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PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH EXAMINING ADMINISTRATORS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERCEPTION, EXPERIENCE & KNOWLEDGE OF THE MISSISSIPPI SPECIAL EDUCATION GROWTH RUBRIC

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by

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ABSTRACT

In the current era of accountability, public school administrators' responsibilities may include evaluating special education teachers and providing them with feedback and support to improve their effectiveness. The problem that exists is that administrators who do not have a background in special education are charged with the responsibility of evaluating special education teachers, resulting in special education teachers not getting the support or feedback necessary to improve their instructional practice.

In addition to administrators not having the background knowledge necessary to effectively evaluate and support special education teachers, the problem of developing an effective evaluation model to evaluate special education teachers also exists. Despite the vast majority of research and literature that exist on developing effective evaluation models for general education teachers, there is a limited amount of research conducted on effective evaluation models for special education teachers and how special education teachers benefited from their evaluation process. In this study, I asked a) how special education teachers and administrators perceived the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric (MSEGR)? b) How administrators perceived their ability to provide special education teachers with feedback and strategies to improve their effectiveness? c) and how special education teachers perceived their evaluation and evaluation results.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my grandson Myles Xavier Henderson, who kept me motivated through the entire process. To my father, John Pittman Sr., I wish you were here to share this moment with me and to My grandparents William and Edna Pittman who loved me unconditionally. Finally, my grandmother, Elvera C. Potts, who would always encourage me to do my very best and in those quite moments I can still hear her say “Always walk like you’re going somewhere, and you can be anything that you wanted to be if you put your mind to it”, then sealed that message with a kiss. Each one of you has been instrumental in shaping me into the person that I am today, and I love you for it.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIPP	Context, Input, Process, Product
ESSA	Every Student Succeed Act
IEP	Individual Education Plan
MDE	Mississippi Department of Education
MPGS	Mississippi Professional Growth System
MSEGR	Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric
MSTAR	Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
RTT	Race to the Top
SLD	Specific Learning Disabilities
STEC	Statewide Teacher Evaluation Committee
SWD	Students with Disabilities
VAMs	Valued Added Models

CHAPTER I -INTRODUCTION

For the last two decades, the concept of holding teachers accountable has been said to be the key to boost teacher quality and student achievement. “The key accountability assumption here is that enhanced teacher education quality depends on systematic and vigilant public evaluation and monitoring of outcomes related to teacher education institutions, programs, and teacher candidates” (Chochran- Smith et al, 2017, p. 572). In the current era of accountability, there is a need for teachers to be effectively evaluated using an evaluation instrument that lends itself to professional growth and development. Generally speaking, performance evaluations are a part of everyday educational culture in which teachers are judged by what they value most about their profession. For decades, teacher evaluation instruments have proven to be an inconsistent process across the United States, more specifically in Mississippi. Teachers and the quality of instruction that they provide are the most influential factors on student learning and achievement. Therefore, teachers not only need to be evaluated by an effective evaluation instrument, but they should also be evaluated by an evaluator who is well versed in using the evaluation instrument, one who understand special education teachers’ responsibilities, one who can provide immediate evidence-based feedback and professional development opportunities (Hunt et al.,2016).

Teacher effectiveness and the ability to improve upon it has been an ongoing topic in the United States for the last several decades. As school districts face continuing pressures and challenges from community leaders and legislative initiatives, such as Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA), No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, the need

to develop a more rigorous and effective evaluation instrument for teachers has become critical for school districts. If educational leaders are going to be successful in promoting teacher growth and development, there is a need to develop an evaluation instrument that is more effective than the current teacher evaluation instruments. There is also a need to have school administrators who can provide special education teachers with meaningful, reliable, and useful evaluations (Aramburo & Rodl, 2020). U.S. Federal laws have authorized, and re-authorized initiatives aimed at improving teacher's effectiveness to promote student's academic achievement. Based in Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA,) to receive funds, states and school districts are required to focus on educational accountability (Skinner, 2022). Because of ESSA's educational accountability, educators have worked tirelessly to find ways to improve teacher's performance to increase students' knowledge. Marzano (2010), stated that the only predictor of an effective teacher is success in the teacher's classroom. So therefore, schools and schools' districts must be intentional when determining what is an effective teacher and just as intentional when measuring their effectiveness.

By the 1980s, teacher evaluation instruments were widely criticized, misunderstood, and developed through trial and error (Marzano et al., 2011). Soar et al., (1983), stated that administrators evaluated teachers based on personal characteristics such attendance, patience and empathy to determine their effectiveness along with student achievement. Both methods were criticized because neither of these methods yielded the type of evaluation data that would improve the effectiveness of the teacher. It was then, administrators decided to directly measure their teacher's quality of teaching.

This method was also criticized due to the “rating scale lacking the minimum properties necessary for accurately measuring the performance of the teacher, rating scale lack validity, and the rating scales were highly susceptible to the halo effect” (Soar et al.,1983, p.243). The halo effect occurs when administrators rate teachers more favorable due to their positive relation with the teacher. Administrators cannot continue to measure teacher effectiveness by using meager observation protocols that are limited at enabling administrators to provide useful information to teachers. Measuring teacher effectiveness by using strategies described above has resulted in many states developing their own teacher evaluation instruments to judge the effectiveness of their teachers. Other issues that surround status quo teacher evaluation instruments is the difficulty they present in differentiating the evaluation of a general education teacher and the evaluation of a special education teacher.

As states, school districts, and community leaders delve into ways to evaluate general education teachers efficiently and effectively, they must also consider ways to effectively evaluate special educators. Evaluating a special educator has become a very salient topic for school administrators, especially for high school administrators. High school administrators often rely on classroom observations and student performance in subject area tests, which quantify how much student have learned, and Value-added models (VAMs), as a way to gauge the effectiveness of their teachers. VAMs, within themselves, are not useful predictors of teacher effectiveness because they are used to predict students’ achievement over a period of time (Amrein-Beardsley & Geiger, 2020). Administrators often use VAMs as a predictor because VAMs are based on the belief that

student achievement on standardized tests are a direct reflection of the teacher's effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2012). Special educators do not teach subject area courses, so the use of VAMs will not be beneficial for evaluating special educators. Therefore, administrators must rely on their knowledge of special education, classroom observations, student's growth and academic performance to evaluate special educators.

Special educators' roles and responsibilities do not allow them to be evaluated using VAMs. Instead, administrators must have an adequate understanding of the unique roles and responsibilities of special educators to observe and evaluate them in a manner that would be beneficial to a special educator's growth and development. Marzana (2013), conducted a study by asking participating educators if evaluation models should be used to measure or develop teacher effectiveness. The vast majority of the participants agreed that both are equally important. Marzano believes that administrators must understand that evaluations can serve as a way to document teacher effectiveness and for the development of teachers, by providing them with useful feedback for professional growth and development. In order for administrators to provide such services, they must possess a pedagogical background and have the ability to be an empathic consultant in order to provide both general educators and special educators with constructive and valid feedback. Current research suggests that both special educators as well as general educators who receive a high level of support from their administrators are more confident with the academic instruction in which they provide (Bettini et al., 2016).

Bettini et al. (2016), believed that there are three factors that influence teachers work behavior, "(a) personal factors, including one's own belief and characteristics; (b)

social factors, including communication with others in a social system; and (c) situational constraints that surround a role, such as assigned responsibilities, schedules, and resources. Bettini et al. (2016), stated that "these three factors do not occur in isolation." As an example, in the field of education, social interactions with administration that communicate support may influence a special education teacher's belief about his or her capacity to fulfill assigned responsibilities. Special education teachers' prior knowledge and experience is also likely to influence the social system, as others may choose to provide more or less support depending on their perception of the special education teacher's knowledge and skill. (p.177)

General education teachers and special educators share some common educational responsibilities, but there is a significant difference between the two roles. Federal laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), require special educators to abide by strict legal guidelines to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Special educators are tasked with preparing and executing individualized lessons for students with disabilities, they are required but not limited to writing students' Individual Education Plans (IEP), writing Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), progress monitor students' academics and behaviors, collaborate with general education teachers, as well as communicating regularly with parents, and administrator about student's progress and most importantly, meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities. The ultimate responsibility of a special educator is to ensure the success of children with specific learning disabilities (SLD). A reflection of this success should be reflected in the students' academic and behavioral performance.

Administrators' observations remain the primary source of data collected when evaluating teachers. Tantamount to creating a valid and reliable teacher evaluation instrument for special educators, administrators must also be able to understand the role and responsibilities of a special educator and how to use the evaluation instrument effectively. Administrators must understand the specialized classroom strategies special educators use in order to provide special education teachers with evidence-based feedback for teaching students with disabilities.

Evaluating special education teachers poses unique challenges, mainly due to the complex nature of their roles and responsibilities. The lack of understanding by administrators to evaluate special education teachers efficiently and effectively may cause special education teachers to feel that they are not valued in the teaching profession. Accountability and evaluations go hand and hand, to ensure that teachers are held accountable to the institutions' established standards, special education teachers must be evaluated effectively (Thomas et al., 2000).

Problem Statement

In the current era of accountability, special educators in Mississippi are being evaluated just as often as general education teachers. In the state of Mississippi, educators can be evaluated by administrators or educators who have completed the requirements specified by the Mississippi Department of Education (Mississippi Department of Education, 2021). Special educators and general educators are evaluated using the same four predetermined domains. The domains are as following:

Domain I: Lesson Design

Domain II: Student Understanding

Domain III: Culture and Learning Environment

Domain IV: Professional Responsibilities

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2019)

Administrators who evaluate teachers are expected to use the Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric (MSEGR). General educators and special educators share some of the same responsibilities, but there is a unique difference between the two roles. Teacher evaluation instruments should be defensible, fair and accurate. Many universal evaluation instruments do not differentiate the role or responsibilities of teachers, which may yield invalid and unreliable results. The goal of any good teacher evaluation instrument should be to provide evidence that would support teachers in their everyday instructional practice, promote teacher effectiveness and improve the quality of instruction in which they provide. The quality of instruction educators provide is the most important contributor to student learning improvement (Kane & Cantrell, 2012). Most of a student's time is spent in a K-12 setting, so it is imperative that they are taught by an effective teacher, which researchers say will have a long-term effect throughout a student’s educational career (Kane & Cantrell, 2012). Therefore, the instrument by which teachers are evaluated must be relevant across all content areas. While districts and stakeholders continue to focus and delve into ways to improve teacher quality is encouraging, but many evaluations instruments s that are used to evaluate special educators are being criticized for only focusing on how special educators manage their

classrooms (Crawford et al., 2013). Subsequently, there are still a number of concerns surrounding the effectiveness of evaluation instruments used to evaluate special education teachers.

Administrators, or the evaluating teacher, is another area of concern that must be addressed when evaluating special educators. To what extent does the evaluator, usually the administrator, understand the role and responsibilities of a special educator? Research has shown that typically administrators without a special education background lack the understanding of what goes on in a special education classroom. It is this lack of knowledge that makes it difficult for administrators to be an academic leader for special educators (Backor & Gordon, 2015). It has been reported that teacher quality is at its best when they are supported by administrators who are able to provide strategies and resources to improve effectiveness (Hill & Epps, 2010). Baker and Gordon (2015) reported that there are several studies of administrators that indicate they do not have the knowledge or expertise needed to support their special educators. Studies have reported that there is a lack of special education training in administrators' preparation programs and there is a lack of professional development opportunities for administrators to understand how to evaluate special educators (Hill & Grossman, 2013). This lack of knowledge coupled with a universal teacher evaluation instrument, which may not lend itself to evaluate special educators, may affect administrator's ability to provide special educators reliable and valid scores.

