2005, 2010, 2012). The courses were not predetermined for teachers, but they had to be relevant to the teacher's area of teaching for licensure purposes. The requirements for renewing a teacher's license remain the same today (MDE, 2005, 2010, 2012).

In 1982, the Education Reform Act (ERA) brought more focus to the concept of improving student achievement by improving the quality of instruction by teachers (TFEEM, 1983). For the first time, teachers were required to engage in "professional growth." TFEEM identified professional growth as one of four ways to increase student achievement, but the growth of teachers was deemed necessary to increase student achievement (TFEEM, 1983). ERA mandated that school districts implement a "state-approved" professional development program. The school districts had the responsibility of designing their professional development programs and showing how they directly tied

to increased student achievement. The deadline for implementation of the PD programs was the beginning of the 1984-1985 school year (TFEEM, 1983).

There were no significant changes for PD in Mississippi from 1985 to 1996. In 1997, the Mississippi Code of 1972 was amended to include the requirements of PD for teachers. It was at this point specific criteria were established for PD sessions (MDE, 1997, 1998). With assistance from the Commission on School Accreditation, MDE adopted the following comprehensive PD criteria:

- a) require guidelines for allocating available state funds for in-service training to local districts; (b) require a portion of the plans be devoted exclusively for the purpose of providing staff development for beginning teachers within that local district and for no other purpose; (c) require a portion of the school district's in-service training for administrators and teachers be dedicated to the application and utilization of various disciplinary techniques. (MS Code 37-17-8)

Further adjustments were made to the requirements for PD in 1998. MDE released a model for districts to follow called Professional Development for the New Millennium. This plan gave specific requirements and suggestions to guide school districts in providing and implementing PD initiatives (MDE, 1997, 1998). Requirements for PD remained unchanged from 1998 to 2012. In 2012, MDE trained school leaders on how to analyze the newest standards of professional development adopted by MDE, the Standards for Professional Learning, so they could better plan PD in their districts and at the individual schools. This is important specifically so PD planned in schools is relevant to the needs of the teachers in order to improve student achievement (Learning Forward, 2011; MDE, 2012).

## Professional Development Standards

In 2012 when MDE adopted its standards of PD, these were based on Learning Forward (2011), formerly known as the National Staff Development Council. Learning Forward is “an international association of learning educators focused on increasing student achievement through more effective professional learning” (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 12). The current professional development categories for the standards for teachers in Mississippi are the following: “learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes” (Learning Forward, 2011, p.23). School leaders have the responsibility of providing PD in each of the listed standards categories through well-designed and implemented strategies.

### *Learning Communities*

Learning Forward (2011) defined learning communities as “professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students” (p. 24). This happens “within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, supporting learning among teachers, and goal alignment” (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 24). In the school setting, professional learning communities are teachers meeting together on a regular basis to work toward a common goal. The configuration of the professional learning communities can be by grade level, subjects, or both (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012). Regardless of the configuration, these meetings are designed to meet the PD standard category of “learning communities.”

*Standard.* The actual standards of learning communities are that they provide continual improvement, cooperative responsibility, alignment and accountability, and support for learning among teachers (Learning Forward, 2011; MDE, 2012). School

leaders have the responsibility of making sure the policies and structures within their school supports these elements (Firestone et al., 2008; Mizell, 2010). Continual improvement requires regular meetings between school leaders and teachers with clear objectives and outcome goals. Regular meetings help teachers experience continuity of learning together (Learning Forward, 2011; MDE, 2012). According to Barton and Stepanek (2012) each meeting should focus on increased student achievement for all students through improved teaching. Meetings should be collaborative in nature and involve every member of the learning community.

Hirsh and Killion (2009) reported that each member of the community should accept that the students are a collective responsibility. According to multiple sources (NEA, n.d; MDE, 2010, 2012), teachers can no longer think of “my students” and “your students” when working to improve the entire school. The lens needs to be focused on the school as a whole. Goals are created and set in motion as a whole. Ideas shared among teachers can be extended and fine-tuned to address individual student needs in the classroom. In other words, teachers share ideas and then adapt them for their own students (Learning Forward, 2011)

The alignment and accountability of goals is another part of learning communities. Solid and focused policies for PD maintain integrity and protects students and the learning process. MDE (2012) requires all PD policies align to the school’s vision for learning. The continuation of focused policies and visions provides guidelines for learning communities. PD could be considered a cornerstone of the efforts to achieve the goals set in PLCs (Garet, Porter, Desimone, & Yoon, 2001). This accountability helps keep everyone focused on the outcome of improved student achievement (Learning

Forward, 2011, MDE, 2012). Clear guidelines do not leave room for blaming others for less than acceptable results.

### *Leadership*

Leadership is the second standard category for professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011; MDE, 2012). Increased student achievement requires improved teacher effectiveness. Improved teacher effectiveness requires leaders who are advocates for professional learning and provide the necessary supports for teachers. Knapp, Copland, and Talbert (2003) noted that school leaders need to be as devoted to the outcomes of PD as are the teachers. This kind of commitment builds as well as facilitates leadership among teachers.

*Standard.* The standard of leadership is as follows: “Professional development develops a capacity for learning and leading; advocate for professional learning; and create support systems and structures” (MDE, 2012, p. 9).

MDE (2012) suggested school leaders delegate leadership responsibilities to teachers as a way to advocate for learning through PD. Moreover, the best leaders help create future leaders. Teachers leading does not necessarily mean one person is in charge of a meeting or project, but that typically means teachers have different responsibilities within the faculty without one single teacher being the sole leader (Knapp et al., 2003; Schraw, 2010). School leaders help facilitate teacher leadership by assisting in the planning and implementation of PD at the school level. Facilitation is but one example of school leaders using professional development to develop teachers’ leadership skills (Schraw, 2010).



Creating support systems and structures as core elements of leadership is important. If procedures are established for the smallest and largest of tasks, it would lessen teacher anxiety and create consistency. Because they can maximize the effectiveness of the content or skills being discussed, support and structure are especially important for professional learning. An example of this is the establishment of guidelines that would let teachers know what documentation is required for meetings. Another example of support and structure is demonstrated when school leaders make use of peer mentoring by pairing teachers with each other on an as-needed basis during the course of PD sessions (Firestone et al., 2008; Hirsh & Killion, 2009).

### *Resources*

The third standard category for professional learning is resources which include people, buildings, technology, time, and money. District- level guidelines usually dictate the procedures for managing the resources and reporting how they were used (Firestone et al., 2008).

*Standard.* School leaders do not always have control of all resources, but the PD standard states that it is the responsibility of school leaders that resources are used as effectively and wisely as possible (Learning Forward, 2011; MDE, 2012; Schraw, 2010). This applies to professional development resources as well. A wise use of personnel may include professional learning that is job-embedded, which would enable teachers to remain in their classrooms without losing interaction time with students. By using the resources allotted to them, school leaders have control over the use of time during the school day. When time is managed efficiently, teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with their learning communities (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

## *Data*

The fourth standard category of professional development is using data to increase student achievement. Teachers and school leaders collaborate together in order to determine the types of data that would be collected and analyzed to best meet the needs of the school. In order to do this effectively it requires continual PD focused on the actual process of “digging through” so all involved will gain an understanding of the information (Learning Forward, 2011; MDE, 2012). The more effectively teachers and leaders can collect and analyze data, the more effective they are in meeting the individual needs of the students. Data can be used to determine various placements of students in schools by assigning them to performance-based classrooms. In this type of classroom school leaders work with teachers to determine what data will be used to group students according to reading performance, math performance, or overall average of performance on state or district tests. Teacher Support Teams (TST) analyze data for Response to Intervention (RTI) and special education eligibility including gifted education (Learning Forward, 2011, 2015; MDE, 2012).

*Standard.* Data help administrators evaluate teacher and program effectiveness. The PD standard for data is that school leaders and teachers use data to assess the effectiveness of the professional learning that occurred during the PD. In the context of professional learning, the use of data drives the selection of topics as well. The benefits of data are well established. Although student achievement is reported using collected data, ineffective leaders make changes without looking at data or the theory behind the data collection (Learning Forward, 2011; Hirsh & Killion, 2009). Professional learning requires frequent and consistent measures of data. Hirsh and Killion (2009) reported the

things that matter are the things that are measured. For instance, students and teachers alike are more likely to “put their best foot forward” when they know data are being “collected” (p. 466).

### *Learning Designs*

The fifth standard discussed is learning designs. A learning design is simply a plan for how individuals will learn a new concept. In the area of PD, learning design refers to how PD is designed to ensure teachers are learning (Garet et al., 2001). When a new learning design is implemented, teachers and school leaders can work together on implementation and working out any problems. Teachers should receive support for new learning designs during their PD sessions.

*Standard.* Learning Forward (2011) stated the PD standard for learning designs is, “Professional development that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcome” (p. 40). To meet the standard of learning designs, the analysis of data must continue. What programs are used is best determined by the needs of the students based on data analysis. Active engagement with a program or new process requires practice before it is evaluated (MDE, 2010, 2012).

Appropriate PD designed to maximize teacher learning will help teachers when new ideas and concepts are implemented in the classroom. Teachers need a time dedicated to discussing the pros and cons of new programs and strategies used in the PD sessions (Leko & Brownell, 2009). They use implementation techniques during class time and then use their scheduled professional learning community time or other team

collaboration time to discuss how their techniques and learning designs work in the classroom (Leko & Brownell, 2009).

### *Implementation*

Implementation is the sixth standard category of professional learning. This standard is important when selecting learning designs (Learning Forward, 2011, 2015; MDE, 2012). When implementing a new strategy or learning design, teachers and school leaders must be committed to full implementation with integrity to give it an opportunity to succeed.

*Standard.* Professional learning on implementation needs to apply research on the topic as well as provide continued support throughout the school year in order to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Implementation can begin in workshops, in-service trainings, and coaching. School leaders monitor implementation of school initiatives (Firestone et al., 2008; Schraw, 2010) and ensure that teachers have the resources necessary for implementation.

### *Outcomes*

The last and seventh standard category for professional learning is outcomes. Projected outcomes drive instruction. Students, teachers, and school leaders have performance standards to meet. The meeting of these standards is an ongoing topic of professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011, 2015; MDE, 2012).

*Standard.* Educational outcomes are better when instruction is focused and well planned. Professional development helps with building coherence. The specific PD standard for outcomes is “professional development that increases effectiveness and results for all students and aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student

curriculum standards” (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 48). Other aspects of the previous standards such as collaboration and data analysis assist with building coherence (Learning Forward, 2011, 2015; MDE, 2012). Positive outcomes are less likely to occur if teachers use stand-alone approaches in isolation and do not consult student data for the needs of students.

To meet performance standards teachers provide effective instruction through the implementation of research-based programs and initiatives. They use data to determine the direction of the instruction. All of this is designed to improve student achievement through improved teaching skills acquired by effective PD sessions (Learning Forward, 2011, 2015; MDE, 2012).

### Theoretical Framework

With guidelines for professional development from MDE (2010, 2012) and NCLB (2002), school leaders must examine how teachers learn best. This helps teachers teach students in the way those students learn best as well. There are different theories of how individuals learn. Examples of different theories of learning include behaviorism, cognitive constructivism, and social constructivism (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). Jarvis (2015), along with Shutz and Luckmann (1974) and Kolb (2014), defined one particular learning theory as learning that takes place through experience. Jarvis, in particular, used previous work from Shutz and Luckmann (1974) to report “experience is conscious and socially constructed, it occurs in space and time” (p.7). Everyday experiences shape individuals without their realizing it. The realization of learning does not occur until time has passed, and the person becomes aware of the new skill.

Jarvis (2015) states that learning is “fundamental to life itself and we probably internalize from every life situation and experience, although we are not conscious of much of it” (p. 93). The learning happens through emotional reactions to everyday experiences (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Jarvis (2015) stated there are three parts to learning theory: experiential learning, learning in practice, and learning expertise.

### *Experiential Learning*

Experiential learning is the first part of this learning theory. In education, the theory of experiential learning occurs as a teacher develops his or her sense of self as a teacher (Jarvis, 2015). A sense of one's self occurs when deciding strategies or management techniques and realizing why one way will work yet another will not work. The spillover of experiences shapes how a teacher responds to new and old situations. With experiential learning, the skill set is filed away in the person's consciousness until a new yet similar experience sparks a memory or a somewhat automated response to a situation (Jarvis, 2015; Kolb, 2014). It is the afterthought that makes the person ponder on how she knew to do something she does not recall actively learning about beforehand.

When applied to PD, experiential learning follows the idea teachers learn through the experience of trying the new strategies learned in the training session(s). Cognitive learning is also part of the experiential learning theory. Jarvis (2015) stated, “Cognitive learning begins with the conscious experience of not knowing” (p. 83). Individuals reflect on experiences and they in turn become part of our actions (Kolb, 2014).

PD is a balance of skill and theory. Argyris and Schon (1974) noted difficulties in learning for teachers occurred when they separated the idea of skill learning from theory learning. Separating skill from theory does not provide teachers with what is

considered as well-rounded learning. They need skill and theory balanced together to fully understand why specific strategies they learn are important to student achievement (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

### *Learning in Practice*

According to Jarvis (2015), the second part of learning theory is learning in practice. He noted that learning also takes place when an individual is actively aware and focused on a skill or concept. The similarity of learning in practice and experiential learning is how individuals process auxiliary information without outwardly focusing on it (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974). However, learning in practice involves more focus (Jarvis, 2015). In professional development sessions, educators are aware of the skill or theory they are supposed to be learning on which they focus during the entire session. However, they are not always aware of the learning that creeps into their subconscious and leaves a mark in their teacher skill set as a result of participating in the PD (Jarvis, 2015).

### *Learning Expertise*

Learning expertise is the third part of learning theory and occurs when the individual has absorbed the targeted skills and theory without thinking about it actively (Jarvis, 2015). This part of learning happens in stages. Teachers have to practice new skills repeatedly to go through the novice, proficient, and expert stages (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Jarvis, 2015; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974). When full absorption has occurred, teachers perform the new skill intuitively. Implementing new strategies and taking ownership of valid theories without consciously thinking about it is the overall goal of learning theory in professional development.

## Attitudes Toward Professional Development

As stated earlier, improving student achievement is the overall goal of increasing teacher expertise (Learning Forward, 2011, 2015; MDE, 2010, 2012; Rushing, 2012). Teacher beliefs do not drive PD per se but give an idea of the attitudes of the teachers in Mississippi who have completed professional development sessions designed to increase their students' achievement. Rushing (2012) measured the teachers' attitudes about how well their training helped in raising achievement scores. He conducted a study of Mississippi teachers' "perception of the effectiveness of professional development on raising student achievement" (p. 55). Similarly, the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NIFE) reported student achievement is related to professional development (French, 1997).

Rushing (2012) used his study to question teachers' trust in school leaders to plan appropriate PD activities through the year. He noted teachers had a higher opinion of the PD and its ability to raise student achievement when they believed school leaders took their opinions concerning specific training needs into account. Support from school leaders led to teacher buy-in with in-service activities through the school year (Rushing, 2012). Rushing (2012) further noted that grade level and years of teaching experience did not have a significant effect on the teachers' opinion of professional development and that school leaders providing support was important to teachers.

Studying teachers' attitudes towards professional development is not new. In 1957, the National Society for the Study of Education released a book titled *Inservice Education for Teachers, Supervisors, and Administrators*. This book focused on teachers developing an attitude that promoted collaboration among all stakeholders in order to



provide PD activities (Lieberman, 1995). Similarly, Rushing (2012) found that there was a shift in teacher attitudes as teachers experienced more support from school leaders to meet students' needs. Teachers then had a refreshed focus on student achievement and an improved outlook concerning their students' overall abilities to succeed academically. The topics of meetings, trainings, workshops, and PLCs became very important to the teachers. The overall conclusion drawn from the study indicated the majority of teachers in his study believed student achievement was increased by their participation in professional development activities during the school year (Rushing, 2012).

### Professional Development Organizations

There are many model programs for PD. However, for the purpose of this study, only two were discussed (Learning Forward and the National Education Association) to illustrate the differences between a membership organization that provides PD opportunities and an organization whose standards for PD have been adopted by many states.

#### *Learning Forward*

Professional organizations, which provide support for school leaders and teachers, have released ideas for improved PD as well as their opinions on how it can be improved in order to meet the needs of students and teachers alike. Learning Forward (2015) is one such organization, which was explained earlier. This organization released specific standards for professional learning in an effort to better inform school districts' leaders and teachers as to what their in-service should look like conceptually (Learning Forward, 2011, 2015). They listed five core beliefs concerning professional learning:

1. Professional learning that improves educator effectiveness is fundamental to student learning.
2. All educators have an obligation to improve their practice.
3. More students achieve when educators assume collective responsibility for student learning.
4. Successful leaders create and sustain a culture of learning.
5. Effective school systems commit to continuous improvement for all adults and students (Learning Forward, 2015, “Vision, Mission, Beliefs, Priorities,” para. 1).

Along with standards, Learning Forward (2011, 2015) provides school leaders and teachers opportunities for professional learning as a membership benefit. Many publications are offered to assist school leaders and teachers who are searching for additional training on how to use the professional standards to benefit all stakeholders (Learning Forward, 2011, 2015). This association is dedicated to professional learning and holds a yearly conference for members and nonmembers alike (Learning Forward, 2015). The conference provides sessions for all levels of educators including support staff, instructional coaches, principals, district office personnel, and Title I school staff.

#### *National Education Association*

The National Education Association (NEA) is a national organization devoted to assisting teachers and school leaders. The NEA’s primary focus is not necessarily PD but it does provide learning opportunities, publications, and an annual conference (NEA, n.d). Teachers and school leaders, regardless of membership status, may use NEA’s online resources to gather information on the latest trends and policies. School leaders

may find the resources listed on NEA's website are particularly helpful for planning PD activities. As with Learning Forward (2015), the NEA has beliefs regarding quality PD are as follows:

Professional development should be required throughout the career of education support professionals. Professional development programs should provide equal opportunities for these educators to gain and improve the knowledge and skills important to their positions and job performance. They should assure that these educators have a decisive voice at every stage of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Student achievement depends on supporting and educating the whole student. To have high standards for students, there must be high standards for the staff members who work with them (NEA, n.d, para. 1).

#### Teacher Participation in Professional Development

In the past twenty years, many scholars have focused on why effective professional development (PD) is important and what topics are most appropriate for PD (Kaufman & Ring, 2011; Masuda, Ebersole, & Barrett, 2013; Mizell, 2010; Schachter, 2014; Steinert et al., 2010). Mizell (2010) stated, “Research confirms that the most important factor contributing to a student’s success in school is the quality of teaching” (p. 1). Teachers who are unable or unwilling to learn new skills or refine their teaching are unable to advance their students effectively through course curricula (Mizell, 2010).