Theoretical Framework

Stufflebeam's Context, Input, Process, and Product evaluation model (CIPP) is the theoretical framework that will guide this study. Stufflebeam (2000), defines evaluation as a systematic approach to evaluate an object of interest; in other words, it measures its merit and/or its worthiness. Operationally, Stufflebeam (2000), stated that:

> "Evaluations are a way to delineate, obtain, report, and apply descriptive and judgmental information about the worthiness or merit of an object of interest to guide decision making, to support accountability, and disseminate effective practice to increase understanding for continuous improvement." (p. 280).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2013) advocated for the need to enhance teacher quality to ensure that all students are taught by highly qualified teachers. "As teacher quality takes center stage in education reform" (Danielson, 2016, p. 12), much attention is paid to the effectiveness of teacher evaluation instruments. Teacher evaluations are at the center of teacher improvement. Unfortunately, many teacher evaluation instruments are inadequate and provide little empirical evidence to accurately measure teacher's performance (Hafen et al., 2014). The Context Input Process Product, (CIPP) evaluation model, if used correctly, will provide an opportunity for systematic feedback to address the needs of the teacher, measure and interpret teacher effectiveness. It is not a model that is used for inquisitions, but instead can guide an examination of ways to improve teacher effectiveness, not to prove teacher ineffectiveness.

The CIPP was created explicitly to identify the strengths and limitations of an evaluation instrument. By moving through each of the four areas, programs can assess

and identify areas of needs. Context identifies why the evaluation model is necessary; Input, refers to the resources needed to develop an effective evaluation model; Process, involves the planning, training, and feedback to assess the planning process of the evaluation, and lastly the Product, which allows for summative judgement to determine whether to continue to use the evaluation model in its current state, modify the evaluation model or to terminate the evaluation model because it has been deemed in-effective (Stufflebeam, 2000).

Purpose of the Problem

Teacher quality and the instruction they provide has been identified as the most influential factor in student academic achievement (Kane & Cantrell, 2012). Teacher evaluations are the most powerful instrument used to evaluate the quality of a teacher. The information obtained from teacher evaluations remains the most useful information for administrators to improve the development of their teachers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the effectiveness of the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric (MSEGR) when evaluating special educators. Marzano (2012) stated that most teacher evaluation systems fail at accurately measuring teacher quality, mainly due to the lack of discrimination between effective and ineffective teachers, as well as the lack of discrimination between special educators and general educators. Furthermore, I was interested in exploring the extent to which administrators without a special education background possess the knowledge to effectively evaluate special educators in order to make a sound judgement of a teacher's effectiveness, and administrators' ability to provide evidence-based strategies for teaching students with specific learning disabilities.

The lack of knowledge in any of these areas could adversely affect the administrator's ability to provide an accurate score of a special educator's performance. Additionally, this study explored special educators' perception about the MSEGR as an evaluation instrument to effectively evaluate special educators based on the pre-established domains and rubric items.

All too often we tend to overlook the human aspect of teacher evaluations. Donaldson & Donaldson (2013) reported that policymakers and school districts put forth extraordinary efforts to ensure that every student is educated by highly qualified teachers, but even the most sound, valid and reliable teacher evaluation instrument by itself cannot ensure that a teacher is highly effective, without considering the human side of the evaluation process. Teachers have reported that the evaluation process is neither respectful nor constructive (Aydin & Aslan, 2016). The study is guided by the following questions.

1. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education perceive the effectiveness of the rubric items and pre-established domains on the Special Education Professional Growth System when addressing the unique job responsibilities of their special educators?
2. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide evidence-based strategies to special educators who teach students with specific learning disabilities to improve their instructional practices?

3. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide immediate feedback to special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities.
4. What are special educators' perceptions of how accurately the Special Education Professional Growth System reflects and captures special educator's effectiveness and capabilities?
5. How do special educators perceive their evaluation and results when being evaluated using the Mississippi Professional Growth System?

Definitions

Special education teacher: For the purpose of this study, a special education teacher or special educator will be defined as a teacher who teaches students with specific learning disability (SLD), which could manifest itself in a student's ability to listen, think, spell, write or do math calculations (U.S. Department of Education).

Teacher perception: For the purpose of this study, teacher perception is the special educators' belief or perception of the effectiveness of Mississippi Professional Growth System and administrators evaluating abilities to evaluate special educators in their particular school setting in relationship to special educators ability to implement evidence base strategies when teaching students with disabilities and special educators ability adhere to federal guidelines that are specific to special educators' roles and responsibilities.

Teacher performance evaluation or Mississippi professional growth system: For the purpose of this study, the Mississippi Profession Growth System will be used as the evaluation instrument. This system involves a formal process by which a school uses predetermined domains to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses. The findings from these evaluations are used to provide feedback to teachers and guide their professional development (U.S. Department of Education).

Teacher effectiveness: For the purpose of this study, teacher effectiveness is the ability to implement practices to improve student learning as well as having the ability to follow federal special education policies and procedures.

Instructional leader: For the purpose of this study, leadership focuses on improving the overall performance of a special educator to improve student achievement.

Validity: Maxwell (2005), defines validity as, "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (p. 106).

Evaluation model: Evaluation Model will be used interchangeably with evaluation instrument. This term describes the process to supply information and feedback to the teachers. This model involves: "information and feedback used for effective practices and offer a pathway for individual growth through professional organizations, common goals, and a supportive learning community" (Mississippi Department of Education Teacher Growth Rubric 2019, p.7).

Justification of Study

The focus of this study was to determine the extent to which administrators, without previous experience in the field of special education, possess the knowledge to

evaluate special educators using the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric (MSEGR), the effectiveness of the pre-determined domains when evaluating special educators and special educators' perception of their evaluation experience is. Evaluating teachers' performance is essential to improving teacher quality. Without teacher evaluations, it will be difficult for special education administrators to know or determine if their special education teachers are living up to the students, administrators, district, or stakeholders' expectations. While we understand that teacher evaluations are necessary, research has shown that teacher evaluation models continue to be an issue that is often contested.

Many times, teacher evaluations are viewed as meaningless exercises by both the teachers and the administrators (Danielson, 2001). The 1996 publication of *What Matters Most: Teaching for Americans Future* introduced the third phase of *A Nation at Risk* which recognized the importance of teacher quality (Danielson, 2016). The *Nation at Risk* publication encouraged policy makers and school personnel to examine strategies to enhance teacher quality to improve student achievement. Policy makers and school personnel acknowledge that improving the quality of a teacher could not be achieved without the use of effective teacher evaluations and administrators to support teacher growth and development.

The landscape of accountability and teacher evaluation reform has shifted its attention to evaluation instruments and measuring student's academic growth (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). Using teacher evaluation models to evaluate teachers is no longer a new concept, yet principals and school district continue to use evaluation models that are not useful when evaluating special educators (Marx, 2014). Many states

use the same evaluation instrument to evaluate both general education and special education teachers or a slightly modified evaluation instrument to evaluate a special education teacher. Braun and Young (2020), stated "While there may be practical and philosophical value to having school leaders use common evaluation practice for general and special educators, it is important to evaluate this empirically to guide policymaking and to ensure that all teachers are evaluated effectively (p. 3). In addition, research has produced evidence suggesting that well-designed evaluation instruments for general education teachers were proven to be successful, but not successful when evaluating special education teachers.

This study contributed to the limited research conducted on teacher evaluation instruments, specifically related to administrators' ability to evaluate teaching performance of special education teachers and provide evidence-based strategies to special educators who teach students with specific learning disabilities. This study provides information about special educators' perception of the evaluation process. Braun and Youngs (2020), stated that teacher evaluations can add value to educators' instructional practices, Glowacki and Hackmann (2016), expressed that evaluating special educators has not been examined and studied enough in its relationship to the evaluation instrument being used to evaluate special educators or administrator's ability to rate special educators effectively due to their lack of knowledge. This study sought to provide evidence which will help administrators understand the need to become more knowledgeable about the role, responsibilities, and expectations of special educators. The knowledge and understanding obtained by administrators will assist administrators to

have a better understanding of how to rate special educators more efficiently, effectively, and empower administrators to feel confident to provide special education teachers with evidence-based strategies that will support classroom instruction as well as immediate instructional feedback.

The proposed study was delimited to special education administrators and special education teachers who were selected from Gulfport School District, Neshoba School District, Laurel School District, Simpson County School District, Vicksburg Warren School District, Long Beach School District and Pass Christian School District. Special educators and administrators who were licensed in these roles but working within other positions were not selected for this study, even with the possibility they could provide useful information to the topic. High school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education, who evaluate special educators only responded to research questions pertaining to their ability to evaluate and provide strategies to teach student with specific learning disabilities, and their perception on the Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric when used to evaluate special educators. Special educators will only respond to research questions pertaining to their perception of the Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric and their perception of the evaluation process. This study was only conducted in schools located in Mississippi.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the study was that the participants will only be secondary administrators and secondary special educators in Mississippi. This study may be limited to the times that special educators and administrators are available to be interviewed due

to school scheduling. Administrators and special educators are also limited to Mississippi. The Special Education Professional Growth System pre-determined domains may be constructed around standards that are unique to Mississippi which may be comparable to evaluation systems of other states. Although this study could be extended to other educators and administrators, the focus of this study is only on Mississippi's special educators and administrators without previous special education experience.

Summary

Data that administrators obtain from teacher evaluations remains the most useful data collected to determine the effectiveness of their teachers. Glowacki et al. (2016) believes that there is a need for special education teachers to be evaluated by an evaluation model that can capture the full scope of their daily responsibilities. In this chapter the purpose and significance of this study is to determine if the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric is an effective evaluation instrument to evaluate special education teachers. There is a limited amount of research that has been conducted on how special education or special education administrators perceive the effectiveness of special education teachers' evaluation models. It is important for states and districts to understand the importance of developing an effective special education model that supports professional growth and improves instructional practices.

CHAPTER II -REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk,* was referred to as an "Open letter to the America people." The publication rang a bell and sounded the alarm alerting the public to the achievement gap among students in America's public education. This landmark report focused on student outcomes and expressed to the American people the need to confront the achievement problem that has plagued our schools. Terrell Bell, President Regan's secretary of education argued that the educational system in America was mediocre at best, causing concern for the future of America's students (Borek,2008). Due to the growing body of literature which examines how teacher effectiveness contributes to student achievement, *A Nation at Risk* uncovered the need to examine teacher effectiveness to address America's achievement gap among students.

A Nation at Risk was developed in three phases. The third phase was titled *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. This phase changed the trajectory of teacher evaluations, teacher expectations and teacher accountability. Examining the effectiveness of teacher accountability, teacher expectations, and teacher evaluations has continued for the last three decades. Unlike the past, teacher evaluations are no longer designed to rate teachers based on personal characteristics. In this new era of accountability, teacher evaluations are based on teacher's performance and student achievement. Education stakeholders realized that evaluating and rating teachers based on personal characteristics did not account for student achievement. If the expectations are to improve teacher effectiveness and raise student achievement, it has become paramount to policy makers and school leaders to understand the importance of teacher

supervision and develop an effective teacher evaluation model that supports general education as well as a model that supports special education teachers (Danielson, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which administrators without a special education background have the knowledge to evaluate special educators effectively using the Mississippi Professional Growth System for Special Education Teachers. This model was developed by a steering committee established by The Mississippi Department of Education "to assist special education teachers with improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities" (MDE, 2019, p.7). This model "provides special education teachers and administrators with an evaluation tool that allows for immediate feedback to inform continuous improvement" (MDE, 2019, p.7). This study also examined special education teachers' perception of the Mississippi Professional Growth System for Special Education Teachers. This chapter begins by expounding on the history of teacher evaluations, teacher supervision, the purpose of teacher evaluations, the federal mandates to improve teacher evaluations, and the importance of a valid and reliable evaluation instrument.

Data collected from teacher evaluations remains administrators' main source of information to determine teacher effectiveness (Lawson & Knollman, 2017). The data collected can be used to evaluate teachers' effectiveness, teachers teaching strategies and used to provide teachers with immediate feedback for continuous growth. Administrators are expected to be educational leaders for both general educators and special educators, so therefore it is important for administrators to understand the expectations of special educators as well as general educators. The literature review revealed when evaluating

special educators and their ability to provide instructional strategies for teaching students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Researchers have examined and educators have agreed that teacher evaluations are necessary to improve teachers and teaching (Warren, 2015). The concept of evaluating teachers is not so much that it is needed and necessary, often the area of concern is how the evaluation is carried out and the reliability and validity of the evaluation model (Warren, 2015). Lastly, I will examine the pre-determined domains of Mississippi Professional Growth system for Special Educators and its effectiveness when used to evaluate special educators.

Teacher Evaluations

Warren (2015) explains how educational leaders agree that teacher evaluations can be instrumental in increasing teacher quality and a path for teachers to obtain professional development for continuous improvement. Educational leaders are keeping with the belief, recognizing that teacher evaluations, if used correctly can be the driving force for improving teacher quality and student achievement. Researchers and educational stakeholders acknowledged that student achievement does not happen in isolation, teacher's instruction, and the quality in which they provide it plays a significant role in student achievement.

In this new era of accountability, school leaders and teachers have been pressured to keep up with the rising expectations to prepare students and equip them to lead the nation in the years to come. So, therefore the achievement of all students has been continuously analyzed and scrutinized. Students with disabilities (SWD) are among the population that has been closely analyzed. With the achievement gap among general

education students and special education students being considerably significant, it is incumbent on administrators and educational leaders to understand the distinct difference between the roles and responsibilities of general and special education teachers in order to evaluate each of them effectively, in order to provide them with the instructional feedback necessary to improve their effectiveness and student achievement. Still today, teacher evaluations, yet beneficial, remain an emotional and controversial issue in education. Danielson (2012) reported that evaluations and the evaluation process differs among states and districts, as well as between general educators and special educators, but as studies suggests, what remains constant is how teachers perceive the evaluation process. Both general education and special education teachers believe that the evaluation process did not place enough emphasis on the data as a result of the evaluation, but more on the process of how to conduct the evaluation (Danielson, 2015). Teachers are not opposed to being evaluated or the evaluation process, it is the lack of attention to how they are being evaluated, the lack of instructional feedback to improve teacher effectiveness and the ineffectiveness of the instrument by which they are being evaluated (Danielson, 2015).

History of Teacher Evaluations:

Hiner (1990) stated, “a restlessness among those interested in teacher education was appearing throughout the country. A desire to reexamine old assumptions and old ways of teaching went along with a feeling that somehow the profession should organize and reorganize itself more effectively if it were to make real gains in improving the quality of teachers." (, p. i). Teacher effectiveness remains one of the most important

variables for improving student learning (Danielson, 2012). As a result, teacher evaluations and administrators' ability to evaluate and provide effective feedback to improve teacher effectiveness continues to be the catalyst to promote teacher's professional growth and student achievement. In the early fifteenth century, students evaluated and paid their teachers according to their level of effectiveness (Gong & Diaz-Biello, 2012). As Matthews & Crow (2010) posits, the data collected from teacher evaluations should be used to improve teacher quality by expanding teachers' skill set as well as increase teacher's instructional capacity. Due to the intense interest in teacher accountability and student achievement, supervisors and or instructional leaders must have the knowledge and ability to communicate teacher's instructional strengths and weaknesses.

The 1958 launching of the Soviet Union's satellite Sputnik brought attention to the need to improve education in America, but more specifically, student's performance in math and science (Colby et al., 2002). Simultaneously, faculty members at Harvard School of Education were developing the Clinical Supervision Model. This supervision model was developed for the medical profession but has also been used in education to improve inexperienced teachers' instructional strategies (Stiggins & Duke, 1998). Unlike the evaluators today, the supervisor's only responsibility was to determine if inexperienced 1st year teachers were fit to remain in the classroom (Stiggins & Duke, 1998). As mentioned before, prior to the 1960s, teacher evaluations were systems of inspections, based on personal characteristics, such as age, sex, and race, which eventually evolved to characteristics such as attendance, dress code, maintaining

classroom discipline, the teacher's level of morality and ethical disposition, as opposed to the quality of instruction that teachers provided or student achievement (Danielson, 2011).

It was not until the 1960s that teacher evaluations became more objective, using pre-determined categories as the basis for the evaluation. Administrators began using summative and formative assessments to evaluate teachers. Summative assessments were used to "weed" out bad teachers and formative assessments were used to strengthen teacher's professional growth (Eisner, 1992) If teachers did not meet the expectations of the school or district, they were typically released from their duties, rather than being providing timely instructional feedback or instructional strategies to help them improve their teaching capacity (Aldeman, Chad. 2017).

Dating back before 1965, administrators were not responsible for curriculum, nor were they responsible for being knowledgeable of educational methodologies; instead, decisions such as these were made by individual states. The federal government did not support or fund education, so therefore students had to depend on the type of education their state and localities provided them (Goodwin & Webb, 2014). As a result, education opportunities, instructional practices, teacher quality, and professional growth were uneven across states. States were left to chart their own educational course and develop their teachers as they saw fit (Goodwin & Webb, 2014).

Although teacher evaluations and teacher quality remain controversial and education opportunities were uneven across states, Robert Goldhammer and Morris Cogan of Harvard School of Education, changed the look and expectations of teacher

evaluations and teacher performance (Colby et al., 2002). The Clinical Supervision Model was designed to improve the way pre-service teachers delivered instruction and how administrators observed and evaluated their teachers. By the late 1960s "clinical supervision" was being viewed as an up-and-coming teaching practice (Colby et al., 2002). Teaching perspective emphasized curriculum, academic achievement, readiness, and transferring learning to new ideas (Colby et al., 2002). Clinical supervision provided an opportunity for pre-service teachers and seasoned teachers to communicate, review data, analyze data and discuss effective instructional practices to enhance student learning and teachers' professional growth. (Papay, 2012). This was an opportunity for beginning teachers and seasoned teachers to work together to improve the overall quality of teaching and student learning. As mentioned previously, the responsibility of the administrator, when using the Clinical Supervision Model, was to evaluate and determine if the teachers would remain in the classroom, while it was incumbent upon the seasoned teacher to improve pre-service instructional practices (Hull, 2013). Goldhammer passed away in 1968, before his work was widely used, appreciated, and supported by literature (Papay, 2012).

Improving teacher quality through effective evaluation and teaching moved into the 1980's. The Instructional Theory into Practice (ITIP) model, which was also referred to as Madeline Hunter's seven-step-evaluation model of mastery learning, was thought to be key to improving teacher quality and student achievement (Gibboney, 1987). This model evolved when promoting curriculum standards were at an all-time high and standardized tests raised the stakes for teachers and students. States were being pressured

for students to learn faster and for students to become more proficient in reading and math. Many states adopted this model in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Steward et al., 2010). The Madeline Hunter's model provided scripted lessons that were taught and reinforced. Administrators were responsible for observing and evaluating how effective teachers were when using the seven-step model (Gibboney, 1987). Educational leaders presumed academic excellence, improved teacher quality, and effective leadership would be obtained if teachers and administrators were committed to using the Madeline Hunter's Model.

The Madeline Hunter Model came with much criticism from both teachers and administrators. The model was said to be didactic in nature, non-intellectual, and it reduced teacher autonomy (Stalling, 1985). Students were only required to recall facts; teachers' lessons were scripted, and administrators only evaluated teachers' use of the model. There was little evidence to support that the model improved student achievement or improved the administrators' ability to effectively evaluate teachers (Gibboney, 1987). Gibboney (1987) stated that the evidence to support Hunter's claim of improving student learning was never substantiated. The nation's desire to achieve accountability and academic excellence at every level of the educational process continued along with the nation's desire to develop an evaluation instrument to improve teacher quality and professional growth (Riner, 1990).

Teacher expectations, evaluations and accountability experienced yet another shift in the twenty-first century. In 2001, during the Bush Administration, the U.S. Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which was, at that time, the most recent

reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (NCLB, 2001). Bush's NCLB was yet another attempt to improve student achievement and teacher quality. To hold states accountable for student achievement, NCLB mandates, made it mandatory for states to develop some form of standardized assessment to measure student's achievement growth over time, which later shifted to holding states accountable for teacher's performance. The Bush administration's NCLB, provided incentives to raise student achievement, requiring school district personnel to examine teacher certifications to ensure that every student was taught by a highly qualified teacher (NCLB, 2001). This shift in accountability examined teacher's qualifications as opposed to the effectiveness and quality of the teacher (Klein, 2016). To ensure teachers were highly qualified, states were required to establish content standards in English and math (Eppley, 2009).

Teachers play a pivotal role in student learning and to improve the academic disparity that plagues our states, the Bush administration's belief was that teacher's credentials would be the catalyst to improve student achievement (Linn et al., 2002). Policy leaders, who encouraged NCLB soon recognized that teachers' qualifications did not guarantee teacher quality (Tomlinson, 1998). As Sober stated (2012), teacher quality is the combination of training and experience, not only qualification. Acknowledging that training and experience cannot be replaced by qualification, the Bush administration provided funds for ongoing professional development for all teachers regardless of if they met the state standards to become a highly qualified teacher (Linn et al., 2002).

While the NCLB accountability model was more frustrating than fruitful, the next phase shifted to teacher accountability, holding individual teachers accountable for

student achievement, and holding administrators accountable for teacher's professional growth (Daley & Kim, 2004). When President Obama took office on January 20, 2009, his goal was to provide every student with a competitive education (Synder & Bristol, 2015). NCLB expired in 2012, and as a result of the expiration and criticism, Congress passed and President Obama signed The Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) on December 10, 2015, giving states more control over standardized assessments and teacher evaluations (Zepeda, 2016). When NCLB expired, the Obama Administration established Race to the Top (RTTT), which was a part of President Obama's 2009 Recovery and Reinstatement Act (U.S. DOE, 2010). RTTT was a competitive educational reform initiative, which granted states monetary incentives to improve and reform their educational processes to promote student achievement (Schachter, 2012). States who were competing for the grant were asked to enumerate the manner to which they would reform certain parts of their educational systems such as developing an evaluation process to improve teachers and administrator's effectiveness, with hopes of improving student achievement (Rosenblatt, 2017). Although RTTT was created on the accountability concept introduced in NCLB, RTTT emphasized adding a more objective approach to the evaluation process (Rosenblatt, 2017).

Teachers voiced their opposition to the use of objective data being added to teacher evaluations (Mathers et al., 2008). Many states added objective data such as classroom observations, teacher preparation and student engagement, so that the evaluation would be more purposeful, with more focus on improving the quality of teaching. This is different than focusing on the supervisory role, which focuses on day-to-

day operations of a classroom (Namaghi, 2010). RTTT educational reform made an enormous impact on the way schools improved their existing teacher evaluation model and how schools developed models that would evaluate the influence teachers have on student learning (Schachter, 2012). Despite RTTT monetary incentives, objective data being added to the evaluation instrument, and high-stake testing, 94% of U.S. teachers still scored a satisfactory rating on their annual evaluation (Schachter, 2012). With 94% of teachers scoring satisfactory, one can conclude that the conclusion that the evaluation process lacked consistency among raters, or the rankings were not reported accurately (Bolyard, 2015). With accountability and teacher evaluations being the centerpiece of teacher improvement along with teacher ratings not making significant gains, the need for administrators to understand the importance of raising educational standard and improve the quality of teachers has become more apparent (Warring, 2015).

Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) developed the Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric (M-STAR). The design was based on research conducted by Charlotte Danielson (MDE, 2012). Danielson's (2007) *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching,* was composed of 22 components clustered into four different domains: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Teachers were rated on a scale of zero to four (0 -non existing, 1 - unsatisfactory, 2 - Emerging, 3 - Effective, 4 - Distinguish) whereby each standard was evaluated using at least one evaluation method (artifact review, pre- or post-observation, classroom observation, or student survey) (MDE, 2012). Danielson’s Framework for

Teaching (FFT) was inspired by Madeline Hunter, and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). (Morris-Mathews et al., 2021).