#### *Obstacles to Participation*

Typically, state departments of education dedicate a set number of days for teachers to participate in their schools’ PD sessions during the school year. School leaders and teachers refer to these days as “teacher workdays.” PD sessions that occur on

those days are mandatory and part of the teachers' contracted working days which results in a high attendance rate (MDE, 1997, 1998, 2011, 2012). Participation is lower for PD sessions that are not mandatory because teachers have limited time, interest, or motivation (Masuda et al., 2013).

*Lack of time.* Steinert et al. (2010) examined the reasons some medical school faculty members attended PD sessions on a regular basis and why some faculty members chose not to attend sessions. Using focus groups to gather information on how to improve PD sessions, they found the faculty members who attended the sessions believed their PD sessions provided them with professional growth when the topics were related to their needs and gave them the opportunity to collaborate with other faculty members. They reported obstacles to participation in PD sessions as being “lack of time and volume of work” (Steinert et al., 2010, p. 906). Steinert et al. (2010) found that required PD sessions on topics selected by administrators were driven by specific learning objectives and current trends in their profession. The authors recommended that the faculty leaders continue to use information and ideas from faculty members to assist in using time wisely, which would help with development, design, and delivery methods of the PD sessions. The researchers felt the recommendations would lead to an increase in participation (Masuda et al., 2013; Steinert et al., 2010).

Lack of available time to collaborate with other teachers was also viewed as an obstacle for pre-school teachers who participated in a study by Fitzgerald and Theilheimer (2013). The researchers conducted a qualitative study that asked the question: “How can staff development support teamwork?” A by-product of this study was learning that teachers and assistants did not attend non-required PD sessions, and

they did not see the value in many of their required sessions which contradicts the previous study in the medical school. Those participants saw the value in PD when it was focused on their needs whereas the preschool teachers did not (Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013). The data collected from the pre-school teachers indicated the school leaders needed to be mindful of the targeted teacher group for the PD (Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013). Many of the PD sessions did not address the needs of the teachers participating; they needed training in pre-academic skills. The researchers did note they shared the results of the study with the school leaders to better meet the needs of the teachers through PD sessions.

*Lack of interest.* Participation can also be hindered by lack of interest in the PD topic. A group of researchers who formed a local affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English (Masuda et al., 2013) studied the issue of interest in PD. Their goal was to provide PD opportunities for teachers in their rural island community in Hawaii. As educators themselves, they recognized the need for teachers to connect and collaborate with each other (Masuda et al., 2013). They had low teacher attendance to the organization's planned PD sessions. Masuda et al. (2013) explored the potential reasons behind a lack of attendance, by conducting a qualitative study, asking teachers "what influences teachers' attitudes and willingness to engage in professional development?" (p. 7).

Masuda et al. (2013) interviewed 16 teachers who taught in the local school district, ranging from first-year teachers to those who had more than 20 years of experience. Participants answered questions about the number of PD sessions they attended, their experiences in PD sessions, what type of PD sessions were most valuable

to them, what made those experiences valuable, whether the sessions were mandatory, and why the participants were in the teaching profession (Masuda et al., 2013). The results of the study shed light on topics, value, intent, and tensions associated with PD. In the area of intent, the teachers with less experience were driven by the desire to learn as much as possible during PD sessions (Masuda et al., 2013). These particular participants reported feeling obligated to attend PD sessions that were offered even though they were not required by their school district. Comparatively, mid-career teachers, as well as those with 20 years or more experience, wanted to meet the requirements of certification and gain useful knowledge for their classrooms (Masuda et al., 2013). Similarly, Clement and Vandenberghe (2001) found that teachers' attendance was directly related to their openness regarding PD sessions. The more open teachers were to the idea of professional learning the more likely they were to attend PD sessions. The same idea was reported by Gabriel (2005) who said the PD needs of teachers should align with their willingness to learn new ideas and concepts for the classroom.

The value and topics of PD were directly tied to the intent of the PD sessions which meant all of the teachers found value in time spent with other teachers. Specifically, teachers most valued PD sessions related to their own content areas and not general topics (Masuda et al., 2013). Along this same idea, Barton and Stepanek (2012) noted that teachers found value in being able to collaborate and discuss issues related to the daily teaching. Teachers in the study with Masuda et al. (2013) reported varied interest in the topics of PD sessions based upon their years' experience. The more inexperienced teachers wanted assistance with "classroom management." Mid-career teachers said they needed PD sessions that would help increase their mastery of pedagogy

(Masuda et al., 2013). Late-career teachers needed more assistance with technology and Common Core curricula. All of the teachers in this particular study reported a lack of time and availability of PD sessions on their interests and needs as the areas of greatest concern (Masuda et al., 2013).

*Motivation.* School leaders may recognize that teachers may have unique needs for PD. They may or may not be motivated by the same needs as other teachers in the school. For example, the needs of a librarian may differ from the needs of the English teacher (Abilock et al., 2013). All teachers will be motivated to improve student achievement, but the skills needed for individual teachers to accomplish this goal may look different depending on the context. Teachers have more motivation when the PD is relevant to their individual needs (Abilock et al., 2013).

Sergiovanni (2009) wrote that encouraging teachers is as important as teaching them new skills for the classroom. To improve upon their classroom delivery, Reaves (2010) stated that teachers need to believe in themselves and know they have the support of their school leaders. Teachers can embrace the path before them when they are motivated to do so by feeling like administrators support them in their efforts (Sergiovanni, 2009).

#### *Obstacles to Effectiveness*

Burke (2013) noted “many forms of professional development in U.S. education have been ineffective with little to no noticeable change in classrooms” (p. 248). This is tied to the lack of opportunity for teachers to practice and reflect on new teaching methods. He reported PD should be experiential in nature and allow teachers

opportunities to try out new strategies and then reflect on them during PD sessions. The practice is on-going and not a one-shot, one-day workshop (Burke, 2013).

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) reported, “teachers learn by doing, reading, and reflecting (just as students do); by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see” (p. 83). The implementation of new strategies will not be perfect the first time they are attempted by the teacher. Like students, teachers may experience frustration with new ideas and techniques (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). The authors’ argued is that the stimulus behind PD is the desire of teachers to improve their teaching skills in a way that is meaningful for the students in the classroom. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) noted that student feedback is part of what motivates teachers. While student achievement is the ultimate goal, as stated by Eaker, DuFour, and Burnette (2002), Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) stated that teachers should inform students of why strategies changed in their classrooms. The implementation of new strategies, with the desired outcome of improved achievement, is the responsibility of the teacher (Williamson & Blackburn, 2010). Students need to be aware that their teacher is studying as well to help them learn more effectively. This will create a sense of community between the students and the teacher. The same strategy of providing feedback regarding PD can assist school leaders to assess the effectiveness of the PD. Teachers can let school leaders know the positives and negatives of strategies learned in the PD sessions (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

An important aspect concerning obstacles to PD sessions regarding participation and effectiveness is the obligation for school leaders to assess their teachers' needs for



PD. Each of the researchers discussed found the motivation for PD to be a desire for increased knowledge (Burke, 2013; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Fitzgerald & Theilheimer, 2013; Masuda et al., 2013; Steinert et al., 2010). This desire was not different whether it occurred in a pre-school setting, clinical setting, or general education setting but did provide an impetus for administrators/leaders to explore the components of PD and ways it was delivered.

### Components of Professional Development

Assessing students' needs is an ongoing process for classroom teachers as well as school leaders (Kaufman & Ring, 2011). The process can be quite overwhelming when students have needs in more than one area of learning. Many school leaders have the responsibility for determining how specific parts of student achievement will be addressed in school-based PD sessions. End of year test scores, benchmarking results, and needs assessments are three ways school leaders can make these decisions concerning topics for PD (Kaufman & Ring, 2011).

### *Engagement*

Research by Shaha and Ellsworth (2013) showed teachers learn more when the components and delivery format of PD sessions require active participation rather than sitting and listening to a speaker. The teacher engagement is vital to the effectiveness of the PD session (Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013). Kaufman and Ring (2011) related teacher attitude to increased engagement stating that teachers are more positive when they actively engage in their learning. Kaufman and Ring (2011) referred to "choosing your attitude" as a key factor in having a positive outlook in light of the daunting task of meeting the needs of many students.

The importance of attitude was evident in an article written by Schachter (2014). Using a sample of teachers in Tennessee, Connecticut, Oregon, and California, Schachter (2014) found the need for more intense PD with the adoption of Common Core State Standards. Elementary teachers teach writing skills across the curriculum. For example, students are required to find textual evidence for answers whether the class is reading, social studies, or science. In math, elementary and high school teachers may have to learn new ways to teach specific math skills, such as subtraction and fractions. The demand for new teaching skills is a direct result of Common Core being a more rigorous curriculum (Kaufman & Ring 2011; Schachter, 2014). According to these researchers, teachers are more likely to be actively engaged in their PD about learning new teaching skills and Common Core when they have a positive outlook, as stated earlier by Kaufman and Ring, 2011.

*Ways to engage teachers.* Joyce and Showers (2002) discussed the features of effective PD sessions. They considered new strategies to be more effective when modeled in the classroom as part of PD sessions. When implementing new strategies, teachers found observations by school leaders and peers, with appropriate reflection from the teacher and students (as applicable), to be effective (Joyce & Showers, 2002). This idea is also supported by Reaves (2004) who reported that new strategies were more effective when coupled with strategic PD sessions.

Another component to teacher engagement is making sure the new strategy has theoretical grounding in research rather than a passing trend. Williamson and Blackburn (2010) noted that teachers and school leaders have the responsibility to understand the research behind new strategies. This strategy of increasing engagement gives teachers

the opportunity to build their own confidence in using new teaching strategies.

Specifically, if teachers understand the research behind a strategy they are more likely to exhibit increased engagement in the PD for learning new teaching strategies (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Another way to fully engage teachers in learning is for them to actively plan and deliver their own PD. Sergiovanni (2009) discussed Lesson Study, a technique for PD, from the book *The Teaching Gap* by Stigler and Hiebert (1999), which includes the following steps:

- Identify a goal
- Formulate a plan to reach that goal
- Collaboratively create lesson to move students toward that goal
- Observe each other teach
- Discuss the lesson presentation
- Redesign portions of the lesson as needed
- Assess student progress
- Meet to discuss the overall impact of the lesson (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 301)

Through the process of Lesson Study, teachers observe each other and have the opportunity to provide feedback on lessons. This type of interaction increases teacher engagement in their own PD and enables them to make changes as necessary to further student learning. Kaufman and Ring (2011) noted that the process requires trust and a positive attitude which is fostered by ongoing peer coaching. Previous research by

Fernandez and Chokshi (2002) indicated another benefit of Lesson Study is how it helps teachers design lessons to meet the individual needs of all students in their classrooms.

### *Collaboration*

Collaborating with other teachers is beneficial to learning. Collaboration is successful when aligned with the overall objective. For instance, a reading teacher should collaborate with other reading teachers to accomplish goals related to reading fluency and comprehension. The teachers involved need to share common goals for the group and for their students (Devlin-Scherer & Sardone, 2013).

The collaboration component of PD can appear in many different forms. For example, school leaders can carve out time during the school day once a week for grade level or content specific teachers to meet and discuss common goals and issues. Often called professional learning communities (PLC), teachers use the time to work together to develop lessons and get input from each other (Burke, 2013). The collaborative component of PD can also involve teachers meeting with faculty members from other campuses who teach the same grade or subject.

Collaboration requires schedule coordination from school leaders, which is one of the many ways they help in this process (Burke, 2013; Devlin-Scherer & Sardone, 2013). Collaboration is a continuous process where teachers have the opportunity to practice newly acquired skills and then have the opportunity to reflect (Shaha & Ellsworth, 2013; Joyce & Shows, 2002). Teachers may reflect on their lessons while in a collaboration meeting before or after school where they would be more relaxed and open to feedback rather than meetings during the school day (Burke, 2013). A sense of community develops with collaboration because the teachers begin spending time together for a

common goal. The timing needs are important, but the overall importance is teachers collaborating for the shared purpose of increasing student achievement. They want each other to succeed in helping their students (Burke, 2013).

*Coaching.* Used with collaboration, Burke (2013) proposed that on-site coaching is an effective delivery tool for PD. Coaches can be content specific or more general. School leaders can have coaches focus on teachers who are struggling or use them to help with new initiatives. These coaches tend to put teachers at ease because their purpose is not to evaluate but to help provide topics for conversations between teachers and school leaders. Coaches have also been known to be the cheerleaders for teachers when working through the difficulties of a new curriculum. A well-matched coach can help teachers stay positive (Kaufman & Ring, 2011).

*Job-embedded learning.* Job-embedded learning is a component of PD that many teachers take for granted. Nolan and Hoover (2004) wrote, “instead of conducting teacher training away from the classroom, with teachers as passive recipients who sit and receive knowledge provided by consultants on designated in-service days, staff developers should emphasize multiple forms of experiential learning called ‘job-embedded learning’” (p. 251). It requires organization in planning and time for teacher reflection (Nolan & Hoover, 2004). Job-embedded learning is teacher centered. The teacher is responsible for researching improved classroom and teaching techniques that meet the needs of his or her particular students and then implementing appropriate techniques in the classroom (Burke, 2013). School leaders can monitor teacher progress and goal attainment throughout the year (Nolan & Hoover, 2004).

In summary regarding the components of PD, sessions repeatedly focus on collaboration and the need for teachers to practice new teaching techniques and reflect on their own teaching practices. The specific delivery format of the PD is relevant, but the follow-up is more important (Sergiovanni, 2009). School leaders assist in the provision of the necessary components of PD. One of their responsibilities as the instructional leader is to make sure teachers have the information and tools they need to be successful. The goals teachers set for themselves should translate to improved student achievement (Burke, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2009).

### Overview of Special Education

Horace Mann was one of the first advocates for students during the Age of the Common School Revival, 1812-1865. He promoted the education of all children (Pullam & Van Patten, 2007). Before the passage of Equal Protection Clause to the Fourteenth Amendment (1868), students were educated in “common schools” which set the foundation of education. Common schools started as schools that accommodated the wealthy with some allowances for middle class but evolved to schools that educated children from any background. However, individuals with disabilities typically were not provided educational services. They were kept at home or put into institutions that housed individuals with psychiatric difficulties (Pullam & Van Patten, 2007). In theory, the Equal Protection Clause opened education up to all students including those with disabilities. All individuals then had the right to be educated.

### *Special Education Law*

Special education is defined as “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (United States Department

of Education [USDE], 2015). Through the years, many court cases resulted in education becoming more available and equitable for individuals with disabilities. As stated earlier, the Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution opened the door to education for all students (Pullam & Van Patten, 2007). The Supreme Court decisions in *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972) brought about additional educational rights for individuals with disabilities (Yell, 2006). This education, however, usually resulted in students with disabilities being segregated from their “normal” peers (Yell, 2006).

*Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) involved 13 school districts as well as the secretaries of the Board of Education and Education and Public Welfare of Pennsylvania. The plaintiffs in this class action suit argued that students with intellectual disabilities were not being provided with public education in direct violation of the Equal Protection Clause. The defendants argued that children needed to have the cognitive abilities of at least a five-year-old by first grade. Holding to this belief, they denied children with lower cognitive functioning access to public schools. The Court found in favor of the students. The Court held by consent agreement specifying that all children with mental retardation between the ages of 6 and 21 must be provided a free public education and that it was most desirable to educate children with mental retardation in a program most like the programs provided for their peers without disabilities. (PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1972)

*Mills v. Board of Education* (1972) was filed on behalf of all students with disabilities who were “out of school” in the Washington, D. C. area public schools. The

seven students who were the named plaintiffs in the lawsuit represented more than 18,000 students with a variety of disabilities (intellectual disability, physical disability, hyperactivity, behavior disorder, epilepsy). These students had been excluded from public education without the benefit of due process. The Court ordered that the “board provide all children with disabilities a publicly supported education. In addition, the Court ordered the district to provide due process safeguards....clearly outlined due process procedures for labeling, placement, and exclusion of students with disabilities” (*Mills v. Board of Education*, 1972).

*Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.* Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA) to provide protection for individuals with disabilities and to ensure they received educational services (Pullam & Van Patten, 2007; Yell, 2006). This was the first law that provided services for individuals from birth to 21 years-old and mandated specific state action (Pullam & Van Patten, 2007; Yell, 2006). Parents and students were guaranteed rights for assessment and placement for services. EAHCA required states to place students with disabilities in general education classrooms for services whenever feasible. Other components of EAHCA included: “the process of eligibility determination for individuals with disabilities, designing individual educational and behavioral programs, and ensuring appropriate implementation of these programs” (Yell, 2006, p. 70). EAHCA first introduced the concepts of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and a “free, appropriate public education” (FAPE) (Yell, 2006).

*Individuals with Disabilities Act (1990).* In 1990, EAHCA was reauthorized and renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Under this law, more services



for individuals with disabilities were added to include assistive technology, therapeutic recreation, social work, and counseling. IDEA also included provisions for students with autism and traumatic brain injury (Yell, 2007).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997).* The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA clarified students' involvement in general education classrooms, students' access to the general education curriculum, and the inclusion of general education teachers as members of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) committees (Yell, 2007). Under the IDEA (1997), the IEP was listed as the main instrument for guiding teachers in providing meaningful instruction and services to students with disabilities (Yell, 2006). IEPs outline how the student participates in the general education classroom and/or special education classroom and for what subjects. Participation in the general education classroom was considered as the LRE for most students as explained in the section about service delivery options. IDEA contained language that raised the accountability for the academic achievement of special education students. Many lawmakers believed the high expectations could only be realized by students with disabilities if they were placed in general education, with students who did not have disabilities. These high expectations did not carry over to students who were in a special education classroom all day long (USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006).

IDEA (1997) required at least one of a student's general education teachers to be part of the IEP committee which consists of the people in the school and district who are responsible for making decisions regarding the student. For example, an IEP committee consists of typically the special education teacher, one of the student's general education teachers, an administrator, district personnel who can interpret any evaluation

results, the student (as applicable), and the parent. The involvement by general education teachers looks different depending on the individual student (USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006). For some students, the general education teacher is his or her homeroom teacher, English language arts teacher, or math teacher (Yell, 2006). For students with more severe disabilities, the general education teacher may be the art teacher, librarian, or physical education teacher with whom the student attends classes for socialization. The student is included as a member of the IEP committee to the extent it is appropriate; this typically depended on the severity of the disability and the student's age (Yell, 2006)

To obtain funding under Part B of IDEA, which applies to individuals ages 3-21, states and school districts must provide modifications and accommodations for testing as appropriate for individual students (USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006). The access to the general education curriculum includes assessments.