History of Teacher Supervision

"Educational supervision is a process which aims to enhance teaching by developing teachers" [grammar error in original] (Altum and Sarpkaya, 2020, p. 284). Glickman (1992) stated that supervision lies at the heart of education, Spears (1953) believed that supervision is an important aspect of educational leadership, Garman and Haggerson (1993) felt that supervision is a specialty and practice area that needs to be honed to perfection, and Smith, (1987) postulated that the act of supervision and supervising is worthy of being studied. Teacher supervision and the structure by which teachers are supervised has a long history, but since the turn of the century new approaches and theories have emerged due to the overwhelming attention to accountability. Studies have indicated that the quality of school leaders is a direct reflection of teacher effectiveness (Smith, 1987).

Teacher Supervision in the Mid 1600's:

The field of supervision has been around since the mid-1600s (Glanz & Hazi, 2019). During that time teacher supervision "stressed strict control over teachers and close inspection of school facilities" (Glanz & Hazi, 2019, p. 3). William H. Payne (1875) published the first book on supervision. He believed that supervisors must oversee teachers to ensure harmony and efficiency in the classroom. In the latter part of the nineteenth century networks of schools were developed. Schools were now being overseen by 'schoolmen;' today, we refer to the schoolman as superintendents. The

superintendent transformed and streamlined schools, inspecting them daily, using his "expert" inspections to legitimize his position. The superintendent's inspections or evaluation were based on his interpretation of classroom expectations, as opposed to grooming teachers to become better at their craft to improve student learning (Lucio & McNeil, 1969). During this period, supervisors only function was to maintain the existing standards of harmony and efficiency, as opposed to improving teacher effectiveness (Close et al., 2018).

Scientific Management:

Scientific Management emerged during the 1900's, as a response to President Roosevelt concern regarding waste. Taylor stated (1911) "our larger wastes of human effort, which go on every day through such of our acts as are blundering, ill-directed, or inefficient, and which Mr. Roosevelt refers to as a lack of "national efficiency," are less visible, less tangible, and are but vaguely appreciated" (p. 2). From there, Fredrick Winslow Taylor (1911) published *The Principles of Scientific Management*. He was an industrial engineer, seeking to use modern science to efficiently manage production.

When Taylor published *The Principles of Scientific Management*, his ideas were viewed as revolutionary. Taylor (1911) had three reasons as to why he published this book, the first reason was due to the level of inefficiency in every level of industry's daily performances, including education. Secondly, his belief was that systematic management would resolve issues of inefficiency by following procedures exactly as they are written. Lastly, he sought to prove that the best form of management, or supervision, rests on systematic management as opposed to leadership (p. 7). This ideology

transcended into the field of education. Taylor's ideas were based on the production of products; however, in education the concern is the 'production', or education, of people (Glanz, 2008).

By the early 20th century, scientific management had become a part of the educational system (Kliebard, 1979). Various committees agreed that the need for science to guide curriculum and educations reform was needed (Kliebard, 1979). According to Kliebard (1979), John Franklin Bobbitt was elated at the idea of using science to guide supervision. In Bobbitt's article *The Elimination of Waste in Education,* he drew from the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor by introducing the similarity of the efficiency in production compared to the efficiency in education. According to Kilebard (1979), Bobbitt concluded that the same scientific precision that was achieved "to increase efficiency in industry, so could the application of those same principles achieve success in the curriculum" (p.196). Just as Taylor expected industry workers to follow procedures exactly as they were written, Bobbitt had the same expectations of teachers. Teachers were required to follow the directives determined by administrators, because teachers were viewed as not having the capacity to determine the best way to educate students. Kilebard (1979) summed up Taylor's Scientific Management by stating,

> Students are the 'raw materials' to be produced like commodities according to specified standards and objectives. Teachers are the workers who employ the most efficient methods to get students to meet the pre-determined standards and objectives. Administrators are the managers who determine and dictate to teachers

the most efficient methods in the production process. The school is the factory assembly line where this process takes place. (p. 27)

Teachers' Perspective toward Supervision:

: During the 1920's teachers began to speak out against teacher supervision, teacher expectations, and evaluation practices. The growing opposition to supervision was in part due to supervisors' autocratic methods (Hayes, 1925). Supervisors were accustomed to making decisions based on their own ideas of what was considered an exceptional teacher (Spears, 1953). Supervisors decided the curriculum that was to be taught, as opposed to seeking input from teachers (Spears, 1953). With teachers being openly critical of traditional supervisory and evaluation methods, supervisors' roles became vulnerable within the schools (Hayes, 1925). Supervisors began to worry about their positions in education, causing them to seek acceptance from the teachers to ensure a position in education. To seek acceptance, supervisors began to examine ways to eschew the historic autocratic legacy, by applying John Dewey and James Hosic's scientific methods and cooperative problem-solving approaches to education (Pajack, 1993).

Democratic Approach to Supervision:

Cooperative problem-solving and scientific methods were viewed as a more democratic approach to teacher supervision. Jessie Newlon (1923), supported the democratic approach to supervision, maintaining that educational organizations should be set up to allow for teachers to be active participants in the organization's evaluation process. Supervisory councils were established by Newlon, to assist teachers in having an

active voice in how they were evaluated, positing “The end of autocratic supervision can be realized when teacher and supervisor work in a coordinated fashion” to ensure teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Glanz, 2019). Newlon felt if these conditions were put in place and teachers were given a voice “teachers will be regarded as a fellow worker rather than a mere cog in a big machine” (p. 406).

Science of Supervision:

John Dewey and his theory of the science of supervision continued into the 1940s. Dewey’s 27-page concise, yet strident essay entitled *The Sources of a Science of Education* highlighted problems, such as teacher quality, supervisory practices, and teacher evaluations (Mette et al., 2017). Dewey felt that there was a need to address these issues to improve education, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement (Glanz, 2008). Employing social efficiency in education, moving towards scientific thinking to alter autocratic supervision, and applying a more effective democratic and improvement foci continued to gain momentum (Burton & Brueckner, 1995). Examination of the literature expresses how teachers favored the application of science to address issues in education, evaluations, and teacher supervision, but remnants of autocratic leadership remained (Burton, 1930). Burton, acknowledged that prior to introducing science to education, rating schemes were adequate and appropriate, but as education continues to evolve so should teacher supervisory and evaluation practices. A.S. Barr (1931), stated that supervisors and teacher evaluations have been a part of education for several decades, but to be seen more professionally, Barr concretely asserted:

> Supervisors must have the ability to analyze teaching situations and to locate the probable causes for poor work with a certain degree of expertness; they must have the ability to use an array of data-gathering devices peculiar to the field of supervision itself; they must possess certain constructive skills for the development of new means, methods, and materials of instruction; they must know how teachers learn to teach; they must be able to evaluate. In short, they must possess training in both the science of instructing pupils and the science of instructing teachers. Both are included in the science of supervision. (pp. x, xi)

There were several educational figures who supported the science of education; however, Dewey's theory was not widely accepted (Stoller, 2015). Many supervisors and educational leaders found his writing to be technical and enigmatic, which brought about a lack of understanding among supervisors. Although Dewey's theory was not entirely accepted by his peers, the idea of improving teacher supervision and evaluations continued to gain momentum (Burton & Brueckner, 1995).

Historical View of Teacher Evaluations

Stenographic reports were yet another practice that emerged in the 1900s to improve supervision, teacher evaluations, and teacher effectiveness. Hoetker and Ahlbrand (1969) stated that stenographic reports provided supervisors with accurate black and white accounts of teachers' instructions. Romiette Stevens (1912), a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, felt having a stenographer present to record accurate lessons for supervisors to analyze and study would provide accurate information for evaluations. Although good in theory, it was poor in practice (Hoetker, Ahlbrand, and

Cemrel, 1968). Stenographers were difficult to secure, they were not able to transcribe examples and diagrams on the board, teachers and pupils' behaviors were not considered normal with the stenographer present, but it set the course for descriptive, non-judgmental supervision (Riegle,1976).

Evolution of Teacher Supervision:

Improving supervision and teacher evaluations to increase student achievement and improve teacher effectiveness continued into the 1980s.Educational stakeholders need for alternative methods has placed their focus on the development of the teachers as opposed to the principal-centered leaders whose responsibilities were to "keep schools on track" (Lashway, 2002). This paradigm shift focused on teachers becoming more reflective about their teaching practices (Siens & Ebmeier, 1996). Administrators, who were responsible for supervising teachers, were expected to evaluate teachers in a manner that would lead teachers to produce tangible academic results (Jamentz, 2002). This shift in supervision not only called for a change in innovative academic practices, but also a change in how principals viewed supervision and how they evaluated their teachers (Riner,1992). Given the numerous and opposing points of views for change, parents, taxpayers, political leaders, school board members, and students began demanding improvements in education and better teachers. Due to increased demands for teacher accountability and evaluations, the 1980s ushered in the need for instructional supervisors to support teacher growth, and student achievement (Riner, 1992).

Re-vitalization of an Old Approach:

Teacher evaluations and supervision methodologies in the 20th century continued to merge both management and psychology. Shaw (2016) stated that scientific management, "which had roots earlier in the century, focused on judging quality and efficiency through a focus on inputs (teacher behavior) and outputs (student results)" (p. 2). It was at this time when Taylor's scientific management theory re-emerged and was being referred to as the "New Taylorism". The new Taylorism was considered the dominant theory that influenced education (Barrette et al., 2019). The aforementioned Taylor's Scientific Management Theory derived from research conducted in the business industry. Fredrick Taylor was an industrial engineer who seemed to face some of the same issues in industry that educational administrators faced in education. Since the early 1900's standardized testing has been a part of the US educational system. Au (2011) argues that the Taylorism scientific management theory and reorganization of management practice is apparent in US public school teaching practices. Teachers' instructional practices are controlled by pre-packaged scripted curriculum and standardized testing, which is very much like teachers teaching to the test (p. 25). Administrators' way of leading, evaluating and holding teachers accountable for student achievement was to ensure that teachers taught from the pre-packaged curriculum to prepare students for their standardized assessment (Stoller, 2015).

Politics and Teacher Supervision:

Efforts aimed at improving teacher supervision, teacher effectiveness, teacher evaluations, instructional leadership and student achievement continued to be evaluated

and improved upon. Pressures from No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTTT) and Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) prompted states across America to reevaluate their teacher evaluation models and their teacher supervision methods (Mette et al., 2017). Sledge & Paze.y (2013) commented that teacher supervision is not a new concept; instead, it has been in existence since the 1600s. Teacher supervision methods have evolved since then, along with the views and theories that surrounded educational leadership and supervision (Elmore, 2005). Teacher supervision no longer places emphasis on supervising behaviors to improve teaching methods but has shifted towards supervising and evaluating teachers based on student achievement, which coincides with the passing of unique pieces of legislation designed to improve student achievement in public education (Snyder & Pufpaff, 2021).

Theoretical literature provides us with an overwhelming amount of information regarding teacher supervision (Zepeda, 2012). With the constant debate, theories, and changes in what constitutes good leadership and effective supervision, it is problematic to find an enduring solution (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Southgate et al. (2013), refers to this as a "wicked problem." "The conceptual lens of the 'wicked problem' is useful in explicating why professional experience in teacher education seems to never be 'solved', always needs 'fixing', and is a constant topic of debate" (Southgate et al., 2013, p. 13). In sum, when reviewing the history of teacher supervision, it provides context to what is occurring in education today. As Shaw (2016) posits "this history is both evolutionary and revolutionary" (p. 4).

Conceptual Foundation:

Danielson & McGreal (2000) stated educational research and classroom practices continue to evolve, and for this reason, so should evaluation techniques. “The evaluative criteria used should represent the most current research available; and we need to make provisions, as time goes on, to revise those criteria to reflect current findings” Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 3). Teacher observations remain the primary form of data used to evaluate the quality of teachers and teacher instruction. Observations are also used to address any need for professional development to promote teacher professional growth (Marshall, 2005). Teacher evaluation models must rely on current research to develop a well-designed system that establishes clear goals and expectations to promote high quality instruction and have the ability to differentiate between an effective teacher performance and an ineffective teacher performance (Zepeda, 2012).