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.* The focal point of the 2004 IDEA reauthorization (IDEA 2004) was alignment with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Under IDEA 2004, the federal government focused on higher standards in the classroom for students with disabilities, the development and use of appropriate assessments, provision of highly qualified teachers for students with disabilities, and improved early intervention services. The federal government provided funding to ensure appropriate and adequate education was provided to all students in special education (IDEA, 2004; USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006).

The IDEA now recognizes 13 disabilities as special education eligibility. The disability categories include: autism, blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other

health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (IDEA, 2004; Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Special Education [MDE, OSE], 2015; USDE, 2006). The process for determining special education eligibility has been refined through the reauthorizations of the IDEA and continues to require parental permission for evaluations. The IDEA (2004) also requires all stakeholders for the student to participate actively in each IEP meeting. The meetings are held a minimum of once a year for the annual review (MDE, OSE, 2015; USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006).

### *Service Delivery Options*

LRE placements prohibit students with disabilities from being removed from a general education setting because accommodations or modifications are lacking in the district and school (MDE, OSE, 2015; USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006). During annual IEP meetings and students' triennial evaluations for eligibility, IEP committee members look at the appropriateness of the placement of services, the LRE. Under IDEA, there is a continuum of placement options to service the varying needs of individuals with disabilities (IDEA, 2004; USDE, 2006). The continuum of placement, in order of least to most restrictive, consists of the following: full inclusion, inclusion with pull-out support, resource room, self-contained, special school, homebound, or hospitalization (IDEA, 2004; USDE, 2006).

*Full inclusion.* Teachers who work in this environment teach students in a general education classroom who are referred to as inclusion students. The general education teacher is responsible for the lesson delivery for all core subjects (IDEA, 2004). The role of the special education teacher is monitoring the student's progress

while modifying assignments and providing accommodations in the classroom. The special education teacher consults and collaborates with the general education teacher as needed to make appropriate accommodations and modifications. The special education teacher does not remove students from the classroom for special education services. Typically, this type of service delivery option is appropriate for students whose educational disability only mildly impacts his or her learning (IDEA, 2004; MDE, OSE, 2015).

*Inclusion with pull-out support.* Some students are able to be successful in a general education classroom but with additional support (IDEA, 2004; MDE, OSE, 2015). These students receive their instruction in the general education classroom but may be “pulled out” of the general education setting for testing, retesting, or extra assistance as the need arises. The general education teacher and the special education teacher communicate to determine what skills and assignments need to be re-taught or re-tested (IDEA, 2004; USDE, 2006).

*Resource.* The next option for teachers is to assist students with disabilities in a resource classroom. In this setting teachers instruct students for one or two of their core subjects, for example, reading/language arts or math, in a special education classroom. All students in this classroom have a special education ruling and the teacher is a certified special education teacher (IDEA, 2004; MDE, OSE, 2015; USDE, 2006). The students may attend general education classes for social studies, science, or other non-academic activities. The students split their time between general education and special education classrooms. This placement is appropriate for students with mild to moderate disabilities (IDEA, 2004; USDE, 2006).

*Self-contained.* Self-contained special education classrooms are the most restrictive setting in the “regular” school placement. The teachers in this setting provide instruction and services to students who have disabilities that prevent them from being successful in a general education setting even with extensive modifications and accommodations (IDEA, 2004; Yell, 2006). Their exposure to the general education classroom is for socialization purposes only. Many of these students have more severe disability rulings such as intellectual disability, autism, traumatic brain injury, etc. with significant cognitive disability (IDEA, 2004; USDE, 2006). The classrooms for these students typically have a smaller enrollment and have at least one teacher’s assistant or personal care aide. The teacher in this setting is certified in special education. Collaboration and interaction between the special education teacher and the general education teachers usually revolve around ways to include the special education students in socialization situations in the general education setting.

*Special school.* In the event the local school agency is unable to provide the necessary special education services for a student, a special school is considered to be the LRE. The home school district is responsible for paying for the placement and providing transportation to and from the special school (IDEA, 2004; USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006).

*Homebound.* Another teaching option for special education teachers is homebound placement. This option is appropriate for students who are unable to attend school because they are medically-fragile or for students whose disabilities are so severe they are unable to attend even a special school (USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006). Once again, the local education agency is responsible for providing services to the student. School

districts employ special education teachers who service students in their homes for an amount of time each week determined appropriate by the IEP committee (IDEA, 2004).

*Hospital.* The most restrictive service delivery option is in a hospital. This option is considered to be the LRE for students whose disability is so severe his or her needs are unable to be met by any of the previously mentioned service delivery options. Many of the students who receive services in a hospital setting are medically fragile or have extreme emotional disturbance (IDEA, 2004; Yell, 2006). These students receive medical and psychological care as well as educational services when appropriate. The local education agency does not provide the educational services at this point but does provide appropriate documentation for special education eligibility (IDEA, 2004; USDE, 2006; Yell, 2006).

#### Special Education Topics for PD

Based on the information provided above on service delivery teaching options, special education teachers need extensive knowledge of content, pedagogy, and disabilities. In order to adequately provide services to and instruct students with disabilities special education teachers require adequate PD.

#### *Pedagogy and Curriculum*

Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010) reported that 96% of all students in special education spend part of their day in a general education classroom. General education teachers rely on special education teachers for guidance in the classroom regarding modifications and accommodations (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010). According to Leko and Brownell (2009), special education teachers need an awareness of the general education curriculum as well as have sufficient pedagogical knowledge in order to make

appropriate decisions regarding modifications and accommodations. These researchers also found that alternate route special education teachers were more lacking in pedagogical knowledge than traditional route special education teachers. This lack of knowledge increases the need for appropriate professional development for all special education teachers (Leko & Brownell, 2009).

According to MDE, OSE (2015), overall, 30 % of the alternate route teachers teach in inner city school, 25 percent teach in small towns, 30 % teach in suburban areas, and 15 % teach in rural schools. This data is not exclusive for special education teachers but encompasses general education teachers as well. Specific information on the percentage of alternate route special education teachers in Mississippi is unavailable on the MDE website (MDE, OSE, 2015). The information provided by MDE, OSE (2015) supports the information reported by Leko and Brownell (2010) regarding lack of pedagogical knowledge by alternate route teachers whether general education or special education.

Often, special education teachers receive special education departmental training while general education teachers receive professional development on the current learning standards for their states and districts (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010). Special education teachers sometimes exhibit a lack of confidence in helping students with a new or unfamiliar curriculum because they were not present for the PD related to it. A student's special education teacher may find himself or herself unaware of the latest skill expectation in mathematics or language arts (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010).

A special education student's ability to succeed many times lies in the special education teacher's ability to modify assignments or provide appropriate

accommodations (Benedict, Brownell, Park, Bettini, & Lauterbach, 2014; Erickson, Noonan, & McCall, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2009). Without a proper knowledge of the standards, the modifications made may be inappropriate and cause the assignment or test to lack validity. Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010) reported that targeted professional development for general education teachers and special education teachers who share students would be beneficial in the classroom. The teachers could assist each other by using their expertise in their individual areas (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010). General education curriculum could be broken down and compared to student goals and objectives on IEPs (Benedict et al., 2014; Erickson et al, 2010; Leko & Brownell, 2009). Special education teachers assist the general education teachers in scaffolding skills for students who experience learning difficulties, even those without a special education ruling (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010). To do this effectively, special education teachers need the appropriate skill knowledge. Special education teachers do not have the same knowledge of general education curriculum; thus, they need additional training to better serve their students.

### *IEP Goals and Objectives*

The regulations for creating and implementing students' IEPs have changed with each reauthorization of the IDEA. This PD topic is crucial to special education teachers in order for them to follow district and state guidelines regarding the writing and implementing of IEPs. Students' IEPs have developed over time to include general education standards (Leko & Brownell, 2009). Special education teachers must use student achievement data to determine which standards and objectives are appropriate for the student each year (IDEA, 2004; MDE, OSE, 2015). The proper structure for goals



also changed with each reauthorization. Currently, IEP goals must include a standard, a behavior for completing it, the time frame for completion, and an accuracy rate for mastery (IDEA, 2004; MDE, OSE, 2015). Today's IEPs address the following: present levels of performance, supplementary aids and services, goals and objectives, units of measurement; related services, transition services, extended school year, significant cognitive disability eligibility, transportation, and assessment.

Special education teachers need continual professional development to stay abreast of the changes for IEPs each year. They also benefit from opportunities to collaborate with other special education teachers on ways to simplify or streamline the IEP-writing process (Leko & Brownell, 2009). Special education teachers can also use PD time to proofread each other's IEPs for errors related to spelling, grammar, and content.

### *Assessment*

The last special education PD topic to discuss involves assessment. The IEP committee determines how to appropriately assess a student's progress. This may include standardized state tests or other assessments. The special education teacher may administer an alternate state assessment for reading, language arts, and math if the student has a significant cognitive disability (IDEA, 2004; Leko & Brownell, 2009; MDE, OSE, 2015; USDE, 2006). In Mississippi, science is also assessed for grades 5 and 8. Like the general education assessment, alternate assessment requires extensive training. As stated earlier, special education teachers must be aware of the testing regulations and the processes for the testing (Leko & Brownell, 2009).

Assessments do not consist only of state tests. Special education teachers use formative assessments all year long to ascertain their students' mastery levels. This type of assessment does not look the same for every student. In an inclusion setting, the weekly test may be the same, but in a self-contained classroom, one student may complete a paper/pencil test while another student demonstrates knowledge through the use of manipulatives (Leko & Brownell, 2009). Assessments are individualized based upon the individual students' needs. Special education teachers need professional development opportunities to explore the various ways to assess their students based on their unique abilities.

### Summary

This study is designed to investigate PD provided by school leaders and whether it meets the needs of special education teachers. A thorough examination of literature acknowledged the standards for PD for all teachers whether general education or special education as well as potential PD topics for special education teachers. The literature also revealed a uniqueness associated with the field of special education such as the various service delivery options. The teaching options for special education teachers supported the potential needs for targeted PD to address students' individual needs regardless of the setting/placement.

Furthermore, the examination of literature revealed there may be differences of opinions between teachers regarding the needs for PD based upon years of teacher experience, type of certification, and type of service/class setting. The literature also highlighted a lack of knowledge between alternate route teachers and those with

traditional certification for special education while also providing valuable information on the types of PD that would benefit special education teachers.

## CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if special education and general education teachers report that their professional development (PD) needs are being met in regard to special education topics. Special education and general education teachers will be surveyed for this study. This chapter describes the participants, research design, the instrument that will be used, procedures, and how data will be analyzed. The dependent variables (DV) for this study include levels of satisfaction as well as determining if there are significant differences between general education teachers and special education teachers regarding amounts and topics of PD. The independent variables (IV) include the seven PD standards, amount of PD topics whether general education or special education, degree level of teachers, years' experience as a teacher, certification route, and utilization of PD sessions.

### Research Design

The study, guided by research hypotheses, was quantitative and used the survey method to gather data. A pilot study of approximately 20 teachers was conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting the pilot study and the main study. This study focused on the following research questions:

1. To what degree do teachers report the presence of the seven professional development standards during an academic school year?
2. Is there a significant difference in the number of special education PD topics and general education topics provided to teachers?
3. Is there a difference in the amount of PD related to their degree levels?

4. Is there a significant difference in teacher satisfaction with PD based on
  - a. School leader versus district leader selected PD
  - b. Years' experience as a teacher
  - c. Certification route
5. To what degree do teachers utilize information presented in PD sessions?

### Pilot Study

#### *Participants*

Approximately 20 special education and general education teachers participated in a pilot study which served to check the reliability of the questionnaire. Each of the potential participants in the pilot study received an email from the school district's superintendent providing them with a link to the questionnaire. The participants were asked to provide consent before beginning the questionnaire. The participants were aware their participation was for a pilot study.

#### *Instrumentation*

The online-questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics. Participation was voluntary. Questions 1-7 addressed the background information of participants were asked about their highest degree level obtained, years' experience teaching, type of certification (traditional versus alternate route), current grade level taught, leadership particulars of their current school, and current teaching setting. Questions 8-12 specifically address PD.

Question 8 addresses Research Question 2 pertained to the number of special education topics versus general education topics for PD sessions. Question 9 addressed Research Question 4a concerning the satisfaction of PD provided by school leaders

versus that provided by district level leaders. Question 10 addressed Research Question 2 about specific special education and general education topics for PD. Question 11 was similar to Question 9 but addressed one aspect of Research Question 4a. Research Questions 4b and 4c was addressed by comparing information obtained in regarding years' teaching experience and certification route obtained with the answers to the other questionnaire items. Research Question 1 was addressed with Question 12 and Research Question 3 was addressed using information from Question 2.

### *Procedures*

Prior to the one district being surveyed for the pilot study, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher then asked permission from one selected school district superintendent in south Mississippi, via email, to survey general education and special education teachers in grades K-12. The researcher's home district was selected for the pilot study due to convenience and size. A link to the questionnaire was emailed to each of the teachers in the school district. The purpose of the pilot study was explained in the initial email to the superintendent and in the email to the teachers. The teachers clicked a link in the email that took them to a consent page and then to the questionnaire. Data analysis for the pilot study was to ensure reliability and validity of the questions.

### *Main Study*

#### *Participants*

In the state of Mississippi there are 148 public school districts. Each district employs general education and special education teachers for students in grades K-12. The superintendent of each school district in Mississippi received an email asking for

permission to survey his/her special education and general education teachers. Teachers for approved districts were emailed a brief description of the study along with a link to the questionnaire. Participants were first be asked to provide consent before beginning the questionnaire.

### *Instrumentation*

The questionnaire was created by the researcher. It was designed to gather the demographic information of the participants in the first seven questions. The remaining questions consisted of multiple parts which addressed PD specifically. Participants provided information regarding general education and special education professional development topics whether they were led by district personnel or school leaders. They gave the number of sessions and total of hours. Teachers provided the number of sessions and number of hours of PD provided by district personnel and school leaders. The participants also reported the number of sessions, total hours, and level of satisfaction for PD led by school leaders and district personnel.

The number of sessions and total hours were given for PD sessions provided on Least Restrictive Environment, special education regulations, Individualized Educational Plans (IEPS), and instructional strategies related to implementation of MS-CCR standards. One question specifically asked how may PD sessions were led by the school leader on special education and general education topics. The seven professional development standards were addressed in one question. Each standard was listed and participants gave the number of sessions, total of hours, level of satisfaction, and degree of implementation of the standard.

Changes to the questionnaire were made as necessary after data from the pilot study was collected and analyzed. Some questions were revised or removed. Reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. The researcher consulted with the dissertation chair and other committee members when making decisions to revise the questionnaire.

### *Procedures*

Prior to the districts being surveyed, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher then asked permission from school district superintendents in Mississippi, via email, to survey general education and special education teachers in grades K-12. A link to the questionnaire was emailed to participating schools by the researcher at a time specified by school and/or district leaders. The importance of the study was explained to all school leaders in a letter via email. A copy of the permission letter from each district is included in the research study. Teachers participated in the study by clicking on a link provided to them by their school district's designated contact person via email. The contact person was determined by the superintendent of each participating school district. All data has been kept secure on the Qualtrics website and is password protected. Data will be deleted after three years.

### *Data Analysis*

The researcher used the University of Southern Mississippi's latest version of SPSS to analyze the collected data. Analysis measures included independent t-tests and/or ANOVA. The type of analysis depended on the particular research question. Research Questions 1, 3, 4, and 5 were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA. Research Question 2 was analyzed using an independent t-test. Research Question 6 was analyzed



using crosstabs to separate special education participants' answers from general education participants' answers for each of the previous five research questions.

## CHAPTER IV – ANALYSIS OF DATA

The overall purpose of this study was to evaluate the professional development (PD) that is provided to special education and general education teachers. Specifically, the study examined the need for effective PD on special education topics for all teachers regardless of certification track, years' experience, or type of classroom. Demographic information was used to describe the participants and to determine if there were any significant differences between special education teachers' and general education teachers' responses concerning PD that was provided to them during the school year.

### Results

Six of the 148 superintendents of the public K-12 schools in Mississippi gave permission for their teachers to participate, on a volunteer basis, in the study. Of those six school districts, 240 teachers completed the questionnaire. Forty-five of the participants were male and 194 were female. One participant did not select a gender. Analysis shows not all who agreed to participate answered every item on the questionnaire. Most of the participants indicated their highest level of education was a Master's degree. Demographic information is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Type of Certification*

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Traditional Route	163	67.9
Alternate Route with a General Education Degree	25	10.4
Alternate Route with a Non-education Degree	50	20.8

Participants also answered a question pertaining to their years' teaching experience, the type of school leadership, and current teaching assignment. Responses from participants indicated a higher percentage of teachers had 11-15 years' experience as teachers than any other experience group. Also, most school leadership is made up of a principal and one assistant principal. Teachers' current teaching assignments indicated that most of the participants were general education teachers, while there were only 61 respondents who identified themselves as special education teachers. The data are displayed in Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4.

Table 2

*Years' Experience as a Teacher*

	<i>n</i>	%
0-11 months	17	7.1
1-5 years	41	17.1
6-10 years	48	20.0
11-15 years	62	25.8
16-20 years	28	11.7
More than 20 years	43	17.9

Table 3

*Type of School Leadership*

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
One Principal	16	6.7
A Principal and an Assistant Principal	123	51.3
A Principal and a Lead Teacher	15	6.3
A Principal and More Than One Assistant Principal	83	34.6

Table 4

*Current Teaching Assignment*

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Special Education Teacher	61	25.4
General Education Teacher	173	72.1

## Research Question 1

Research Question 1 dealt with the degree to which teachers report the number of PD sessions and the presence of the seven PD standards which include professional learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning design, implementation, and outcomes during an academic school year. To answer this question a frequencies analysis was completed using the seven components of item 11. The researcher noted that of the 240 teachers who agreed to participate in the survey, not all of them completed this item on the questionnaire. Possible reasons for the missing data will be discussed in

Chapter 5. Tables 5 and 6 give the overall frequencies for these items using the valid percentage.

Table 5

*Valid Percentage of the Presence of the Seven PD Standards*

Number of Sessions	PLCs	Leadership	Resources	Data
0	17.3	51.5	22.3	10.9
1-2	24.0	36.6	48.5	47.5
3-5	16.3	10.9	23.3	23.8
6 or More	42.3	1.0	5.8	17.8

Table 6

*Valid Percentage of the Presence of the Seven PD Standards*

Number of Sessions	Learning Design	Implementation	Outcomes
0	55.7	22.3	13.5
1-2	28.9	50.5	46.2
3-5	13.4	22.3	29.8
6 or More	2.1	4.9	10.6

The median response for the number of PLC sessions during the 2016-2017 school year was 3-5 sessions; however, most of the respondents showed they attended 6 or more PD sessions on PLCs. Only 104 of the participants answered this item on the questionnaire. The median response for the number of sessions on creating and using

leadership opportunities was 0 sessions attended. As stated in the paragraph above, most of the respondents for this item did not attend any PD sessions. The number of participants who answered this question was 101.