In the past, administrators evaluated teachers using a single dichotomous scale, scales that provided ratings such as satisfactory, unsatisfactory and the like (Kersten & Israel, 2005). Other teacher evaluation models used rating scales to rate their teachers on a scale from 1 to 4 which represented a rating of needs improvement, satisfactory, and seldom. These systems fell short due to the lack of consensus of what constituted a level 3. The use of checklists to evaluate teachers was short lived due to its inability to measure effective classroom instruction and teacher effectiveness (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Danielson’s framework for teaching is commonly used in many school districts across the United States (Donaldon,2009). Danielson & McGreal, 2000) contended that “effective

teacher evaluation system is far more complex than the forms and must contain three essential elements:

1. A coherent definition of the domain of teaching (the "What?"), including decisions concerning the standard for acceptable performance ("How good is good enough?").
2. Techniques and procedures for assessing all aspects of teaching (the "How?").
3. Trained evaluators who can make consistent judgments about performance, based on evidence of the teaching as manifested in the procedures. (p. 21)

Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) personnel responded to No Child Left Behind NCLB setting expectations for states to improve teacher evaluations, Race to the Top (RTTT) aiming to implement standards to improve teacher effectiveness, and Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) providing funding and flexibility to states, granting them the autonomy to decide how they would evaluate teachers and administrators as well as giving them the freedom to develop a teacher evaluation model that would differentiate between effective and ineffective teachers, (Zepeda, 2012). MDE discontinued the use of Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric (M-STAR) stating:

> The school board of each local school district shall adopt and implement a policy establishing an evaluation system designed to measure teacher effectiveness for all licensed teachers employed in that district. The evaluation system established under the policy must be designed to promote continuous professional improvement in instructional personnel in order to improve achievement at the individual, school and district levels. In addition, the evaluation system must

> include a process for monitoring and evaluating the effective and consistent use of evaluation criteria by employees having evaluation responsibilities and the overall effectiveness of the evaluation system itself in improving instruction and student learning. (MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE; HOUSE BILL NO. 1227, p. 1)

MDE, with the support of a steering committee, reviewed and recommended changes to M-STAR. Systematic changes and improvements were made and now M-STAR currently goes by the Mississippi Educator & Administrator Professional Growth System (MPGS) with additional evaluative components for librarians, counselors and special education teachers. MPGS was "designed to improve student achievement by providing teachers and administrators with feedback to inform continuous improvement (MDE, 2021). The three goals of the revisions are to (1) raise the bar, which was designed to help teachers and administrators identify "high quality" instruction, (2) reduce the lift, reduced overlap in standards, and (3) support the growth of teachers by providing clear, specific actionable feedback. The revised M-STAR contains four domains and nine standards" (p. 3).

Teacher Evaluation Systems

There is an overwhelming amount of literature that strongly supports linking effective teaching to a strong valid and reliable evaluation system. Without knowing that we have placed quality teachers in all American's classrooms, we cannot expect any educational reform to be successful. Without a well-designed quality teacher evaluation system, there is no way of knowing if America's classrooms are assigned a teacher who is highly qualified. "Thus, a well-designed and properly implemented teacher evaluation

system is essential in the delivery of effective educational programs and in school improvement" (Strong &Tucker, 2003, p. 3).

The purpose of teacher evaluations has been studied extensively over the years. Strong and Tucker (2003) questions why teacher evaluations are needed. For almost every study that has been conducted to understand the purpose of teacher evaluations, there is a different reason as to why they are needed. Several studies suggest that teacher evaluations are needed to separate the good teachers from the bad ones. Other authors have suggested that teacher evaluations are needed to determine which teachers are better suited to teach a specific group of students. Ford and Hewitt (2020), believes that teachers evaluations should be used to fulfil the need of the organization. When educational organizations understand what they expect from their teachers, teacher evaluations are said to be a great way to inspect what you are expecting from the teachers. Warring (2015) believes that teacher evaluations are important for developing teachers' skills and effectiveness, which will in turn, increase student achievement. Danielson (2016), agree with other authors that evaluations lie at the heart of improving teacher instruction if used correctly.

Strong and Tucker (2003) provided context to the purpose of teacher evaluations by offering the following perspective of public schools, "Human beings derive meaning in life from two general sources: 1) the experience of personal growth and 2) commitment to causes greater than their own self-interest" (p. 4). Considering that the two are usually described as mutually exclusive, Strong and Tucker (2003) made a point by emphasizing "one to the exclusion of the other may yield citizens who either care little

for the welfare of their society or lack the knowledge to contribute to it" (p. 4). This perspective of balance is a direct reflection of the issues that surround accountability and teacher growth (Strong and Tucker, 2003). Strong and Tucker (2003), correlate performance improvement to personal growth because it relates to "helping teachers learn about, reflect on and improve their practice" (p.4). Strong and Tucker (2003) view this as being formative in nature, helping teachers learn and improve their practice, and "suggest the need for continuous growth and development" (p. 4). On the other hand, the summative aspect of the quote refers to the "important professional goals of competence and quality performance" typically, "judging the effectiveness of educational services" (p. 4). Strong and Tucker (2003) strongly believed that teacher evaluation should be both formative and summative in nature and that teacher evaluations should be abundantly clear. Clarity should be the cornerstone of teacher evaluation systems because teaching matters, the way teachers are evaluated matters, and education without effective and capable teachers cannot succeed. This cannot happen without an effective teacher evaluation system, "you cannot have one without the other" (Strong and Tucker, 2003, p. 5).

"Evaluation, both formal and informal, is inextricably interwoven with the entire process of education. Since the quality of learning depends largely on the quality of teaching, teacher evaluation clearly is essential in effective schools" (Shrinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995, p. 3). Shrinkfield and Stufflebeam (1995) stated that when examining the true purpose of teacher evaluation, we must take into account that the "process is fraught with difficulties" including deciding if the expectations are based on the goals

and expectations of the schools or to improve teacher effectiveness based on student achievement. (p. 30). Darling-Hammond et al. (1983), stated that "stakeholders have divergent views on the primary purpose of teacher evaluation" (p. 288).

> Teachers want an evaluation system that provides an opportunity for professional growth, principals want an evaluation system that does not take up too much of their time and one that promotes the school's goals and expectations, and parents want an evaluation system that promotes student achievement. (p. 289)

Strong and Tucker (2003) stated, "Evaluation is not new to the field of education. For varying reasons-sometimes for improvement, sometimes for accountability, often for both" (p. xii), so documenting teachers' performance is necessary not only to hold teachers accountable for their instruction, but to also to assist teachers with improving their ability to provide effective instruction (Strong, 2006). Danielson (2010) postulated that as districts continue to improve instructional practices, professional growth, teacher evaluations, and the effectiveness of teachers will improve.

Formative and Summative Assessments:

Extensive research has been conducted on the importance of teacher evaluations. The two most cited reasons to conduct teacher evaluations were 1) holding teachers accountable and 2) providing professional development to improve teacher effectiveness (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Teacher evaluations come in the form of summative and formative assessments (Danielson, 2011). Although formative and summative assessments have been around since the 1960s, the two terms are not always understood to this day (James, et al. 2006). Summative assessments are important when evaluating

teachers' professional competence (McHaghie, 1991). Summative assessments provide "assurance that the services delivered by professional persons are effective and safe" (McHaghie 1991, p. 3). Unlike summative assessments, formative assessments use evidence from data collected to "adapt teaching and learning practice to meet learning needs" (James et al., 2006, p. 8). Formative assessments also provide an opportunity for evaluators to provide constructive feedback and align professional development to support teacher growth and development (Range et al., 2013). Summative and formative teacher assessment are generally believed to be mutually exclusive, but for teacher evaluations to be beneficial for both teachers and administrators, they must understand that they are two sides of the same coin, there is a logical link between the two assessments (Danielson & McGreal, 2000).

Glickman et al. (2001) stated that "when schools attempt to carry out summative and formative evaluation simultaneously, they tend to place primary emphasis on summative goals, and formative evaluation is reduced to secondary status (p. 195). "A school system that relies solely on periodic evaluations of teacher performance through rating scales may capture data suited for in-system summative purposes but will be handicapped in pursuing formative/developmental objectives. . . without a purposeful allocation of system resources to this end the results are likely to be unequal, spotty and poorly coordinated" (Allison, 1981, p. 15). An administrators' goal should not be to combine the two assessments, but to carry out the specific purpose for each assessment so that each can accomplish its intended purpose (Glickman et al., 2001). "Teacher evaluation has the potential to support and develop high quality teachers" (p. xii), so

therefore, it is important to recognize that formative and summative assessments are not in competition, but together are necessary to improve teacher effectiveness (Strong & Tucker, 2003).

Teachers and Principals Accountability:

"Making teachers and school principals accountable means that their performance can be compared to that of other teachers and other schools, and that they are rewarded or penalized based on these results" (Bedard, 2015, p. 1). The concerns surrounding accountability have increased. Parents, policy makers and school leaders want assurance and evidence that teachers and school administrators are competent (Machell, 1995). Research continues to show that the best way to improve student achievement is to improve teacher's instructional practice. To improve instructional practice "all levels of the educational system must accept accountability for teacher learning" (White, 2020, p. 1). In doing so, administrators are held accountable for fostering an environment conducive to teacher growth and student achievement. It is unfortunate, but due to the lack of administrative support provided to teachers, teachers often fault administrators for the lack of pedagogical capacity. Casting blame on administrators, rather than teachers taking responsibility for their own pedagogical capacity, creates additional problems because educational stakeholders are seeking accountability in education. White (2020) explains that there must be "autonomy and accountability" (White, 2020, p.24).

Due to the growing concern surrounding teacher accountability, school districts are called to reassess the way in which they evaluate their teacher's performance (Machell, 1995).

With Obama's RTTT initiative granting state flexibility from NCLB, the role of administrators to support teachers has become vital. Today's administrators are tasked with more than just overseeing the day-to-day operations of schools which interferes with their instructional leadership. Often times their responsibilities do not allow them to "break away from the isolation of their work" (Chitpin & Jones, 2015, p. 391) to supervise and follow-up with their teachers. Citing Silva et al. (2017), teachers have shown their highest level of interest when administrators show interest in providing them with "professional development support and encouragement" (p. 2). Administrators have acknowledged that their focus has been placed on results and outcomes, while also acknowledging that it is also their responsibility to build trusting relationships and setting high expectations for teachers' continuous improvement.

Administrators are feeling the crunch of their job responsibilities. "They're confronted with the pressures of time-consuming teacher evaluation systems" (Danielson, 2016, p. 19), along with the pressures of holding teachers accountable for student learning. "Now, more than ever, principals are expected to be 'educational experts' and understand what good teaching and learning looks like" (Reid 2019, p.4). With the continuing emphasis placed on improving teacher quality and student achievement, principals are concerned with how to effectively evaluate and lead their teachers (Marx, 2007).

Challenges with Teacher Evaluations:

Research has cited many issues surrounding the problems associated with teacher evaluations, such as the "lack of agreement on what constitutes good teaching, an

emphasis on accountability rather than improved performance, limited feedback, and low benefit to teachers as a means for improving instruction" (Marx, 2007, p. 1). For decades, there has been continuous efforts to improve the quality of teacher evaluations and over time, we have seen improvements in teacher quality and student achievement (Marx, 2007). Newer thinking about teacher evaluations now views teacher evaluations as an "organizational problem that includes improving school climate, having the principal become an instructional leader, and building links between school improvement, professional development, teacher evaluation and student learning" (Marx, 2007, p. 1). As studies have indicated, effective teacher evaluations are seen as a direct link between teacher effectiveness, student achievement, and school improvement.