One hundred three participants responded to the resources section of item 11 on the questionnaire. Of those respondents, the median answer was 1-2 sessions were provided on the use of resources. Most of the respondents attended 1-2 PD sessions whereas the smallest number of attended sessions was 6 or more PDs on resources.

The next PD standard was using data. Only 101 of the participants responded to this particular item on the questionnaire. The median response was 1-2 sessions for PD related to using data. This median answer also reflects the majority of responses for data. There were more respondents who attended 6 or more PD sessions on using data than who indicated they did not attend any PD sessions on data.

The standard regarding appropriate learning designs had the fewest number of responses. Only 97 participants responded to this item on the questionnaire. Of the 97 responses, the median answer as well as the highest frequency of responses indicated 0 sessions were attended on this PD standard. There were respondents who did attend some PD on this standard, but this did not reflect the majority of the respondents. The percentages for 1-2 sessions, 3-5 sessions, and 6 or more sessions were noted in Table 5.

The PD standard for the implementation of school programs and learning strategies received a median answer of 1-2 sessions attended. This response was also the most frequent response. Results also showed just as many respondents did not attend any PD sessions on this topic as those who attended 3-5 sessions on implementation. Very few respondents attended 6 or more sessions on this particular PD standard.

The last PD standard was outcomes from benchmarking, classroom testing, and state testing. One hundred four participants responded to this item. The median answer was 1-2 PD sessions were provided during the 2016-2017 school year. As with the previous standard, the median response also had the highest percentage. The information in Table 5 for this standard also showed some respondents to this question attended 3-5 sessions. There were more who did not attend any PD sessions on outcomes compared to those who attended 6 or more sessions.

### Research Question 2

A paired-samples t-test was used to answer research question 2: Is there a significant difference in the number of special education PD topics and general education topics provided to teachers? Results indicated participants attended more PD sessions on general education topics ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = .822$ ) than special education topics ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = .753$ ). Specifically, there was a significant difference in the number of general education topics compared to special education topics,  $t(116) = 9.676$ ,  $p < .001$ . A summary of the data is shown below in Figure 1.

*Figure 1.*

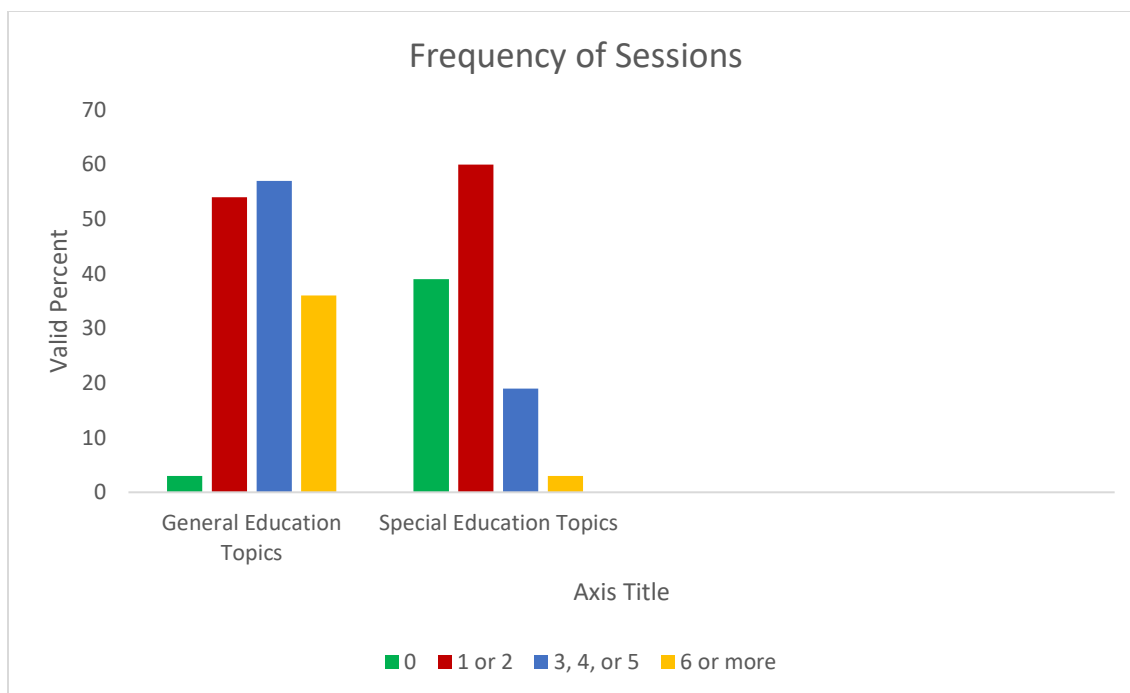


Figure 1 shows there were more general education topics for PD than special education topics. A closer look at the general education data indicate that not only were there more PD sessions on general education topics, but most respondents indicated the general education topics had more sessions. This can be seen in Figure 1 when looking at the number range given for sessions. Information gathered concerning this research question also showed most of the special education topics had only 1-2 sessions. The fewest number of responses given for special education topics was 6 or more sessions. More respondents indicated no special education topics were given in sessions than did teachers having 3, 4, or 5 sessions on special education topics.

Further analysis of the data for research question 2 shows most of the general education topics included 3, 4, or 5 sessions whereas the least response was 0 sessions were attended on general education topics. More respondents chose categories of 1-2 sessions and 3, 4, or 5 for general education topics than the other options of 0 sessions and 6 or more sessions.



### Research Question 3

An independent one-way ANOVA was completed to answer research question 3: Is there a difference in the amount of PD related to their degree levels? The participants reported their degree levels of bachelor's degree ( $n = 49$ ), master's degree ( $n = 56$ ), specialist's degree ( $n = 9$ ), or doctoral degree ( $n = 2$ ). Overall results indicate there was not a significant difference in the number of PD related to participants' degree levels,  $F(3, 112) = .905, p = .441$ .

Participants with a doctoral degree attended slightly more PD than those with a bachelor's degree. The figure also highlights the smallest amount of PD was reported by those participants with a master's degree. The participants with specialist's degrees were not far behind those with bachelor's degrees and not far ahead of those with master's degrees.

Even though the differences between the degree levels were not significant, there were differences which necessitate some discussion. Teacher requirements for recertification vary based upon degree level. For instance, teachers with a bachelor's degree are required to obtain 6 graduate level course hours in content or job/skill related area, 10 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), or obtain National Board Teacher Certification (NBTS). Teachers with a master's degree, specialist's degree, or doctoral degree have the option of 5 CEUs or 3 relevant graduate course hours or NBTS.

The information provided by the participants may reflect only the PD provided in district/on campus, which could explain the lower numbers. The participants may not have considered the workshops or trainings to which they were sent by their school leader or district personnel that occurred at another location, such as the PD that is provided by

MDE throughout the year through the education consortiums in Mississippi such as the Gulf Coast Education Initiative Consortium and the Mississippi Regional Education Agency.

#### Research Question 4a

A paired-sample t-test was completed to answer research question 4a: Is there a significant difference in teacher satisfaction with PD based on school leader versus district leader-chosen PD? One hundred thirty-four participants answered this question with 106 participants leaving it blank. Results from the analysis indicate there is not a significant difference in the overall satisfaction level of PD topics selected by school leaders versus PD selected by district-level personnel,  $t(133) = 1.021, p = .309$ . Table 7 illustrates the findings from the analysis.

Table 7

#### *Paired Samples Statistics*

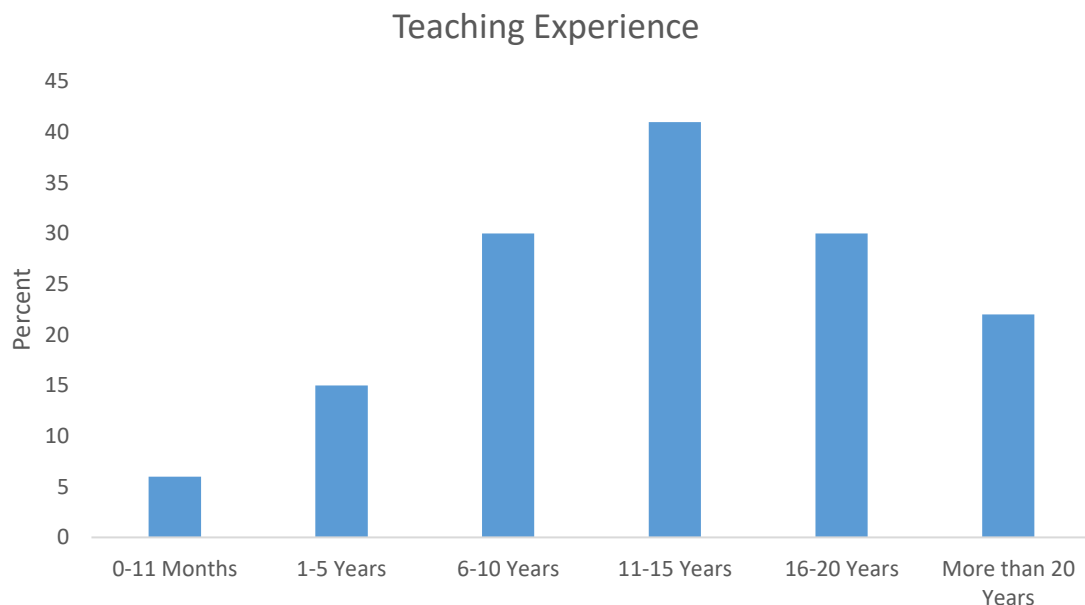
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
School Principal	2.96	.714	.062
District-Level Personnel	2.90	.724	.063

A closer look at the means shows there was very little difference in teachers' satisfaction levels for who chose their PD topics. Participants had similar satisfaction levels between the two groups.

#### Research Question 4b

To determine if there was a significant difference in teacher satisfaction with PD based on years' experience as a teacher as a categorical variable, an independent one-way ANOVA was completed. The results indicated there was no significant difference in the satisfaction levels of teachers based upon their years' teaching experience,  $F(5, 128) = .794, p = .556$ . One hundred thirty-four participants answered this question. Figure 2 provides a look at the distribution of the years' experience for the participants who answered this question.

*Figure 2.*



As shown in the figure above the majority of the teachers who answered this question had 11 or more years' teaching experience. The smallest percentage of teachers who answered this question were also the ones with the least amount experience of 0-11 months. Figure 2 also shows the percentage of participants responding increased as the years' teaching experience increased until 11-15 years and then decreased for the

participants with 16-20 years and even less for participants who had more than 20 years. Previously analyzed demographic data indicated more participants reported they had 11-15 years' teaching experience than the other categories.

#### Research Question 4c

A One-way ANOVA was completed to determine if there was a significant difference in teacher satisfactions with PD based on certification route of traditional versus alternate route. Participants with an alternate route certification were categorized as alternate route with a general education degree or alternate route with a non-education degree. The results indicated there was not a significant difference between PD satisfaction and type of certification route  $F(2, 131) = .944, p = .392$ .

Ninety-three of the 134 participants who answered this question obtained their teaching license through the traditional route. The number and percentage of participants who used an alternate route to obtain licensure was accounted for 31% of the participants. The difference between a non-education degree and a general education degree that was out of their teaching area was negligible.

#### Research Question 5

A frequencies report was run to answer research question 5: To what degree do teachers utilize information presented in PD sessions? This particular question had seven categories. The number of participants who answered each part of Question 5 varied. The category for professional learning communities had 86 responses, creating and using leadership opportunities had 58 responses, using resources had 79 responses, using data had 88 responses, appropriate learning designs had 60 responses, implementation of school programs and learning strategies had 80 responses, and outcomes from

benchmarking, classroom testing, and state testing had 86 responses. The results indicate professional learning communities had the most responses whereas creating and using leadership opportunities had the fewest number of responses. The results from each category are represented in Table 8.

Table 8

*Valid Percentages Reported for the Utilization of PD Information*

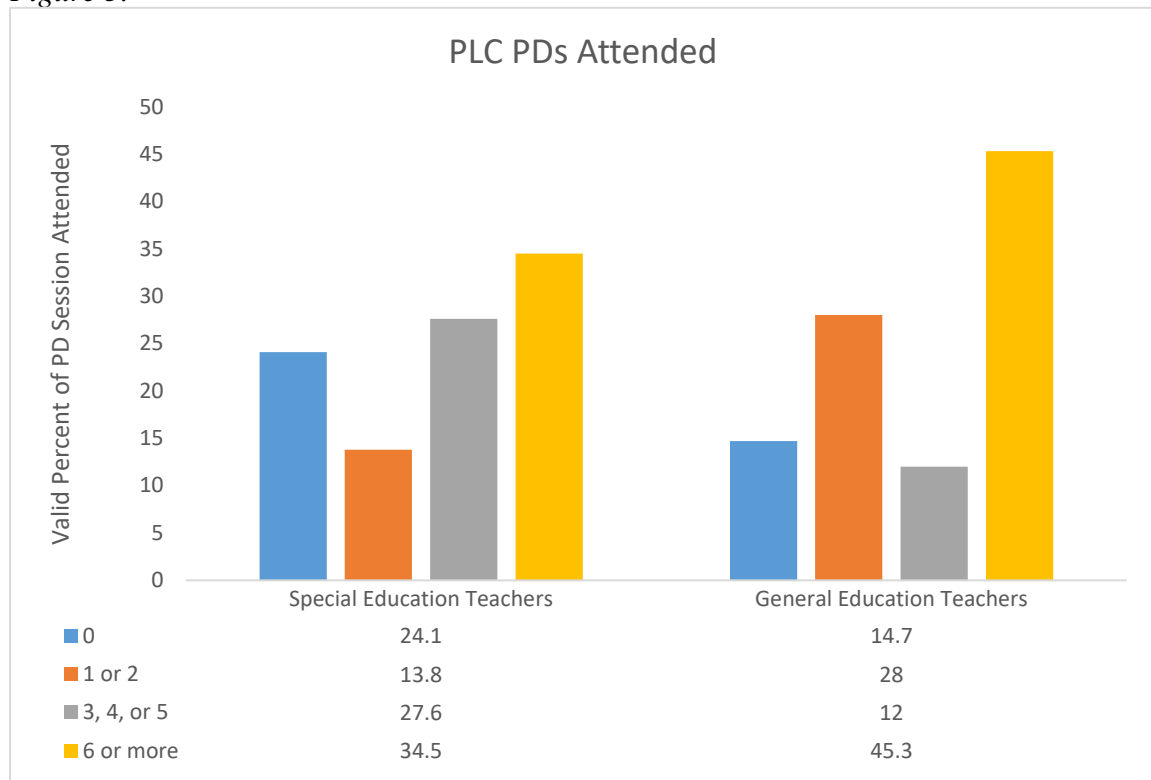
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Professional Learning Communities	0	11.6	74.4	14.0
Creating and using leadership opportunities	10.3	10.3	67.2	12.1
Using resources	1.3	7.6	72.2	19.0
Using data	2.3	8.0	70.5	19.3
Appropriate learning designs	11.7	18.3	55.0	15.0
Implementation of school programs and learning strategies	3.8	7.5	80.0	8.8
Outcomes from benchmarking, classroom testing, and state testing	2.3	8.1	73.3	16.3

Even with the variance between the number of responses to each of the categories, the data indicate overall the median answer was Agree which shows most teachers do in fact implement the information from each of the seven PD categories into their classrooms during the school year. Possibilities for the differences in the number of responses to each of the categories is discussed further in chapter 5.

#### Research Question 6

Research Question 6 involved looking at each of the previous research questions as well as their subparts. The question was as follows: For questions 1 – 5 are there significant differences between responses between special education teachers and general education teachers? A frequencies test was run for each question for general education teachers' responses and then for special education teachers' responses. The data were compared using the valid percent to show differences, if any, between the answers of special education teachers and general education teachers. Figure 3 illustrates the reported differences in the presence of the seven PD standards based on the number of sessions participants attended during the school year.

Figure 3.



The data above indicate a higher percentage of special education teachers reported not attending any PD sessions on PLCs than general education teachers. On the reported number of 1 or 2 PD sessions special education teachers reported 14.2 percent less sessions than general education teachers. Also, it is noted that a higher percentage of special education teachers attended at least 3, 4, or 5 PD sessions on PLCs during the school year than general education teachers. On the reported number of 6 or more PD sessions for this topic special education teachers attended 10.8 percent less than general education teachers. Overall, the difference in the number of PD sessions attended on PLCs between special education teachers and general education teachers was 9.4 percent.

The second PD standard that was compared was leadership opportunities. Table 9 shows the data reported by special education teacher and general education teacher

participants on how many PD sessions they attended that were related to leadership opportunities.

Table 9

*Valid percentage of PD sessions on leadership opportunities*

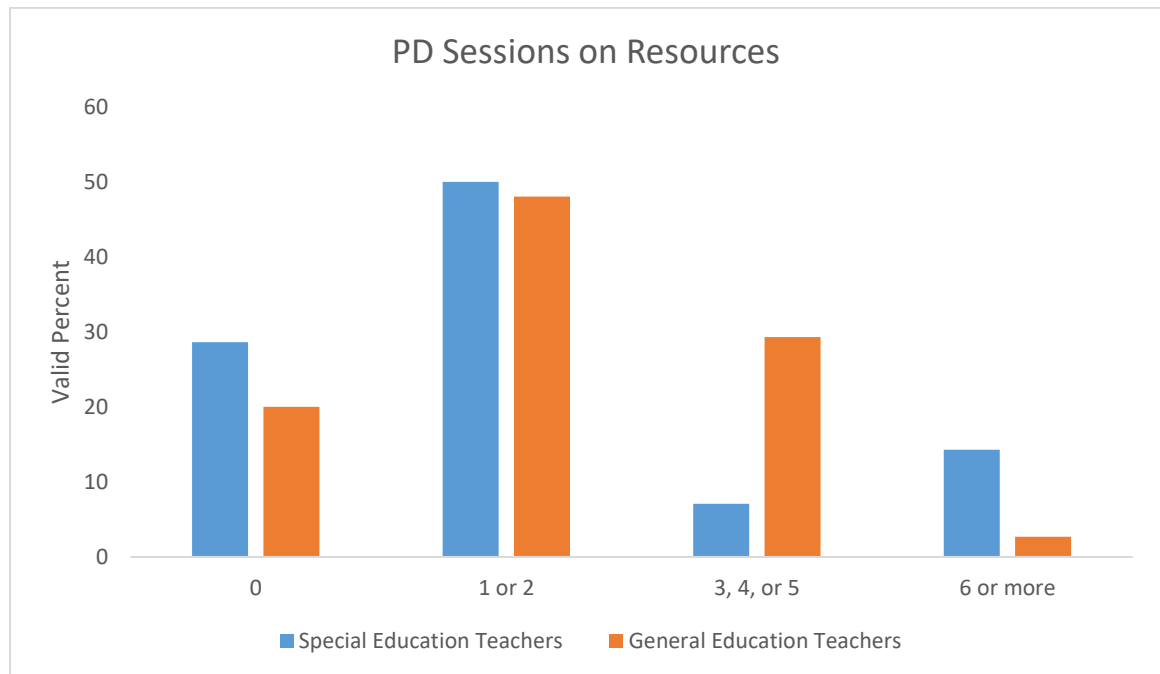
Number of Sessions	Special Education Teachers	General Education Teachers
0	55.2	50.0
1-2	37.9	36.1
3, 4, or 5	6.9	12.5
6 or more	0.0	1.4

The data indicate the majority of both special education and general education teachers reported not attending any PD sessions about leadership opportunities. The percentage of sessions that were attended on leadership opportunities were mostly one or two sessions as shown in the above table. The most sessions special education teachers attended for leadership opportunities were one or two. The number of sessions reported by the general education teachers were very similar to those of the special education teachers.

The third standard used for comparison was resources. Figure 4 gives a visual of the comparison made between the number of PD sessions attended by special education teachers and general education teachers.

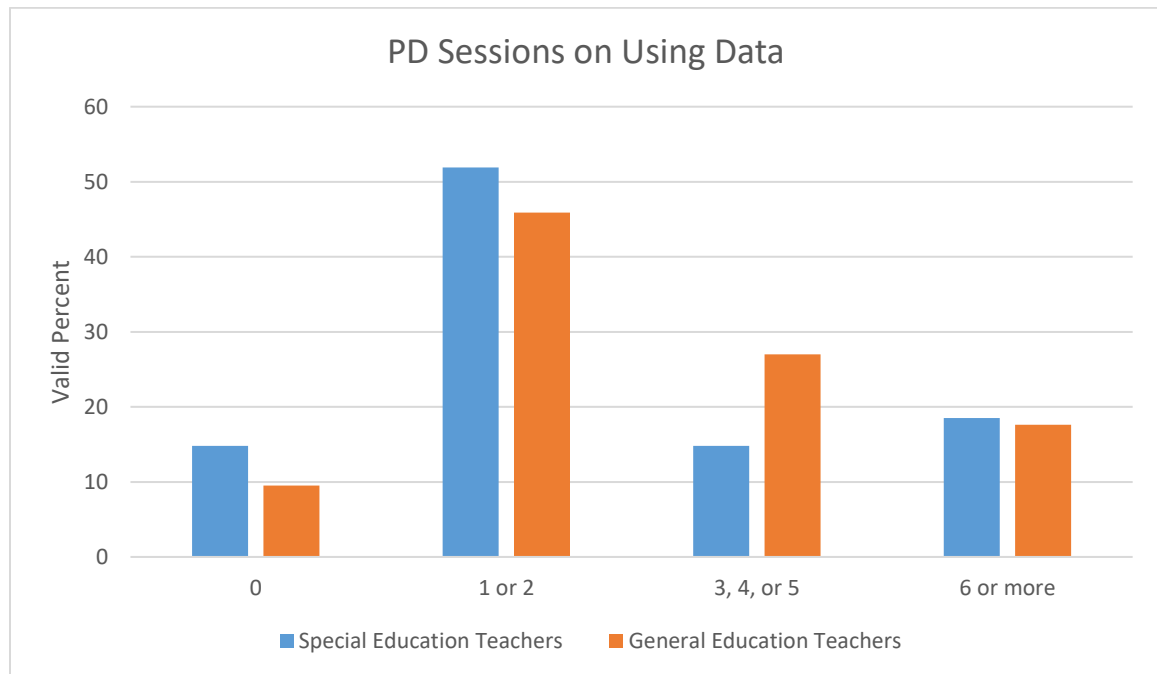


Figure 4.



The data showed special education teachers and general education teachers reported very similar responses for 1-2 sessions attended on resources, but there were larger differences noted between the 3, 4, or 5 sessions and 6 or more sessions. The difference between special education teachers and general education teachers attending 6 or more PD sessions on resources was 11.6 percent. More special education teachers reported attending 6 or more sessions than general education teachers reported. The largest difference between the two types of teachers was the reporting of 3, 4, or 5, which was 22.2 percent. A higher percentage of general education teachers reported attending 3, 4, or 5 PD sessions than special education teachers. Below, Figure 5 shows further analysis of PD sessions that involved using data to drive instruction.

Figure 5.



The majority of participants, whether special education or general education, reported they received one or two PD sessions on using data to drive instruction. The largest difference between the two types of participants were among those reporting 3, 4, or 5 sessions on data. More general education teachers reported having 3, 4, or 5 data sessions than special education teachers. The data also indicate more special education teachers reported not attending any sessions related to PD than general education teachers did. The difference between special education and general education teachers for 0 PD sessions on data was 5.3 percent with special education teachers reporting the higher percentage.

The next PD standard used for analysis was learning design. Specifically, this standard deals with how teachers design learning in their classrooms, their familiarity with the content, and what needs to occur for students to achieve the desired outcome.

Table 10 shows the differences between special education teachers and general education teachers according to their responses on how many sessions they attended related to this standard.

Table 10

*Valid percent of PD sessions on learning design*

Number of Sessions	Special Education Teachers	General Education Teachers
0	53.6	56.5
1-2	21.4	31.9
3, 4, or 5	25.0	8.7
6 or more	0.0	2.9

The majority of teachers in both categories reported they did not attend any PD sessions focused on learning design. The biggest difference between the two types of participants was in how many special education teachers attended 3, 4, or 5 PD sessions on learning design versus general education teachers. The majority of general education teachers who participated reported they attended only 1-2 PD sessions on this standard. It is also noted that a very small percentage of general education teachers attended 6 or more PD sessions for the learning design.

The last two standards compared between special education and general education teachers were implementation, which involves applying new practices or programs to instruction, shown in Table 11 and outcomes, which is shown in Table 12.

Table 11

*Valid percent of PD sessions on implementation*

Number of Sessions	Special Education Teachers	General Education Teachers
0	32.1	18.7
1-2	42.9	53.3
3, 4, or 5	17.9	24.0
6 or more	7.1	4.0

Table 12

*Valid percent of PD sessions on outcomes*

Number of Sessions	Special Education Teachers	General Education Teachers
0	14.3	13.2
1-2	46.4	46.1
3, 4, or 5	32.1	28.9
6 or more	7.1	11.8

In regard to implementation, fewer special education teachers attended PD sessions on this standard than did general education teachers. The comparison shown indicates 67.9 percent of the special education teacher participants attended PD sessions on implementation whereas 81.3 percent of the general education teacher participants reported attending the same type of sessions. Of the number of sessions attended, the

majority of responses indicated that most of the participants, whether special education or general education, attended only 1-2 sessions on implementation.

The comparison between types of participants for outcomes showed similar responses as shown in Table 12. The majority of responses indicated participants attended one to two PD sessions on outcomes. Special education and general education teacher participants gave similar responses for each of the number of sessions they attended on outcomes. The biggest difference in the overall answers were for those who attended six or more PD sessions for this standard and that was still a small amount, 4.7% with general education teachers having the highest percentage.

The next part for comparison in Research Question 6 involved responses for Research Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the number of special education PD topics and general education topics provided to teachers. The original analysis for this question did show significant results. Table 13 shows how many respondents attended PD sessions on special education topics

Table 13

*Valid percent of special education PD topics*

Number of Sessions	Special Education Teachers	General Education Teachers
0	3.6	50.8
1-2	57.1	41.5
3, 4, or 5	28.6	7.7
6 or more	10.7	0.0

The data indicates the majority of general education teacher participants did not attend any PD sessions on special education topics. Most special education teachers indicated they attended 1-2 sessions on special education topics. A smaller percentage of special education teachers attended 3, 4, or 5 sessions and six more sessions. The highest percentage of attended sessions general education teachers reported attending were 1-2 sessions. A small percentage reported attending 3, 4, or 5 and notably no general education teachers attended 6 or more sessions on special education. Table 14 shows the responses participants regarding attending PD sessions on general education topics.

Table 14

*Valid percent of general education PD topics*

Number of Sessions	Special Education Teachers	General Education Teachers
0	0.0	2.3
1-2	42.3	34.5
3, 4, or 5	34.6	37.9
6 or more	23.1	25.3

The responses from special education participants and general education participants were not vastly different as can be seen in the above table. All of the special education participants reported attending some number of sessions with the most frequent being 1-2 sessions. None of them reported not receiving any general education topic PD sessions, whereas a small number of general education participants reported they did not attend any PD sessions on general education topics. The difference between the general

education teachers who attended 1-2 sessions and those who attended 3, 4, or 5 sessions is 3.4% with general education teachers attending more sessions. There was also a small difference between special education and general education participants on attending 6 or more PD sessions on general education topics general education teachers attending a greater number of sessions.

Responses to Research Question 3 were analyzed to break down degree levels between the two types of participants: special education teacher and general education participants. Additionally, the number of sessions on each of the seven PD standards were compared for special education and general education participants. The data for special education teacher participants are shown below in Figure 6 and general education participant data are shown in Figure 7.

*Figure 6.*

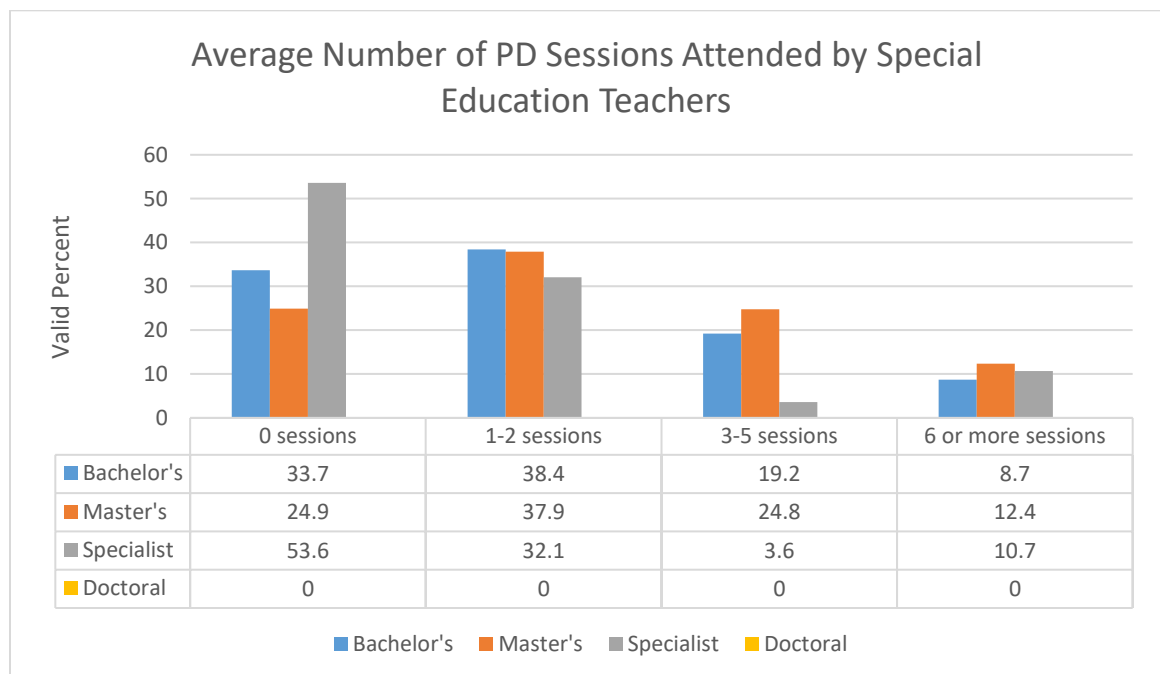
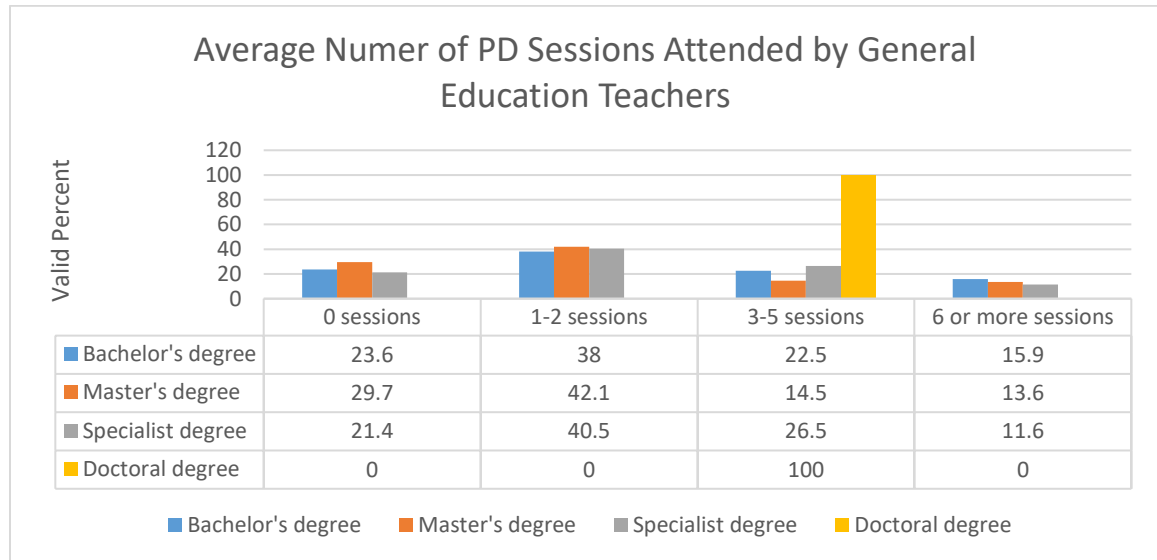


Figure 7.



An average number of sessions attended was taken for each of the seven PD standards and separated by degree level. Special education participants with a bachelor's degree gave similar responses to general education participants in regard to 0 sessions, 1-2 sessions, and 3-5 sessions. The largest difference was for the category of 6 or more sessions. More general education participants reported receiving 6 or more sessions than special education participants. Similar answers between special education and general education participants were reported by teachers who had a master's degree. The largest differences between the two types of participants was reported by those who have a specialist's degree.

More than half of the special education participants with a specialist's degree reported not attending any PD sessions on the seven PD standards whereas the general education participants with a specialist's degree reported only had 21.4 % indicated they did not attend PD sessions on the seven PD standards. The next difference noted between the participants is those with a specialist's degree who reported attending 3-5 PD



sessions. There were more general education participants than special education participants who attended 3-5 PD sessions. Responses provided by a participant with a doctoral degree showed he/she attended 3-5 sessions on the standards and is a general education teacher. There were no special education participants with a doctoral degree who participated in this study.

Participant responses to Research Question 4a were compared between special education and general education participants. The level of satisfaction for PD topics selected by the school principal and PD topics selected by school district personnel were analyzed for comparison between the two type of participants. The comparisons are shown below in Table 15 and Table 16.

Table 15

*Valid percent comparison of satisfaction levels for principal chosen PD topics*

	Special education teachers	General education teachers
Very unsatisfied	3.8	7.3
Unsatisfied	7.7	11.0
Satisfied	76.9	62.2
Very Satisfied	11.5	19.5

Table 16

*Valid percent comparison of satisfaction levels for school district personnel chosen PD topics*

	Special education teachers	General education teachers
Very unsatisfied	4.9	1.7
Unsatisfied	3.3	7.5
Satisfied	34.4	30.6
Very Satisfied	4.9	7.5

Responses from the two types of participants show the majority of special education and general education teachers are satisfied with PD topics whether chosen by the school principal or school district personnel. A small percentage of both types of participants did, however, indicate levels of dissatisfaction. More participants, special education and general education were unsatisfied with school principal- chosen topics than district personnel -chosen topics. Further analysis shows more general education teachers than special education teachers were unsatisfied for topics chosen by the school principal. Overall satisfaction was similar for the two types of participants for principal- chosen and school district personnel-chosen topics. There was a higher level of satisfaction for school principal-chosen topics regardless of type of participant than for school district personnel-chosen topics.

The next research question to be analyzed for comparison between special education and general education teacher participants was Research Question 4b. The

overall satisfaction levels of participants were broken down between special education and general education participants by their degree levels. Satisfaction levels were used for school principal selected PD topics. The comparison is shown in Table 17 and Table 18.

Table 17

*Percent of Special education participant years' experience and satisfaction for principal chosen PD topics*

Level of satisfaction	0-11 months	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	More than 20 years
Very unsatisfied	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0	0.0
Unsatisfied	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	66.7	10.0
Satisfied	0.0	100.0	83.3	83.3	0.0	80.0
Very satisfied	100.0	0.0	16.7	8.3	33.3	10.0

Table 18

*Percent of General education participant years' experience and satisfaction for principal chosen PD topics*

Level of satisfaction	0-11 months	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	More than 20 years
Very unsatisfied	0.0	7.7	3.4	6.7	4.8	13.3
Unsatisfied	16.7	15.4	17.2	13.3	0.0	0.0
Satisfied	50.0	61.5	58.6	70.0	61.9	66.7
Very satisfied	33.3	15.4	20.7	10.0	33.3	20.0

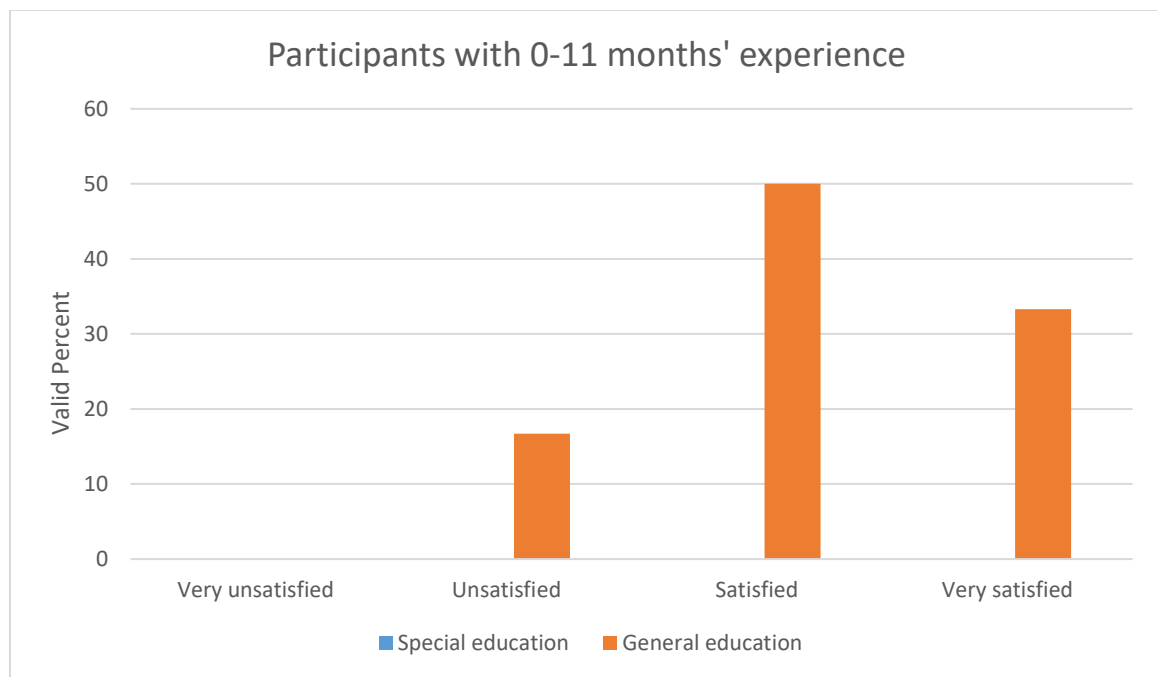
Special education participants in their first year of teaching reported they were very satisfied with school principal-chosen PD topics whereas not all first-year general education teachers reported the same level of satisfaction. The majority of general education participants were satisfied, but there were a small percentage who indicated they were unsatisfied. Participants who had 1-5 years' experience indicated similar levels of satisfaction as those within their first-year teaching. All of the special education participants were satisfied with principal-chosen PD topics whereas 23.1 percent of general education participants were very unsatisfied or unsatisfied. Special education participants with 6-10 years' experience reported they were satisfied and very satisfied with principal chosen PD topics. General education participants with the same amount of experience were mostly satisfied, but 20.6 percent were very unsatisfied or unsatisfied.