Writers and researchers have concluded that teacher evaluations do have a positive impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Heneman et al., 2007). Teacher evaluations should provide opportunities for timely and immediate feedback, that teachers should be able to use to improve their effectiveness (Heneman et al., 2007). Teacher evaluations should not only support teacher effectiveness, but schools' culture, climate, and student achievement as well (Odden, 2004). Toch & Rothman's (2008) *Rush to Judgment,* reported specific reasons why teacher evaluations have not held up to expectations. Toch & Rothman (2008) stated the reason teacher evaluations fall short of expectations is due to the "lack of accountability" (p. 1), "staffing practices that strip school systems of incentives" (p.1) and "using teacher credentials as a proxy for teacher quality" (p. 1). These factors alone are superficial and do not allow for quality instruction nor student learning (Toch & Rothman, 2008).

Marzano (2012) highlighted reasons why teacher evaluations fail to measure teacher's effectiveness by stating that teacher evaluations do not do a good job at differentiating between effective and ineffective teachers, and it does not highlight areas of inadequacies for future professional development. Teacher feedback is a necessary practice to develop teacher skills and improve teacher's effectiveness. Danielson (2010) stated that the inconsistency of raters compromises the integrity, validity, and reliability of teacher evaluations. Smylie (2014), believes that teacher evaluation "lack of impact and uncertainty" (p. 98), can be attributed to "the misalignment between the design of evaluation systems and the lack of understandings of the evaluation tasks" (p. 98). According to Howard and Gullickson (2013), teacher evaluations are a weak link problem, "it is the lack of connection to professional development" (Smylie, 2014, p. 100). Darling-Hammond et al. (2011) stated the teacher evaluation system across the United Stated, have done very little to improve teacher effectiveness, using their current evaluation models. "The aim of evaluation should be to improve teacher practice, not to sort or shame" (Phillips & Weingarten 2013, p. 37). A clearly defined valid and reliable teacher evaluation model cannot happen haphazardly and then be considered an effective evaluation model. To begin to develop a valid and reliable teacher evaluation model, standards must be established to define teacher effectiveness (Phillips & Weingarten, 2013).

Research indicates that there are benefits in effectively evaluating teachers. It is unfortunate, but there are not enough school districts who are "fulfilling their responsibility to provide accurate feedback to teachers" (Frase & Streshley, 1994, p. 50).

Hattie (2008) revealed that based in his extensive research, formative assessments with continuous feedback is a powerful tool that influences teacher effectiveness. Wigging (2012) referenced that the goals of an evaluations should be "tangible and transparent; actionable; user-friendly (specific and personalized); timely; ongoing; and consistent" (p. 11). Administrators need to remember that timely feedback reinforces teacher expectations, and it provides information as to how teachers measure up to those goals (Wiggins, 2012).

Research has cited evidence that administrators lack the ability to evaluate teachers and it is for this reason, teachers' evaluation fails to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement. The validity of a teacher evaluation model may correlate to administrators' inability to effectively evaluate teachers, which addresses why teachers fail to improve student achievement (Tucker & Strong, 2005). In the wake of principals and assistant principals being responsible for evaluating teachers, unlike department heads having subject area knowledge when observing and evaluating their peers, the evaluator may not which may cause principals to experience difficulty providing effective feedback or difficulty assessing teachers accurately (Donaldson, 2009). During the post-observation conference, administrators discuss data, student performance, offer feedback for the observation, and devise an action plan for improvement. Without familiarity of the subject area, providing effective feedback poses a problem (Pritchett et al., 2010). According to Danielson and McGreal, the purpose of summative and formative assessments is to "make consequential decisions. Screening out unsuitable candidates, dismissing incompetent teachers, and providing legally defensible

evidence are all functions of the teacher evaluation process" (p. 8). However, principals have expressed how time restraints prevents them for quality evaluations (Garth-Young, 2007). For this reason, teachers have expressed their lack of confidence in their administrators to improve their instructional limits. (Garth-Young, 2007).

With the lack of time to effectively evaluate teachers coupled with poorly designed evaluation systems, principals are feeling as if they are "caught between the seemingly unmovable rock of policy and the hard place of leading school change" (Derrington 2013, p.26). A learning environment which fosters professional learning, professional growth and development does not happen haphazardly; rather, to foster this type of environment takes work (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). It is incumbent upon school administrators to provide immediate instructional feedback and professional development opportunities to promote teacher effectiveness (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Although teacher evaluations have been criticized for being teacher oriented, years of research supports the fact that teacher evaluations are a mechanism for improving teaching and learning (Tucker & Strong, 2005). Though well intended, the fundamental flaws of these systems "are burdensome and not helpful for teachers who are looking to improve their practice. Nor do they assist administrators in making difficult decisions regarding teacher performance" (Tucker & Strong, 2005, p. 3). Tucker and Strong, (2005) stated that summative and formative assessments are incompatible. The idea of the previous statement being true is an indictment for the purpose of an effective teacher evaluation. Teacher evaluations systems should encourage the culture of collegiality and professionalism, but for many teachers and administrators, teacher evaluations are viewed

as a task that they must endure (Tucker & Strong, 2005). Most teacher evaluations focus on low-level skills in courses such as English, math and science. They were developed to measure advanced skills that allow for critical and analytical thinkers, while sidestepping courses such as art, music and special education classes. “They privilege very low-level pedagogy” . . . The best teachers, those that have a wider teaching repertoire and can engage students beyond the basics, are at a disadvantage.” (Pecheone & Chung, 2006, p. 23). Teacher evaluations may be effective at “weeding out the weakest teacher, but they wouldn’t be as good at identifying the best teachers” (Toch and Rothman 2008, p. 4).

Challenges with Evaluating Special Education Teachers:

At present, there is very little literature that explicitly addresses evaluating the effectiveness of teachers who teach students with disabilities (Pufpaff, 2021). Evaluating special education teachers, because of the complexity of their teaching practices, may be the most evaluation task (Goldhaber, 2016). What makes special education teachers difficult to evaluate is the variability of students that they serve (Goldhaber, 2016). “The Individuals with Disability Education Act identifies 12 eligibility (or disability) categories and within these categories are several different conditions” (Odom et al., 2005, p. 139).

Teacher evaluations have the capabilities of providing useful data to improve teachers’ instructional strategies, which could lead to improved student achievement (Odom et al., 2005, p.139). “Moreover, many teacher evaluation schemes presently being practiced in this country undoubtedly are serving the important function of making assessments of teacher qualifications more objective than they otherwise would be”

(Shinkfield & Stufflebeam 1996, p. 30), However, past teacher evaluations were not designed to address issues specific to special education. To be considered an effective special education teacher evaluation tool, it must be able to target the specific needs of a special education teacher, there must be corrective feedback specific to special educators, it must be able to measure student growth and lastly, the rater or observer must have a high level of content knowledge of special education.

As previously stated, teachers are the most important variable in improving student achievement (Goldhaber, 2016). To improve teachers' instructional qualities, educational stakeholders turned to teacher evaluation systems to provide data on teacher's effectiveness. Although the focus of teacher evaluations to improve teacher quality has shown promise, these instruments have been criticized for focusing on classroom management skills as opposed to instructional practices (Crawford et al., 2013); for not being content specific, which has been shown to improve student achievement (Hill & Grossman, 2013); for not being designed to provide timely feedback to teachers, which has been shown to improve teacher instruction (Biancarosa et al., 2010); and for not being relevant to special education teachers and a number of other content areas (Johnson & Semmelroth, 2014).

There are common duties that general and special educators share, however, special education teachers have roles and duties that are dissimilar to other teachers. Special education teacher's evaluation model should be designed to evaluate duties such as, but not limited to, providing research-based specialized instruction, adhering to due process timelines, developing, and implementing annual Individualized Educational

Program (IEP) plans. Administrators and raters should have the specialized knowledge needed to reliably and effectively evaluate and provide feedback to special educators (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

The U.S. Department of Education reported the student receiving special education services in 2009-2010 increased from 6.5 million or 13% to 7.3 million or 14% of the k-12 population in 2019-2020. As with many education reforms, teacher evaluations are developed without the inclusion of special education teachers or students who receive special education services. Subsequently, the dilemma with developing an evaluation instrument that includes special education teachers and special education students is developing an instrument that will aid in improving instructional qualities and academic achievements for students with learning disabilities (SWD). SWDs require specifically designed instruction, unique to their individual needs. Meeting the needs of SWD poses unique challenges and requires teachers who are capable of meeting those needs.

Hill and Grossman (2013) acknowledged and agreed that designing a teacher evaluation model for special education teachers poses unique challenges, challenges that are not unique for general education teachers. The authors (2013), contend that "policy makers must build a complementary system for instructional improvement rather than assume that evaluation systems built for accountability can serve dual purposes" (p. 372). They acknowledged that the design must:

1) "make available subject-specific observation instruments that provide concrete guidance on desirable teaching practices, 2) draw on special education experts, for

> improving coherence and “to leverage existing expertise around the improvement of instruction”, 3) provide “feedback from observations which is both accurate and usable”, and 4) provide usable data that is aligned with student achievement and teacher expectations. (p. 374)

Developing an evaluation instrument that aligns to the above-mentioned principles brings about added challenges. One of the challenges is understanding that special education teachers are responsible for serving special education student across multiple subject areas (e.g. reading, math, science, history, writing), which will require a unique evaluation instrument for each of the content areas across multiple grade levels. Another challenge that many special educators face when being evaluated is that many of the administrators lack the expertise or background knowledge to provide content specific feedback (Derrington & Campbel, 2015).

Students with disabilities (SWD) are serviced in numerous academic settings and require academic instructions specially designed for the need of the student, requiring special educators to be highly skilled in evidence-based practices and who are cognizant of different types of disabilities and the student’s instructional needs (Odom et al., 2005). Many districts, as well as educational stakeholders, have addressed the use of value-added methods (VAMs) to evaluate how effective teachers are at delivering instruction and improving student achievement. Using test scores to evaluate special education teachers, who teach students with the greatest educational needs, will be less effective because VAMs do not account for student variability, nor will administrators be able to provide instructional feedback that is accurate or usable (Odom et al., 2005). In summary,

there have been numerous challenges that educator stakeholders and policy makers face when evaluating special education teachers. In light of these challenges, educational stakeholders are confident that evaluation instruments that have been designed to evaluate special education teachers will yield fair, valid and useful results.

Validity of Teacher Evaluation:

The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing defined validity as "the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of the test" (American Educational Research Association, 1999, p. 9). Crocket and Algina (1986) explained validity as being the evidence that shows that the assessment is measuring what it was intended to measure. In this case, validity should be understood as being the means to understand the results from teacher evaluations. Messick (1995) explained that "validity is not a property of the test or assessment as such, but rather of the meaning of the test scores" (p. 741).

The study of validity is whether the items on an assessment are an adequate representation of specific interest (Crocker & Algina, 1996). Validity can be internal or external and can also be divided into five types (Herlihy et al., 2013). In dealing with teacher effectiveness, criterion validity can be problematic because the results are obtained after an evaluation cycle and unlike the GRE for example, the evaluation cannot be conducted prior to employment to predict performance (Herlihy et al., 2013).

Construct validity measures the underlying theoretical construct; it measures how well an assessment measures what it is intended to measure, which does not provide the information needed to determine teacher effectiveness (Herlihy et al., 2013). Face

validity is the most basic, but it is associated with the highest level of subjectivity. This is when a panel of education experts determine face value, if the assessment is measuring what it purports to measure (Herlihy et al., 2013). Lastly, consequential validity describes the aftereffect of an assessment, for example if a school tests the entire ninth grade, then a particular subgroup of students with the same traits underperforms when compared to their peers. Consequential validly can identify an assessment that is measuring things that it is not meant to measure (Koretz, 2008).

Ensuring teacher quality and promoting teacher growth, although they seem to be in conflict with one another, are often cited as being the two reasons why we evaluate teachers (Danielson, 2008). To facilitate the provision of evaluative judgements of teachers' overall performance are the reasons why teachers are evaluated; therefore, the evidence from the evaluation should support the judgement (Danielson, 2018). School districts are required by law to evaluate teacher's performance, but "many districts' procedures are antiquated and contribute little to the culture of the school" (Danielson 2018, p. 41). To validate teacher evaluations, the evaluation instrument used to obtain the data should reflect the expectations of the standards and expectations of the school (Danielson, 2018).