A small level of dissatisfaction was reported by special education teachers with 11-15 years' experience, but the majority of those participants did indicate they were satisfied or very satisfied. These responses were somewhat different from the special education teachers' responses with the same years' experience. Twenty percent of the general education participants indicated one of the levels of dissatisfaction, but the majority of responses showed general education teachers were satisfied with the school principal-chosen PD topics. The most noted difference in levels of satisfaction are from special education participants with 16-20 years' experience. The majority of these responses showed the participants were unsatisfied with the PD topics chosen by the school principal. Those results are in contrast with the general education participants' responses that indicated the majority of teachers with 16-20 years' experience were satisfied or very satisfied with the PD topics chosen by the school principal. The last

comparison for this research question involved participants with more than 20 years' teaching experience. Both special education and general education participants reported a majority of them were satisfied or very satisfied.

The next part of the comparison between special education and general education participants involved district personnel-chosen topics for PD sessions. Figures 8 through 13 show the comparison between special education and general education participants for each of the levels of experience.

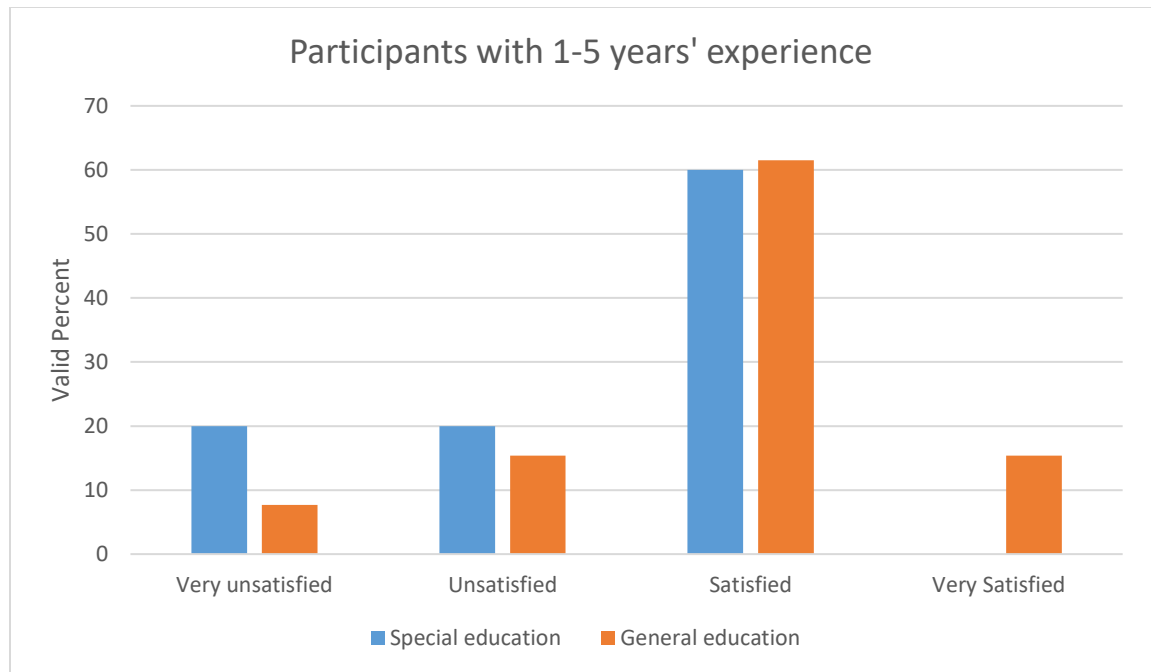
*Figure 8.*



Special education teacher participants with less than one year's experience did not respond to this question. This lack of response was different than general education teachers with the same amount of experience. General education teacher participants with less than a year's experience had an overall satisfaction level of 83.3 percent with

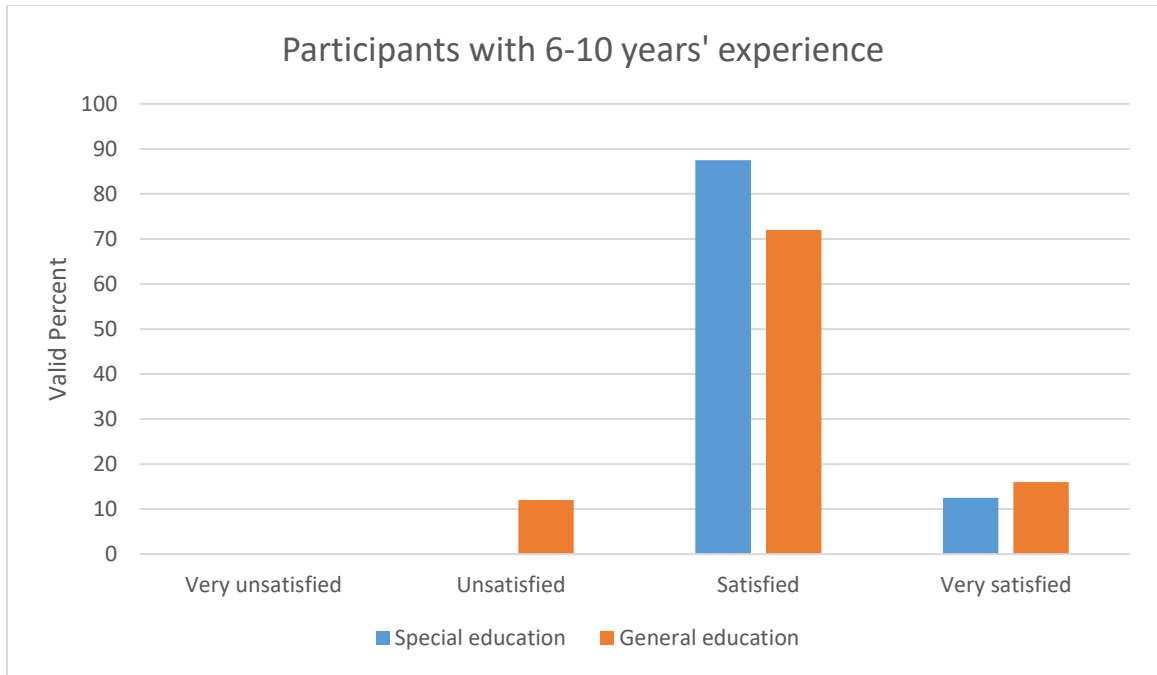
33.3 percent of them indicating they were very satisfied with PD topics chosen by school district personnel.

*Figure 9.*



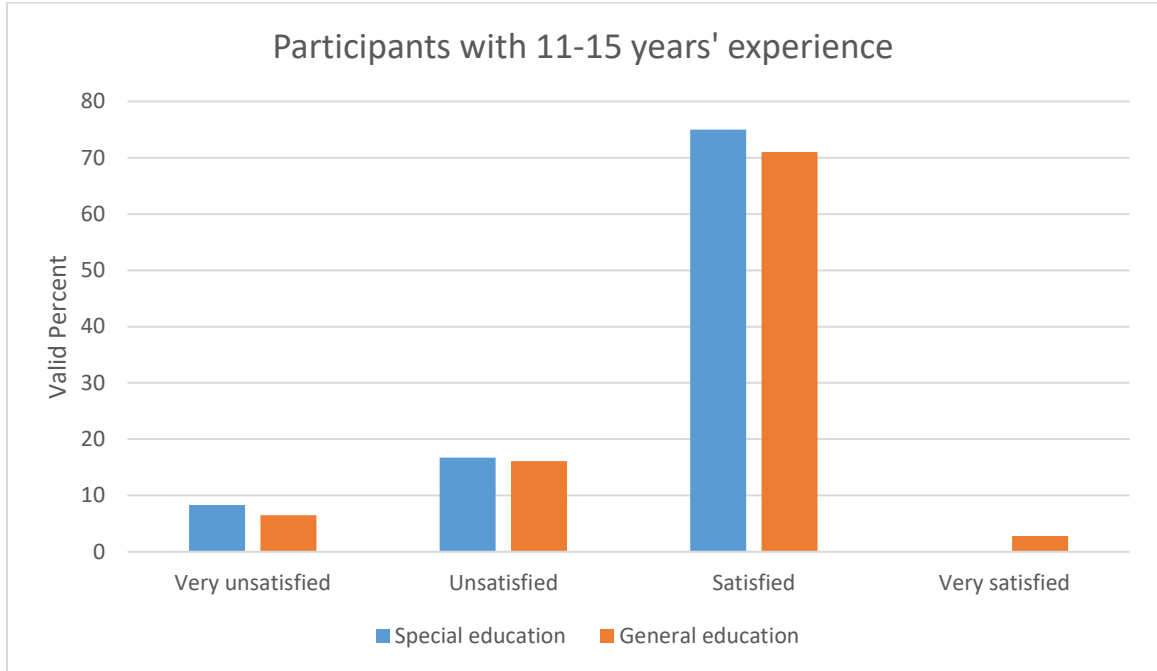
Teacher participants with one to five years' experience whether special education or general education showed the majority were satisfied. Fifteen percent of the general education participants also reported they were very satisfied. One noted similarity for general education teachers that can be seen is the same levels of satisfaction whether the topics were chosen by the school principal or school district personnel. Figure 10 shows the responses for participants with 11-15 years' experience.

Figure 10.



None of the participants indicated they were very unsatisfied with school district personnel- chosen PD topics. None of the special education participants with this level of experience reported they were unsatisfied for this category. As seen in Figure 10 the majority of both types of participants were satisfied and very satisfied.

Figure 11

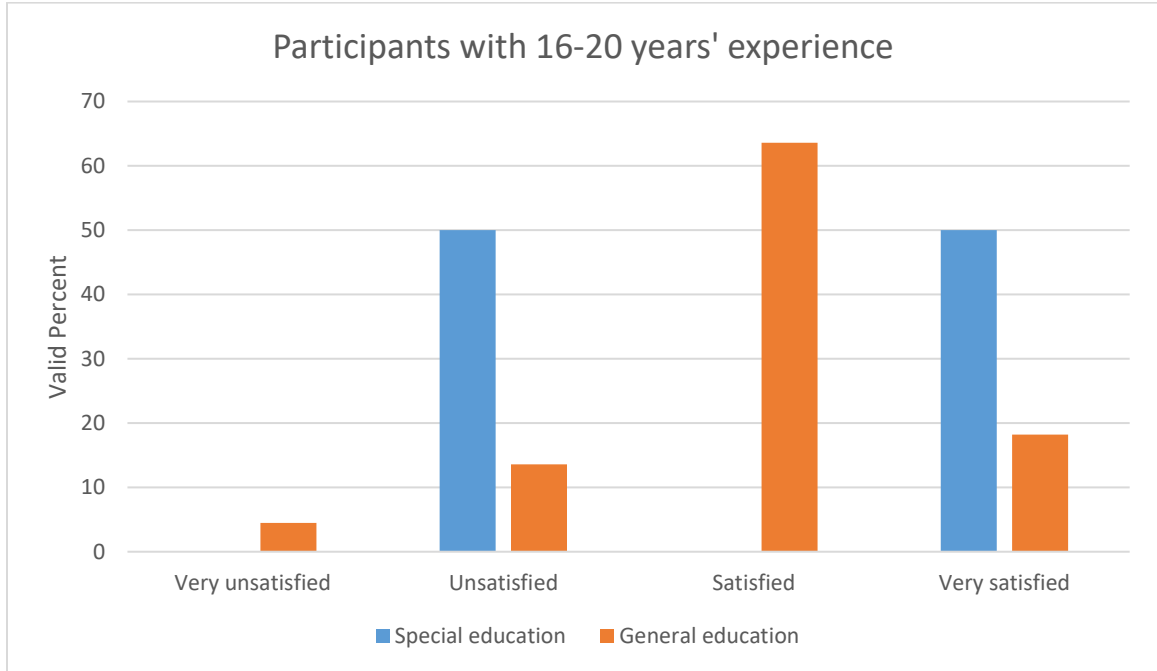


A high level of satisfaction was again reported by participants with 11-15 years' experience. Special education and general education participants reported very similar levels with the exception for participants who reported they were very satisfied with school district personnel chosen PD topics. None of the special education participants reported they were very satisfied, but 75 percent were satisfied.

The next experience range was participants with 16-20 years' experience. That data comparison is shown below in Figure 12.

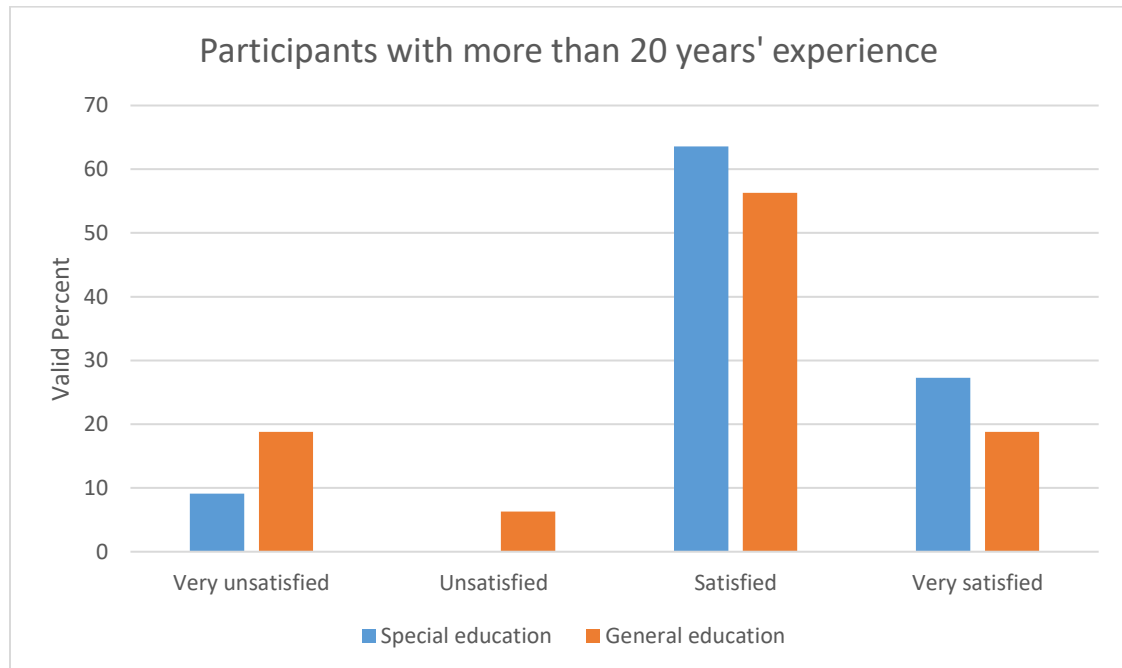


Figure 12



Larger differences between special education and general education participants were reported by teachers with 16-20 years' experience. Fifty percent of special education participants were unsatisfied and fifty percent were very satisfied. This was in contrast to the general education participants with the same level of experience. The majority of general education participants were satisfied with 64.2% of them very satisfied. Figure 13 illustrates the participants with more than twenty years' experience.

Figure 13

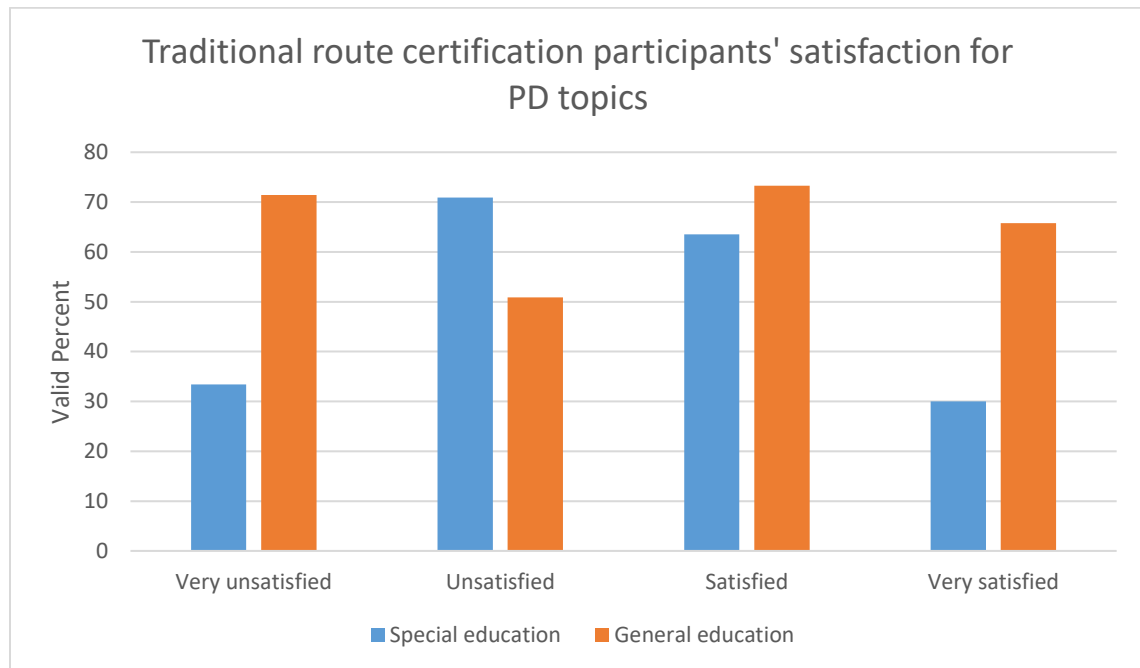


The majority of participants reported they were satisfied with the school district personnel-chosen PD topics. None of the special education participants reported they were unsatisfied, but 27.3 percent of them were very unsatisfied with the chosen PD topics. Satisfaction levels from general education participants were lower overall than special education participants.