Teacher Evaluation Rater Reliability:

Classroom observations remain the most useful form of data collected to measure teacher effectiveness (Danielson, 2008). Lyness et al. (2021) indicated that "reliability is the degree to which assessments produce stable and consistent results" (p. 2). An assessment cannot be valid if it is not reliable. Evaluations are being associated with

high-stakes decisions. When there is more than one rater, it is important for evaluation scores to reflect high inter-rater agreement and inter-rater reliability in observational evaluations (Grahamet al., 2012). Citing Zepeda and Jimenez (2019) “The lack of consistency in ratings has, at least in part, been associated with performance assessments in an educational context that are often designed and implemented before methodological issues are examined and addressed” (p. 14). Frick and Semmel (1978) defined reliability as “the consistency with which something is measured” (p. 158). Graham et al. (2012) defined inter-rater reliability “as the measurement of consistency between evaluators” (p. 5). Danielson (2007) viewed reliability as a direct reflection of how administrators were trained to evaluate teachers. Frick and Sammel (1978), along with other researchers, agreed that trained evaluators are critical to ensuring effective reliable evaluations. Zepeda and Jimenez (2019) were intrigued with the degree to which interrater reliability influenced teacher evaluations, so much so, they conducted a study which was “aimed to address a gap in the literature by assessing if interrater reliability was consistent in a classroom observation instrument” (p. 12).

Race to the Top (RTTT), a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, was designed to improve the effectiveness of leaders and teachers (Clifford & Ross, 2011). “Policy, research, and practice focused on teacher and leader effectiveness addressing primarily how to assess it and what should or should not be used to assess primarily teacher effectiveness” (Zepeda & Jimenez 2019, p. 12). Doherty and Jacobs (2015) stated “Common sense, student achievement gaps and the research on teacher effectiveness all suggest that not all of our teachers should be rated effective” (p.12).

Given that 48 states require classroom observations and principals to be trained to conduct teacher evaluations "it is imperative to examine issues of reliability and the inter-reliability of classroom observations made by school leaders" (Doherty & Jacobs, 2015, p. 14).

Inter-rater relationship is not an exact science. The problem exists that when evaluators rate two or more variables the same or almost the same, the scores could be reliable, but have little to no agreement (Tinsley & Weiss, 2000). Graham et al. (2012) stated that, "inter-rater agreement is the degree to which two or more evaluators using the same rating scale give the same rating to an identical observable situation" (p. 5). Educators are more concerned about rater and interrater reliability, due to evaluations being tied to high-stakes decisions more now than ever before (Graham et al., 2012). Danielson (2011) expressed the need to provide administrators with the training needed to improve their ability to calibrate how they evaluate teachers. To sharpen their skills, administrators and other assigned evaluators should rate videos of classroom instruction as a part of their ongoing professional training (Frick & Semmel, 1978). Researchers contend that if evaluators do not obtain proper training on the use of the evaluation model, coupled with having a high level of expertise of their subject, teachers will continue to be subjected to subpar evaluation that do not adequately reflect their evaluation score and teaching abilities (Cangelosi, 1991).

Understanding the difference between inter-rater reliability and inter-rater agreement is important for several reasons. First, inter-rater agreements are used for high-stake decisions, such as pay increases, promotions, and retention (Graham et al., 2012).

Inter-rater agreement allows administrators or assigned evaluators to provide timely feedback to teachers regarding their instructional practices (Graham et al., 2012). Finally, inter-rater agreement highlights teacher strengths as well as their weaknesses, which allows administrators the ability to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to improve classroom instruction and student achievement (Graham et al., 2012). "Under the current climate of increase pressure" placed on schools and school districts to develop high quality teachers, "it is only fair that performance assessments be held equally accountable" (Lyness, Peterson, & Yates 2021, p.13).

Problem with Teacher Evaluations:

According to Cohen (1985), feedback "is one of the more instructionally powerful and least understood features in instructional design" (p. 33). "Formative feedback represents information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify the learner's thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning" (Shult, 2007, p. 1). There is a plethora of research on feedback; nevertheless, the means that relate feedback to the aspect of learning is still unclear, and the ways that researchers analyze and describe feedback are inconsistent and contradictory (Azevedo & Bernard, 1995). Authors have cited feedback as being an important facilitator to learning (Bandura, 1991). Mielke & Frontier (2012) "identifies a lack of feedback is the primary problem with teacher supervision and evaluation systems" (p. 12). Weisberg et al. (2009) found that "nearly three of four teachers went through the evaluation process but received no specific feedback about how to improve their practice" (p. 14). Studies have indicated that administrators have expressed their lack of attention and frequency when providing

feedback (Mielke & Frontier, 2012). Authors have cited that the frequency of teacher feedback does not happen often enough to improve teacher's performance (Danielson, 2010). Principals have acknowledged that their daily responsibilities do not allow them to provide teachers with timely necessary feedback (Wiener & Lundy, 2013). Because administrators' lack of attention to provide teachers with constructive feedback, has caused teachers to become familiar with administrators' perfunctory behavior (Wiener & Lundy, 2013). This usually results in teachers receiving subpar evaluations (Wiener & Lundy, 2013).

Finkelstein and Fishback (2012) stated that feedback in an important aspect of an evaluation. Without feedback how would one know how much to invest in improving their goals? Finkelstein and Fishback (2012) stated that many leaders lack the understanding of how to provide effective feedback. Many believe that positive feedback is more useful than negative feedback (Finkelstein and Fishbach, 2012). Teachers do associate positive feedback with strengths and accomplishments, negative feedback is associated with weakness and lack of accomplishments. Finkelstein and Fishbach (2012) stated "for these two types of information to constitute 'feedback,' they need to be constructive: positive information should not be needlessly flattering, and negative information should not be unnecessarily detrimental. Instead, both types of feedback should be beneficial by suggesting corrective actions" (p. 22). "With the objective of accurate self-assessment in mind, both (constructive) positive and negative feedback on one's performance are potentially useful" (Finkelstein & Fishbach 2012, p. 23). With the emphasis placed on administrators becoming instructional leaders, they have yet made

the connection to understanding the importance of continual meaningful feedback to enhance teachers' classroom effectiveness (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001).

Collins et al. (2018), believe that "there is a growing body of research that supports the use of performance feedback as a method of increasing teachers' use of effective practices" (p. 126). Performance feedback requires, at minimum, effective consistent observations and non-evaluative reporting (Collins et al., 2018). We must keep in mind that performance feedback should be objective, offering suggestions for teaching modification (Collins et al., 2018). Secondly, performance should be formative with the intent to improve teacher pedagogical practices (Collins et al., 2018).

Effective Teacher Evaluation Feedback:

The purpose of formative feedback is to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Black and William (1998) described feedback as having two functions: directive and facilitative. Directive feedback instructs teachers on what they need to fix or revise to improve their instructional practice. Directive feedback is more specific than facilitative feedback (Black & William, 1998). Administrators providing facilitative feedback are only providing comments or suggestions to teachers to improve areas of concern (Black & William, 1998). Pridemore and Klein (1995) reported that feedback makes a significant difference when administrators provide teachers with detailed evidence-based suggestion to improve instructional practice, rather than only informing them that they are doing a "good job. The lack of feedback has caused teachers to feel that the evaluation process is useless as well as frustrating, which can reduce

teacher motivation (William, 1997). Providing teachers with directive feedback that is specific and clear will aid in improving teacher effectiveness.

Kulhavy and Stock (1989) believes when administrators provided teachers with effective feedback, teachers are able to use the information as verification to define whether or not they are providing quality instruction, or it can be used as elaboration to provide information that guides teachers to improving their craft. Elements of verification and elaboration are both useful in setting goals and expectations for teachers. Administrators who provide follow-up feedback keep teachers motivated and engaged to reach their goals (Fisher & Ford, 1998). In Bransford et al.'s (2000) book entitled *How People Learn,* in relation to feedback, the authors suggested that feedback (a) motivates teachers, (b) makes the task(s) manageable, (c) provides directions to help teacher achieve their goal(s), (d) reduces teacher frustrations, and (e) defines and clarifies expectations.

Specific and Goal-Directed Feedback:

"There is emerging evidence supporting the effectiveness of performance feedback" (Coninx et al., 2013, p. 164). Performance feedback provides guidance to teachers, which allows them to understand the school and district's expectations, while judging their performance level (Coninx et al., 2013). To improve the effectiveness of performance feedback, it must be attainable, actionable, timely, consistent, and credible. Goal-directed feedback is a way to inform teachers about the progress they are making toward the goal (or set of goals) they have set for themselves, as opposed to responding to individual tasks (Shute, 2007). Research has shown how teachers are more motivated

and engaging when expected goals have been identified (Fisher & Ford, 1998). Understanding goal setting is important for two reasons: 1) goals that are unattainable have the tendency to discourage teachers and they will likely experience a decline in effectiveness and 2) if goals are set too low teachers exhibit little to no effort to continue improvement (Birney, Burdick, & Teevan, 1969). Malone (1981) stated that goals must be meaningful and easily generated, performance feedback must be given to the teachers informing them whether or not the goal (or set of goals) has been attained. Shultz (2017) stated that:

> "one way to influence learners' goal orientations (e.g., to shift from a focus on performing to an emphasis on learning) is via formative feedback. . . This showed how feedback can modify a learner's view of intelligence, by helping a learner see that (a) ability and skill can be developed through practice, (b) effort is critical to increasing this skill, and (c) mistakes are part of the skill-acquisition process. (Shultz 2017, p. 13)

Administrators and teachers must understand how performance feedback can be viewed as a "cognitive support mechanism" (Shultz 2017, p. 13).

Attainable and Actionable Feedback:

Attainable and actionable feedback is concrete and specific; it provides teachers with information that will help them attain a goal (or set of goals) (Wiggins, 2012). Actionable feedback must be accepted and understood by the teacher and evaluator (Wiggins, 2012). Presenting information from data is more effective than making assumptions. When providing data-driven feedback to teachers, administrators can work

with teachers to set obtainable goals to improve instructional or behavioral goals (Chappuis, 2012). When evaluating and providing feedback to teachers, evaluators must consider if the desired outcome or goal can be attained in a timely manner or does the situation allow for the goal to be attained (Williams, 2012)? Seeing goals that cannot be attained creates a situation where the teacher shuts down and feels that they have failed. Attainable and actionable feedback can yield two possible results: it can result in the teacher falling short of his or her goal(s) or it can result in the evaluator recognizing that the teacher has reached his or her goal(s). "The ability to improve one's result depends on the ability to adjust one's pace in light of ongoing feedback that measures performance against a concrete, long-term goal" (Wiggins 2012, p. 16). When evaluators provide teachers with feedback, informing them they have fallen short of their goals, teachers are likely to strive to reach the goal expected of them if they have sufficient support. Teachers who have been provided feedback informing them that they have attained their goal, are more than likely to aspire to reach an even higher goal (Wiggins, 2012). For feedback to be effective, teachers must be willing to act on the feedback. In numerous studies, actionable and attainable research has shown to improve student achievement and improve teachers' effectiveness to the extent that teachers remained receptive of this form of feedback, stating that it was targeted (valid), and clear (Shute, 2007).