The next comparison between special education and general education participants involved responses to Research Question 4c. Participant satisfaction was rated based upon teacher certification route. As with the previous comparison the satisfaction levels used for this analysis were with school principal-chosen PD topics and school district personnel-chosen PD topics. The certification routes analyzed were traditional, alternate route with a general education degree, and alternate route with a non-education degree. An average was taken for school principal-chosen PD topics and

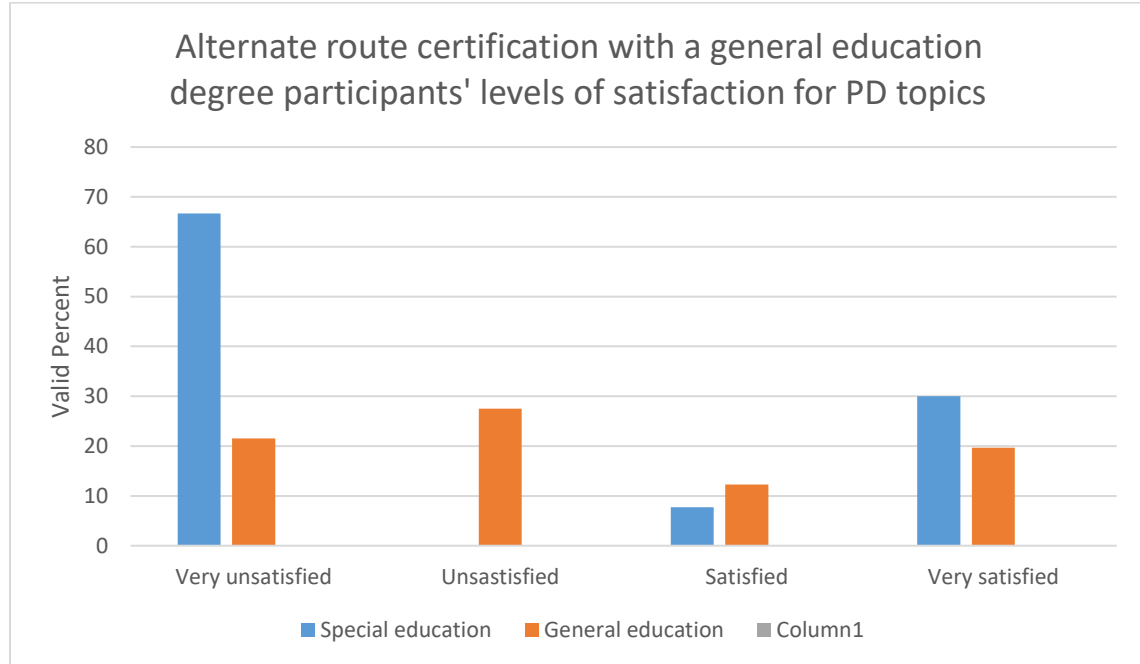
school district personnel-chosen PD topics. Figure 14 shows participants with traditional route certification.

Figure 14



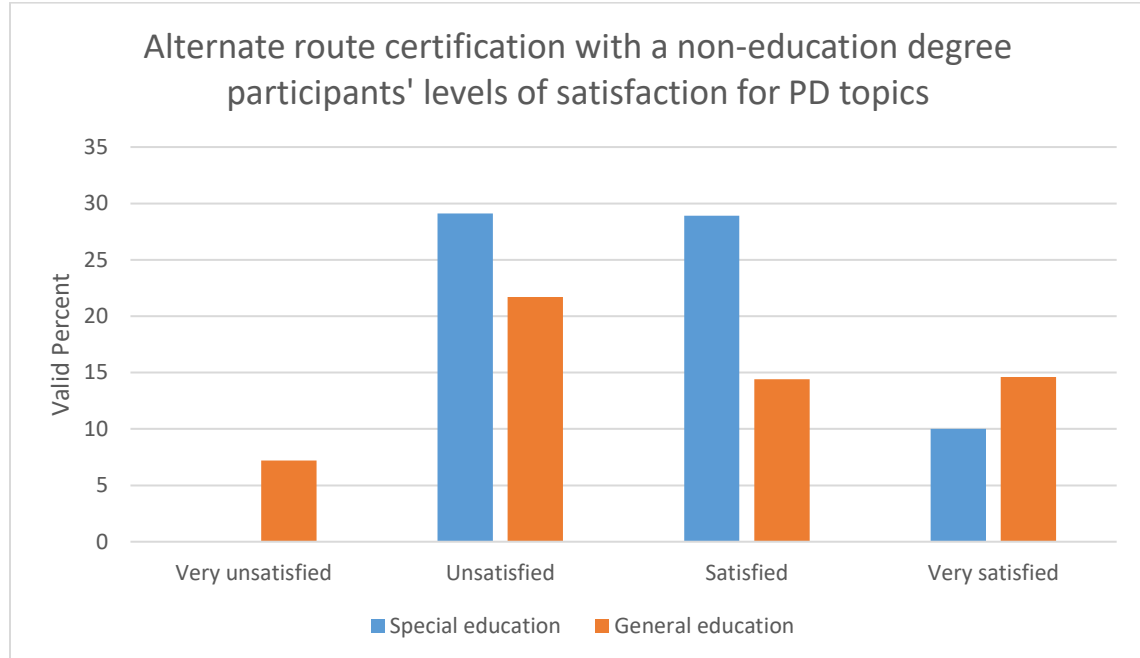
The biggest differences for satisfaction levels between special education and general education participants were those who reported being very unsatisfied and those who reported being very satisfied. Just over 71 percent of general education participants were very unsatisfied compared to only 33.4 percent of special education participants. A similar difference was shown for those participants who were very satisfied. Thirty percent of special education participants were very satisfied while 65.8 percent of general education participants reported the same level of satisfaction. Figure 15 illustrates the average satisfaction levels for participants who obtained alternate route certification with a general education degree.

Figure 15



The data above shows most of the special education participants with this type of alternate route certification were very unsatisfied with the chosen PD topics. The highest level of satisfaction shown for special education participants was 30 percent reporting they were very satisfied. General education participants with this type of alternate route certification had a higher percentage that showed dissatisfaction compared to those who reported they very unsatisfied. The overall dissatisfaction level was 59 percent whereas the overall satisfaction was only 32 percent. Figure 16 shows the satisfaction levels for participants with alternate route certification with a non-education degree.

Figure 16



Special education participants with this type of alternate route certification were very similar for the levels of unsatisfied and satisfied. Twenty-nine percent were unsatisfied and 38.9 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the PD topics. A close look at the data indicates the overall responses for very unsatisfied and unsatisfied were 28.9 percent and the level of satisfied and very satisfied were 29 percent for general education participants.

The last comparison made between special education and general education participants involved how well they utilized the information presented to them in PD sessions. For this analysis the levels of agreement were averaged for utilization of the seven PD standards. The data is shown in Table 18.

Table 19

*Percent of utilization of information presented in PD sessions*

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Special education	4.3	13.3	78.0	4.4
General education	5.2	10.5	65.5	18.8

The data above indicate overall that 17.6 percent of special education participants did not agree that they were utilizing the information presented in PD sessions and 82.4 percent did utilize the information from PD sessions throughout the school year. Overall more general education teachers agreed or strongly agreed to utilizing the information than the special education teacher participants.

#### Summary

In Chapter IV demographic data along with participant responses were analyzed. In some cases, means or medians were reported for the analysis. Crosstab analysis was used to separate special education participant responses from general education participant responses. The implications of the data are discussed in detail in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this study was to highlight the differences in professional development between special education and general education teachers. Special education and general education teachers in public school districts in Mississippi participated in the study. They answered questions about PD standards, topics, number of sessions, and satisfaction levels. Most of the results indicated there were differences in answers between teachers, whether special education or general education, based on degree level, degree route, and years' experience. However, the differences were not significant. The only significant difference was between the number of PD sessions provided on special education topics and general education topics. All teacher participants attended more PD sessions on general education topics than special education topics. The reported answers for all questions were compared for differences between special education and general education teachers. The results from those analyses also showed differences that were not significant.

### Research Question 1

#### *The presence of the seven PD standards during the school year*

Analysis for the reported answers showed special education and general education teachers attended more PDs on data than any of the other six standards for PD. The participants reported the smallest number of sessions attended were on learning design.

*Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).* Participants reported they attended more PD sessions on PLCs than on implementation, resources, leadership, and learning design. The number of attended sessions for PLCs was less than attended sessions related to the standards of data and outcomes. One hundred thirty-six participants did not

indicate how many PD sessions they attended on PLCs during the school year. One possible reason for the lack of response could have been the uncertainty of remembering the number of sessions attended during the previous school year or the presentation of the item on the questionnaire. The non-responding participants may have seen the complexity of the item and wanted to see how many more questions were left until the end. If this were the case, when a participant clicked the navigation arrow on the bottom right of the screen, they were immediately exited from the questionnaire, and their participation was submitted.

*Creating and using leadership opportunities.* A higher percentage of special education and general education teachers reported they did not attend any sessions on leadership opportunities than participants who reported they did attend PD sessions on this standard. One hundred thirty-nine participants did not provide information for this section of item 11 on the questionnaire. This researcher believes this may be due to participants not having a full understanding of the overall meaning of this standard. If participants did not understand the meaning of this PD standard, they were unable to give accurate information regarding any training they may have received. Instead of giving false information, these participants may have chosen to leave it blank. The presentation of this section of item 11 was not hindered in appearance whether shown on a computer or a mobile device.

*Using resources.* The reported answers for this standard indicated the majority of teacher participants who answered this question attended 1-2 PD sessions during the school year. Of the 240 participants who agreed to complete the questionnaire, 137 did not respond to this section on item 11 regarding resources. It is at this point participants



who chose to use a mobile device to complete the questionnaire may have had to scroll over to see the section of item 11. The researcher is uncertain if this limitation prevented participants from responding or if they were unsure as to what “using resources” meant. Another possible explanation for the loss of respondents to this question may have been their lack of memory for the previous year’s PD topics.

*Using data.* More participants attended PD sessions on data than any of the other standards. One hundred thirty-nine participants did not answer this section of item 11. As with the previous PD standard, participants may have been discouraged with the necessary scrolling if they were using a mobile device. Another possible explanation for not answering this section may have been lack of memory. The topic of using data seems self-explanatory to teachers and would not, in this researcher’s opinion, be a possible reason for opting to leave this section blank.

*Appropriate learning design.* This PD standard had the smallest number of attended sessions. The majority of participants reported they did not attend any PD sessions on appropriate learning design. Ninety-seven participants gave information on the number of sessions, yet 143 chose not to respond. The ambiguity of the standard may have been the reason for a lack of response or the limitation of using a mobile device if that were the case for the participants. The researcher does not have the ability to determine what device was used for completion of the questionnaire.

*Implementation of school programs and learning strategies.* Attendance for PD sessions on this standard was more than sessions on resources, leadership and learning design, but less than data, outcomes, and PLCs. One hundred three participants answered this section for item 11. This particular standard is precise in nature. As stated with other

sections for item 11, participants may have had difficulty with the required scrolling if they were using a mobile device. Other limitations may have been recalling the number of sessions from a previous school year.

*Outcomes from benchmarking, classroom testing, and state testing.* The reported number of attended PD sessions concerning this standard was the second highest for the seven PD standards. One hundred thirty- six participants did not provide information on the number of sessions for this PD standard. They may have been limited by a mobile device, lack of memory, or perhaps they simply did not want to answer this item, which was the last one in the questionnaire.

#### Research Question 2

*Is there a significant difference in the number of special education PD topics and general education topics provided to teachers?*

During the school year a significant number of PD sessions are related to general education topics compared to the number of sessions provided on special education topics. Only 117 of the 240 participants answered the question regarding the number of special education topics and general education topics provided to teachers for PD. Lack of memory may have been a factor for some teachers, or they may not have wanted to indicate a lack of topics for fear the questionnaire results may be shared with their school leaders even though all results are anonymous and participants are made aware of that fact.

One interesting part of the responses to this question was that one or two respondents indicated that zero sessions were provided on general education topics. The reasoning for this is unclear, but there may have been a mistake using the drop-down box

on the questionnaire. The researcher is inclined to think this response is not valid because teachers are provided with a minimum of seven professional development days each school year, and most public K-12 schools are comprised of mainly general education teachers. It does not seem plausible that none of the PD sessions provided were related to general education topics.

### Research Question 3

*Is there a difference in the amount of PD related to their degree levels?*

The majority of participants, whether special education or general education, reported their highest degree level as a master's degree. The difference in the number of PD sessions reported by highest degree level was not significant. Special education and general education teachers with only a bachelor's degree attended more PD sessions than participants with a master's degree or a specialist's degree. The participants with a doctoral degree reported a higher percentage for attending PD sessions than any other degree level. However, there were fewer participants with a doctoral degree than with any of the other degree levels.

One hundred sixteen participants indicated their highest degree level. Of the 240 individuals who agreed to participate in the study, 124 chose not to disclose their degree level. There may be many reasons for this, but those are unknown to this researcher. The display of the question on Qualtrics was visible without any scrolling needed to see the answer choices. They were displayed in multiple choice form where the participant only had to select his/her answer. Another possible reason for the missing data on this question could be participants who used a mobile device scrolled past the item without

noticing it. The questionnaire was not designed to prevent participants from skipping questions.

#### Research Question 4a

*Is there a significant difference in teacher satisfaction with PD based on school leader versus district leader chosen PD?*

Special education and general education teachers had similar answers for their levels of satisfaction of who chose their PD during the school year. School leader-chosen PD had a slightly higher satisfaction rating than school district personnel-chosen PD topics.

The missing data from this question may have been due to participants not knowing who actually selected their PD during the 2016-17 school year. In this case, the participants may have decided to not answer to avoid giving false information. It is also possible mobile users found it difficult to navigate through the questionnaire with the drop-down boxes to select an answer. This problem would not have occurred for those participants using a computer.

#### Research Question 4b

*Is there a significant difference in teacher satisfaction with PD based on years' experience as a teacher?*

There was not a significant difference in teacher satisfaction based on years' teaching experience. The experience range of 11-15 years had a higher percentage of satisfaction and participation than the other ranges of 0-11 months, 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 16-20 years, and more than 20 years. As with the previous questions, not all participants provided how long they have been teaching. The reason for this is unclear. Possible

causes could be related to the type of device used to complete the questionnaire or simple user error when clicking on an answer choice. The decline in participants as the years' experience increased after 11-15 years could have been related to teacher attitudes or as stated earlier the participant inadvertently skipping a question by wanting to look ahead. Participants did not have the option to go back after a page was turned and a new question was displayed.

#### Research Question 4c

*Is there a significant difference in teacher satisfaction with PD based on certification route?*

The responses to this question showed no significant differences between certification routes in relation to teacher satisfaction. The highest level of overall satisfaction occurred from teachers with a traditional route degree. The highest overall level of dissatisfaction was from teachers who had a general education degree with an alternate route for certification in special education. One hundred thirty-four participants indicated their type of certification route. There were no known device limitations directly related to participants being able to answer this item on the questionnaire.

#### Research Question 5

*To what degree do teachers utilize information presented in PD sessions?*

The analysis showed more special education and general education teachers agreed or strongly agreed they utilized the information presented in PD sessions than those who disagreed or strongly disagreed. This research question highlighted differences in how participants chose to not answer each part of a question. The lack of responses may have been due to question visibility on mobile devices and participants not

realizing the need to scroll over to see all parts of a question. Another explanation could be the same as for other questions. Some participants may have simply not felt comfortable answering the question. Even though participants are informed their participation is anonymous, they may have felt uneasy answering parts of questions that could have made them look as if they weren't fulfilling their duties to fully use information learned from PD sessions throughout the school year. One other possibility for the missing data could be respondents didn't feel like they had received enough PD on that particular standard in order to give a valid answer.

#### Research Question 6

*For research questions 1 – 5, are there significant differences between responses between special education teachers and general education teachers?*

When analyzing Research Questions 1-5, each of the previous responses to the research questions were separated by special education participant answers and general education participant answers. Most of the data were represented using valid percentages instead of the actual number of participants who chose each answer. The results to each of the analyses indicated there were not significant differences between special education and general education teachers' reported answers.

Missing data may be due to participants not remembering each of the PD sessions during the year, not understanding the intent of provided PD sessions, or not knowing who selected the PD topics. Some of the differences seen between the two type of participants could be attributed to special education teachers not having PD opportunities at the same time as their general education peers. For instance, on PD days special education teachers may be in meetings, whereas general education teachers may have the

opportunity to work in their classrooms. This is only one possible reason for the differences between the two types of participants.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the PD that is provided to special education and general education teachers in regards to special education topics, the amount of PD provided, who selects the PD, and the PD standards. The results showed even though there are differences between special education and general education responses, the differences were not significant. The data indicated PD sessions provided were equitable between special education and general education participants. Special education teachers and general education teachers may not receive PD on identical topics, but their responses to the questionnaire indicated they received similar amounts of PD throughout the school year.

The data from this study was based upon the 2016-2017 school year. This researcher doubts the results would be the same if the data was from the 2019-2020 school year or the current 2020-2021 school year due to COVID-19. Most schools operated via online instruction only for April and May for the 2019-2020 school year. Teacher satisfaction most likely would not have been as high for PD topics and numbers of sessions. Teachers were thrown into teaching situations they were not prepared for at the time. Currently, in Mississippi, schools are providing face-to-face instruction as well as distance learning for students whose parents feel it is best for them to not be on campus this year.

## Recommendations

A recommendation for making sure each of the 7 PD standards are covered during a school year in PD sessions is careful planning before the school year begins. School and district leaders have teachers for at least 7 PD days. Each PD day could have content that is related to a different PD standard. In this way, teachers are gaining useful information related to a variety of topics as well as having a better understanding of the purpose of each PD standard. Teachers need to know why they are receiving PD on a topic and what PD standard relates to it.

One recommendation for special education topics versus general education topics would be to compare specific PD topics provided to special education and general education teachers. This study highlighted special education topics and looked at how much PD general education teachers received on topics such as IEPs, least restrictive environment, and assessment. Useful information could be obtained for future PDs when looking at topics that are specific to the type of teacher, whether special education or general education. This researcher must note that special education teachers represent a much smaller population than general education teachers, but the need is just as great in order to meet the needs of the teachers regardless of their teaching assignment.

Special education teachers need all of the general education PD topics, but they also need the PD provided to them on policies and procedures that change quite often each year. The significant difference would most likely not change in the amount of special education topics provided during PD sessions, but with strategic planning the topics that are provided can be meaningful for all attendees. Many special education and general education teachers co-exist in the classroom for inclusion services and therefore



need to have the same wealth of knowledge to meet individual needs and maximize student achievement.

The next recommendation addresses PD related to degree levels. Teachers, regardless of degree level, are contracted to attend the 7 PD days during the school year, but teachers with bachelor's degrees tend to seek PD outside of their district through various workshops offered in the state. The data showed teachers with only a bachelor's degree attended more PD sessions than those with a master's degree or specialist's degree. Even though this is typically due to needing CEUs for their license that isn't fully known by this researcher. The study did not specifically ask teachers how much PD they sought outside of their required days. The teacher participants with a master's degree and specialist's degree had fewer reported PD sessions attended, but since they have fewer required CEUs for license renewal that information was somewhat expected. This researcher's recommendation is to survey the teachers to see how many are seeking PD opportunities out of district. The information gathered from all teachers could help drive topics for PLC meetings during the week. Teachers could share what they have learned in their outside PD sessions.

Teacher satisfaction based on who chose the PD topics, school leader or district personnel, was not vastly different as reported in the previous chapter. The only recommendation to address these results would be to let the teachers know who has chosen the PD topics. Many times, teachers do not know if the topic is a district-wide focus or particular to one school. Teachers generally do not know how much leeway school leaders are given for selecting PD topics on their campus.

A recommendation to address differences in satisfaction related to years' experiences is to once again survey the teachers for their specific PD needs for the school year. Teachers who have been in the classroom for less than 11 years may have different needs than those who have been teaching for 12 or more years. The PD topics can be addressed by tailoring PLC meetings each week to the needs of the teachers. Teachers with more experience could lead the meetings and provide valuable insight for novice teachers. Conversely, novice teachers can provide valuable information about new strategies and activities that veteran teachers have not learned.

Recommendations for teachers to address the different degree routes involves mentoring. Teachers who have chosen to teach special education, but have an alternate route have not had the instruction on policies and procedures that traditional route special education teachers obtain during college classes. They also do not have the background on various disabilities, how to write an IEP, how to provide accommodations and modifications, or the importance of a Least Restrictive Environment. Alternate route teachers need to be partnered with a traditional route special education teacher for at least one school year. They need to have regular weekly meetings to cover every aspect of being a special education teacher.

Another recommendation addresses the utilization of information presented in PD sessions. This researcher believes teacher participants would be better equipped to properly answer a question concerning utilization of PD topics if they know the purpose of the PD topic along with how it addresses their needs in the classroom. When a teacher doesn't know the purpose and why it is beneficial he is less likely to understand whether he is implementing it or not in the classroom.

In closing this researcher's belief is that all PD should be tailored to the needs of the teacher regardless of teaching assignment. The information in this study proved useful to show the opinions of teachers regarding PD and to highlight the need for more targeted PD offered to teachers. PD is a tool that can be powerful when it is used the correct way and for the correct audience.

## APPENDIX A– Approval Letter



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | [www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board](http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board)

### NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.  
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 17092603

PROJECT TITLE: Professional Development and Special Education

PROJECT TYPE: Doctoral Dissertation

RESEARCHER(S): Angela Gill

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology

DEPARTMENT: Educational Research and Administration

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 09/28/2017 to 09/27/2018

**Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.**

**Institutional Review Board**

## APPENDIX B – Survey Instrument

### *Professional Development and Special Education*

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#### Start of Block: Block 3

Q17 Professional Development and Special Education The overall goal of the project is to ascertain how well the professional development needs of general education and special education teachers are being met. The researcher will analyze data to determine if significant differences occur between general education and special education teachers' responses as well as teachers who are considered traditional route versus alternative route certification.

Participation involves the completion of an online questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. All participants will be anonymous.

The potential benefits from the study would be increased knowledge of the needs and perceptions of general education and special education teachers in regard to their professional development experiences. The results of this study could be helpful to school leaders, district leaders, and teachers by identifying how useful professional development sessions are for the teachers and how to best meet their training needs. Participants will not be compensated for completing the questionnaire.

There are no known or potential risks to participants. The only inconvenience would be taking the time required to complete the questionnaire.

All participants will be anonymous through the use of Qualtrics. No identifying

information is asked and only aggregated data will be used in this study.

This project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations.

Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the IRB at 601-266-5997. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Any questions about the research should be directed to the Principal Investigator Angela.Hill@usm.edu

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Q18 I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate.

- ☐ Yes. I agree to participate. (1)
- ☐ I choose not to participate. (2)

*Skip To: End of Survey If I have read and understand the above information and agree to participate. = I choose not to participate.*

Q1 Select your gender.

- ☐ Male (1)
  - ☐ Female (2)
-

Q2 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Bachelor's degree (1)
  - ☐ Master's degree (2)
  - ☐ Specialist's degree (3)
  - ☐ Doctoral degree (4)
- 

Q3 What type of certification did you obtain for your teaching license?

- ☐ Traditional route through my degree major (1)
- ☐ Alternate route with a general education degree (2)
- ☐ Alternate route with a non-education degree (3)

Q4 How many years' experience do you have as a teacher (counting the current school year)?

- ☐ 0-11 months (1)
  - ☐ 1-5 years (2)
  - ☐ 6-10 years (3)
  - ☐ 11-15 years (4)
  - ☐ 16-20 years (5)
  - ☐ More than 20 years (6)
-



Q5 What grade level(s) do you currently teach? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Kindergarten (1)
  - ☐ 1st grade (2)
  - ☐ 2nd grade (3)
  - ☐ 3rd grade (4)
  - ☐ 4th grade (5)
  - ☐ 5th grade (6)
  - ☐ 6th grade (7)
  - ☐ 7th grade (8)
  - ☐ 8th grade (9)
  - ☐ 9th grade (10)
  - ☐ 10th grade (11)
  - ☐ 11th grade (12)
  - ☐ 12th grade (13)
-

Q6 Which best describes your school leadership?

- ☐ One principal (1)
- ☐ A principal and an assistant principal (2)
- ☐ A principal and a lead teacher (3)
- ☐ A principal and more than one assistant principal (4)

Q7 Which best describes your current teaching assignment?

- ☐ Special education teacher (1)
- ☐ General education teacher (2)

Q8 For the professional development sessions you attended during the 2016-2017 school year

Who selected the topics	Total Number of Sessions	Total Number of Hours	Overall Level of Satisfaction
Topics Selected by the School Principal (1)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)
Topics Selected by District-Level Personnel (2)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)

Q9 What were the type of topics?

	Total Number of Sessions	Total Number of Hours	The Most Current Was Conducted By...	Overall Most PD Sessions Were Conducted By...
General Education Topics (1)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Peer Teacher (1 ... External Facilitator (5)	▼ Peer Teacher (1 ... External Facilitator (5)
Special Education Topics (2)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Peer Teacher (1 ... External Facilitator (5)	▼ Peer Teacher (1 ... External Facilitator (5)

Q10 How much professional development have you received on the following topics?	Total Number of Sessions	Total Number of Hours
Least Restrictive Environment (1)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)
Special Education regulations (2)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)
Individualized Educational Plans (3)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)
Instructional strategies related to implementation of MS-CCR standards (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)

-----

Q11 For the 7 categories listed below you are asked five questions that involve how much professional development, your degree of satisfaction, and to what degree you implement each of the standards

**Consider ONLY the last school year (2016-2017)**

Professional learning communities (1)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Strongly Disagree (1 ... Strongly Agree (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)
Creating and using leadership opportunities (2)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Strongly Disagree (1 ... Strongly Agree (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)
Using resources (3)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Strongly Disagree (1 ...	▼ Very Unsatisfied	▼ Very Unsatisfied

			Strongly Agree (4)	(1 ... Very Satisfied (4)	(1 ... Very Satisfied (4)
Using data (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Strongly Disagree (1 ... Strongly Agree (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)
Appropriate learning designs (5)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Strongly Disagree (1 ... Strongly Agree (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)
Implementation of school programs and learning strategies (6)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Strongly Disagree (1 ... Strongly Agree (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)
Outcomes from benchmarking, classroom testing, and state testing (7)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ 0 (1 ... 6 or More (4)	▼ Strongly Disagree (1 ... Strongly Agree (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)	▼ Very Unsatisfied (1 ... Very Satisfied (4)

## APPENDIX C – Letters of Consent

### **BAY ST. LOUIS – WAVELAND SCHOOL DISTRICT**

200 NORTH SECOND STREET  
BAY ST. LOUIS, MISSISSIPPI 39520

*Vikki Landry*  
*Superintendent*

*Telephone (228) 467-6621*

*Cherie Labat*  
*Assistant Superintendent*

*Kristen Ladner*  
*Assistant Superintendent*


*Fax: (228) 467-1230*

Angela Gill has requested permission to collect data in the Bay St. Louis – Waveland School District. This letter gives her permission to survey the teachers in the district for her study related to professional development and special education topics. The data collection will involve general education and special education teachers in grades K-12 at the following schools: Bay High, Bay Middle, North Bay, and Waveland.

Questionnaires will be administered online and will not interfere with classroom instruction. I understand that no participant, school, or district will be named. I also understand I can request a copy of the results of the study and participation is voluntary. Participants are able to stop the questionnaire at any time without penalty.

Signed,

  
Superintendent or Education (or Designee)

  
Date

## FOREST MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

♦ 325 Cleveland Street ♦ Forest, Mississippi 39074 ♦  
♦ Office: (601) 469-3250 ♦ FAX: 601-469-3101 ♦

Dr. Joseph White  
*Superintendent*

March 5, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

Angela Gill a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) has requested permission to collect data in the Forest Municipal School District for her dissertation. The overall purpose of her study is to determine if school leaders are meeting the professional development needs of their teachers in regards to special education information and topics. The results from her study could help school leaders plan and implement professional development related to special education topics for teachers.

This letter gives her permission to survey the teachers in the district for her study related to professional development and special education topics. The data collection will involve general education and special education teachers in grades K-12 at the following schools:

- Forest Elementary School
- Hawkins Middle School
- Forest High School

Questionnaires will be administered online and will not interfere with classroom instruction. I understand that no participant, school, or district will be named. I also understand I can request a copy of the results of the study and participation is voluntary. This survey is strictly voluntary and participants are able to stop the questionnaire at any time without penalty. Angela Gill has my permission to contact school principals within the Forest Municipal School District to make all the necessary arrangements to begin her survey.

Respectfully,



Joseph White, Ph.D.



POST OFFICE BOX 288  
LAUREL, MS 39441  
PHONE: (601) 649-6391  
FAX: (601) 649-6398

March 6, 2017

Angela Gill has requested permission to collect data in the Laurel School District. This letter gives her permission to survey the teachers in the district for her study related to professional development and special education topics. The data collection will involve general education and special education teachers in grades K-12 at the following schools:

See attachment:

Questionnaires will be administered online and will not interfere with classroom instruction. I understand that no participant, school, or district will be named. I also understand I can request a copy of the results of the study and participation is voluntary. Participants are able to stop the questionnaire at any time without penalty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chuck Benigno".

Dr. Chuck Benigno, Superintendent

[www.laurelschools.org](http://www.laurelschools.org)



**Schools and Building Principals**

<b>Laurel High School (9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup>)</b> 1100 West 12 <sup>th</sup> Street Laurel, MS 39440 Phone: 601/649-4145 or 649-4146 (Main Campus) Phone: 601/649-4110 or 601/649-4132 (9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Campus)  Cafeteria: 601/426-6426 (Main Campus) Fax: 601/426-2347 (Main Campus) Fax: 601/649-4156 (9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Campus)  Counselors	Jeannine Agee, Supervising Principal 10 – 12 <sup>th</sup> Leander Bridges, Assistant Principal LHS Main – 11 <sup>th</sup> grade Jaymar Jackson, 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Supervising Principal Larry Rayburn, Assistant Principal LHS Main – 10 <sup>th</sup> grade Ryakko Price, CTE Director  Tarsha Brown, MSIS Clerk/Guidance/Registrar Kerry Duke, CTE Secretary Tonya Lewis, Office 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade Academy Shaniqua Richardson, Attendance Clerk Kelvin Coleman, Roslyn Haskin Leigh McCarty (CTE) Tamika Owens David Lewis, Director Marilyn Graham, Secretary
<b>Laurel Education Center (Alternative School)</b> 795 South 19 <sup>th</sup> Avenue Laurel, MS 39440 Phone: 601/649-5195 Fax: 601/649-2991	
<b>Laurel Middle School (6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>)</b> 1600 Grandview Drive Laurel, MS 39440 Phone: 601/428-5312 or 426-2396 Fax: 601/426-6775 Cafeteria: 601/426-2176  Counselors	Leah McCullum, Supervising Principal Tracie Leo-McNair, Assistant Prin. Zachary Murphy, Assistant Principal  Alana Bender, Secretary/MSIS Nakailya Pickering, Attendance Clerk Keona Wilkins, Office Manager Sandi Creel, Latrice Daniels
<b>Maddox Elementary School (5K – 5<sup>th</sup>)</b> 600 South 16 <sup>th</sup> Avenue Laurel, MS 39440 Phone: 601/428-1880 or 649-8573 Fax: 601/649-2954 Cafeteria: 601/428-7188	Angelia Lott, Principal  Minnie George, Secretary/Clerk Melissa Brown, MSIS Contact Tiffany Ridgeway, Counselor
<b>Mason Elementary School (5K – 5<sup>th</sup>)</b> 2726 Old Bay Springs Road Laurel, MS 39440 Phone: 601/428-0393 or 428-1585 Fax: 601/649-2751 Cafeteria: 601/428-8743	Dr. Ken Culpepper, Principal Rhonda Holloman, Assistant Principal LaKisha Copeland, Secretary Margo Robinson, MSIS Contact Emily Sullivan, Secretary Brooke Warren, Counselor
<b>Nora Davis Magnet School (4K – 5<sup>th</sup>)</b> 1305 Martin Luther King Avenue Laurel, MS 39440 Phone: 601/428-7782 or 428-7446 Fax: 601/425-3692 Cafeteria: 601/428-8194	Tammy Griffith, Principal  Jasmine Gressett, Secretary  Lanita House, Secretary Janet Tucker, Counselor
<b>Oak Park Elementary School (4K – 5<sup>th</sup>)</b> 1205 Queensburg Avenue Laurel, MS 39440 Phone: 601/428-5046 or 428-7958 Fax: 601/649-6342 Cafeteria: 601/428-0346	Tito Lanier, Principal  Patricia Gates, MSIS Contact Ramona Benson, Secretary Jill Chambers, Secretary/Attendance

MDE – 601/359-3513 Educator License – 601/359-3483



Jimmy Weeks, Superintendent

March 6, 2017

Angela Gill has requested permission to collect data in the Lee County School District. This letter gives her permission to survey the teachers in the district for her study related to professional development and special education topics. The data collection will involve general education and special education teachers in grades K-12 at the following schools:

Saltillo Elementary	Verona Elementary
Saltillo Primary	Plantersville Middle
Saltillo High	Shannon Elementary
Guntown Middle	Shannon Primary
Mooreville Elementary	Shannon High School
Mooreville Middle	Mooreville High School

Shannon Middle

Questionnaires will be administered online and will not interfere with classroom instruction. I understand that no participant, school, or district will be named. I also understand I can request a copy of the results of the study and participation is voluntary. Participants are able to stop the questionnaire at any time without penalty.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Weeks, Superintendent

1280 College View Drive, Tupelo, Mississippi 38804 · P.O. Box 832, Tupelo  
Mississippi 38802-0832 · (662) 841-9144 · Fax (662) 680-6012



## Moss Point School District

### ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

4924 Church Street, Moss Point, MS 39563  
(228) 475-4558

[www.mosspointschools.org](http://www.mosspointschools.org)

March 10, 2017

Angela Gill has requested permission to collect data in the Moss Point School District. This letter gives her permission to survey the teachers in the district for her study related to professional development and special education topics. The data collection will involve general education and special education teachers in grades K-12 at the following schools:

Kreole Primary Elementary, Escatawpa Upper Elementary, Magnolia Middle School, and Moss Point High School.

Questionnaires will be administered online and will not interfere with classroom instruction. I understand that no participant, school, or district will be named. I also understand I can request a copy of the results of the study and participation is voluntary. Participants are able to stop the questionnaire at any time without penalty.

Sincerely,

  
Assistant Superintendent

3/10/17  
Date





# New Albany Schools

Jackie Ford

Superintendent

301 Highway 15 North ~ New Albany, Mississippi 38652  
Phone 662-534-1800 ~ Fax 662-534-3608 ~ Email jford@newalbany.k12.ms.us

Angela Gill has requested permission to collect data in the New Albany School District. This letter gives her permission to survey the teachers in the district for her study related to professional development and special education topics. The data collection will involve general education and special education teachers in grades K-12 at the following schools:

New Albany Elementary School  
New Albany Middle School  
New Albany High School

Questionnaires will be administered online and will not interfere with classroom instruction. I understand that no participant, school, or district will be named. I also understand I can request a copy of the results of the study and participation is voluntary. Participants are able to stop the questionnaire at any time without penalty.

Signed,

Jackie Ford

3-6-17

Superintendent or Education (or Designee)

Date

Lecia Stubblefield  
Director

Suzanne Coffey  
Business Administrator

THE NEW ALBANY PUBLIC SCHOOLS DO NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF RACE, GENDER, RELIGION, NATIONAL ORIGIN, AGE, OR HANDICAPPING CONDITIONS AND ARE AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER.

## Pearl River County School District

ALAN LUMPKIN  
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Angela Gill has requested permission to collect data in the Pearl River County School District. This letter gives her permission to survey the teachers in the district for her study related to professional development and special education topics. The data collection will involve general education and special education teachers in grades K-12 at the following schools:

Pearl River Central Lower Elementary

Pearl River Central Upper Elementary

Pearl River Central Middle School

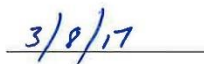
Pearl River Central High School

Questionnaires will be administered online and will not interfere with classroom instruction. I understand that no participant, school, or district will be named. I also understand I can request a copy of the results of the study and participation is voluntary. Participants are able to stop the questionnaire at any time without penalty.

Signed,



Superintendent of Education (or Designee)



Date



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