Timely Feedback:

Timely feedback dates back at least to the 1920s and it remains a particle practical concept still today (Kulik & Kulik, 1988). Studies indicate how timely feedback provides teachers with an opportunity to adjust and rectify how they deliver instruction (Lin, Lai,

and Chuang, 2013). “Studies related to feedback timing (e.g., timely and delayed feedback) have obtained conflicting outcomes for the effects of feedback on learning, however, timely feedback has typically proven to have better effects than delayed feedback” (Lin et al., 2013, p. 228). Jonassen (1997) stated that one aspect of problem solving is to provide coaching “at an appropriate time” (p. 77). Timely feedback was based on Jonassen (1997*), III Structured Problem-Solving Learning Outcomes.* Jonassen (1997) believed that “it is essential, as with any form of practice during instruction, to provide adequate feedback about learners’ attempts to solve the problem (p.77). Feedback should be more than simply stating to teachers that they are doing a great job and keep up the good work. It is important to provide timely feedback on areas of improvements, “to determine where the problem-solving process went wrong and provide either coaching or the correct solution process from that point in the problem” (Jonassen 1997, p. 77).

Clariana (1999), also conducted research on whether or not timing has an effect of performance feedback. Clariana (1999) describes performance feedback in terms of “the interaction of stimulus inputs and response outputs” (p. 2). Clariana used the Delta Rule to describe the input and output unit (1999). The delta rule describes the magnitude of a persons’ reaction time to a response Clariana (1999). For example, if a person changes their telephone number, if asked “What is your phone number?”, the respondent will more than likely recall the old telephone before the new telephone number. Over time, the old telephone number will decrease in memory, if not recollected, while the new telephone number increases. The way research has associated the delta rule to

performance evaluation was in informing educators that depending on the feedback, immediate and delayed performance feedback can both be useful (Clariana, 1999). If teachers are given a glowing performance evaluation, both delayed and immediate feedback will be received by the teacher in the same manner (Clariana, 1999). If a teacher receives immediate constructive feedback, they are more than likely to work toward becoming more effective, as opposed to receiving delayed feedback. With delayed feedback, it is difficult to influence human behavior after a significant amount of time has lapsed (Clariana, 1999). For this reason, it is imperative that administrators provide constructive performance feedback, directly after the behavior has been observed (Wiggins, 2012). In most cases, timely feedback is important, so that teachers are able to apply the feedback in a timely manner to improve the behavior (Chappuis, 2012).

Consistent and Credible Feedback:

Many authors contend that the delivery of consistent and credible feedback is one of the most important processes when evaluating teachers (Jacobs et al., 1973). Wiggins (2012) stated "to be of use, feedback must be consistent. Clearly, performers can only adjust their performance successfully if the information fed back to them is stable, accurate, and trustworthy" (p. 15). Timely feedback is important to improve teachers' performance, but so are the opportunities to create change. Formative assessments are not only the process that comes after a summative assessment, but if a teacher need improving, it also involves creating consistent opportunities for the teacher to reshape the behavior in order to achieve the desired goal. As Cantrel and Scantlebury (2011), explains, with most summative assessments the feedback that proceeds often comes when

the performance is over. As stated previously, the timelier feedback teachers receive, the more likely they are to reach their goal. Wiggins (2012) provided this example, "If you play Angry Birds, Halo, Guitar Hero, or Tetris, you know that the key to substantial improvement is that the feedback is both timely and ongoing. When you fail, you can immediately start over sometimes even right where you left off—to get another opportunity to receive and learn from the feedback" (p. 15). Evaluating teachers should not be focused on the errors, it should be about providing consistent opportunities to improve.

"Teachers reported that the evaluation process is often perfunctory" (Cantrell & Scantlebury 2011, p. 30). Administrators have reported that they received little guidance and "even less training on managing and executing teacher evaluation" (Cantrell & Scantlebury 2011, p. 30). When teachers experience positive evaluations, it is often a direct reflection of a highly skilled evaluator. Therefore, for teacher evaluations to be effective, the information the learners receive must be accurate, trustworthy and supported by data (Wiggins, 2012). Teachers are more likely to respond to the evaluator's feedback when its, 1) aligned with best practice, 2) feedback is consistent and credible, 3) the scoring rubric is reliable, and 4) when the evaluation domains are aligned with student achievement (Cantrell & Scantlebury, 2011).

Mississippi Professional Growth System

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) is vested in providing quality instruction and improving student achievement by placing highly effective teachers in every classroom. Research has demonstrated that highly effective teaching can affect

children's education and career aspirations (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Years of research also support the fact that effective teachers increase student achievement (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Rivkin et al., (2005) conducted research that concluded that students learn more when they are taught by highly effective teachers. The demand on accountability in education has shifted from administrators managing the day-to-day operations of the school to administrators becoming instructional leaders with the goal of increasing excellence in teaching and learning (Darling –Hammond et al., 1983). Sanders & Rives (1996), also conducted research that indicated that effective teachers make a significant difference in student achievement when compared to teachers who are less effective. "It is important, therefore, to identify effective teachers to ensure quality teaching and giving children their birthright of quality education (Akram, 2019, p.94).

Akram (2018) stated that "teacher effectiveness can best be judged through teacher evaluation which has gained considerable attention of policymakers during the last decade" (p. 94). Effective teacher evaluations provide the tools and opportunity to improve teacher instruction and student achievement (Peterson, 2000). Historically, data sources such as classroom walkthroughs, teacher portfolios and teacher's self-assessment have been used to evaluate the effeteness of teachers (Akram, 2019). Peterson (2000) stated if we begin to acknowledge students as being the primary stakeholders, it can have a significant impact on how teachers interact with their students. To improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement, MDE adopted the concept and began working towards effectively educating every student in Mississippi.

In June 2010, MDE solicited the Mississippi Teacher Center to employ the establishment of the Statewide Teacher Evaluation Council (STEC) to research and recommend a framework for the development of a teacher evaluation model (MDE, 2012). STEC's steering committee included teachers, administrators, teacher unions and the like (MDE, 2012). STEC worked to develop principles that would be used to guide the implementation of the evaluation model (MDE. 2012). These principles were developed from extensive discussions surrounding characteristics of effective teachers, principals, and schools (MDE, 2012). There was also research conducted on student achievement, professional development, and performance-based compensation (MDE, 2012).

The following are the goals of the Mississippi Teacher Performance Growth System: Special Education Growth Rubric:

1. Provide a shared vision for high-quality teaching and learning and guide special education teachers in improving their practice.
2. Encourage regular, evidence-based observation and feedback for all special education teachers.
3. Support special education teachers and school leaders in identifying priorities for strengthening practice.
4. Serve as a guide for special education teachers as they reflect upon their own practices. (MDE, 2021).

The Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric derived from the revision of M-STAR. M-STAR included multiple domains to effectively evaluate teachers on the newly

established guiding principle (MDE, 2012). The guiding principles allowed evaluators to identify the teacher's strength and teacher's area for growth (MDE).

> The M-STAR standards were designed to provide a shared and focused understanding of the priorities, values, and expectations of Mississippi teachers in their work of educating students. The performance standards provide a structure to assess teacher performance, with the goal of highlighting and rewarding strengths and identifying and addressing challenges" (MDE, 2013 (p.7). 'The teacher performance standards were divided into five domains with twenty standards directly related to that domain. (MDE 2012, p. 7)

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) granted state autonomy in deciding how they would design and implement their teacher evaluation model. With States now having flexibility to develop their own teacher evaluation models, the Mississippi Department of Education assembled a steering committee comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders to review, revise and make recommendations to improve the Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal Rubric. House Bill Number 1227 granted Mississippi the right to discontinue the use of MSTAR. MSTAR was modified by streamlining the instrument with the result of making it more manageable for administrators to use. With the input from educators and educational leaders, teachers, administrators, state educational agency representatives established the Mississippi Educator Professional Growth System (MPGS). The MPGS was designed to ensure that teachers received high quality feedback that is necessary to support and encourage teacher growth. MPGS also provides school districts and MDE with data to better support teachers and make data-driven decisions to

improve student learning. Goal four of the Mississippi's strategic plan specifically addresses teacher effectiveness by ensuring that "every school has effective teachers and leaders." MDE's vision was "to create a world-class educational system that gives students the knowledge and skills to be successful in college and the workforce to flourish as parents and citizens (MDE 2012, p. 5). MDE's mission was "to provide leadership through the development of policy and accountability systems so that all students are prepared to compete in the global community" (MDE, 2012, p. 5).

With respect to evaluating special education teachers, research indicated that special education teachers play an important role in providing services for students with disabilities, which is critical to their educational success. Special education teachers and general education teachers share some of the same responsibilities as educators, but special education teachers need feedback specific to their role and responsibilities. "This feedback and support should be based on a shared understanding and ongoing support of best practice (MDE, 2021, p. 4). Goals were established to ensure MDE vision and mission statements were met as well as professional growth goals for special education teachers. The following are the goals of the Special Education Professional Growth System:

1. Provide shared vision for high-quality and learning and guide special education teachers in improving their practice.
2. Encourage regular, evidence-based observation and feedback for all special education teachers.

3. Support special education teachers and school leaders in identifying priorities for strengthening practice.
4. Serve as a guide for special education teachers as they reflect upon their own practices. (MDE 2021, p. 4).

Administrators have a responsibility to improve special education teacher growth and development, by providing teachers with regular classroom observations and teacher feedback. The observation cycle consists of "classroom observations, feedback, adjustments in practice, and follow-up to support the growth of teachers" (MDE, 2021 p. 7). Observation and feedback cycles will ensure that teachers are receiving regular classroom observations in order to provide meaningful teacher feedback. For the feedback to be effective, it "should be followed by clear, specific, actionable, and timely feedback to improve practice' (MDE, 2021, p. 7). The evaluation instrument was designed to provide teachers with continuous feedback, administrators should follow-up to ensure that the feedback is being implemented effectively. MDE developed the Administrative Professional Growth System "to help ensure that special education teachers receive the high-quality feedback necessary to support the growth they must maintain" and "to ensure that special education teachers are better prepared, supported, and retained to improve reading and learning for all students" MDE outlined administrators' expectations and responsibilities (MDE, 2021, p. 4). Administrators are responsible for:

1. Completing MDE's observer training to understand and implement the Special Education Teacher Growth Rubric with fidelity and consistency.

2. Knowing and understanding the Special Education Teacher Growth Rubric domains, standards, and indicators.
3. Supervising the observation process and ensuring that all steps are conducted according to the process.
4. Identifying the special education teachers' strengths and areas for growth and provide specific, actionable feedback for improving practice.
5. Ensuring that the Summative Observation Rating accurately reflects special education teachers' practice, (MDE, 2021, p. 5).

Observation and feedback are a four-step process for collecting evidence to support teachers and feedback conversations (MDE, 2021). "This process represents best practice and is not intended to be burdensome but provide observers with a clear process to make identifying high-quality feedback easier" (MDE, 2021 p. 6). The Mississippi Professional Growth System was condensed and streamlined for efficiency now having four domains and only nine professional standards. Each domain is detailed below:

Domain I: Lesson Design

1. Lessons are aligned to the Mississippi College, Career Ready Standards, and/or the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (as appropriate), represent a coherent sequence of learning.
2. Lessons have high levels of learning for all students, as indicated through the general and specialized curriculum to inform instructional decisions for students with disabilities.

Domain II: Student Learning

3. The teacher assists students in self-regulation and monitor generalization of learning.
4. The teacher provides multiple ways for students to make meaning of content by using explicit instructional strategies.

Domain III: Culture and Learning Environment

5. The teacher manages a learning-focused classroom community and productive learning environments for students with disabilities.
6. The teacher manages classroom space, time, and resources (including technology, when appropriate) effectively for student learning.
7. The teacher creates and maintains a classroom of respect for all students.

Domain IV: Professional Responsibilities

8. Engages in professional learning and complies with reporting requirements.
9. Collaborates with families/guardians and professionals.

The standards that were established by MDE were recognized by STEC and are in line with Mississippi's College and Career Standards (MDE, 2021). Special education teachers are rated from one to four based on detailed descriptors:

Level 4 Practice:

> This educator demonstrates advanced instructional practices, particularly those that foster student ownership of learning. In Level 4, a strong community of learners has been created in which students assume a large part of the

responsibility for the success of a lesson and their own learning. Level 4 practice goes above and beyond the expectations for an effective special education teacher.

Level 3 Practice:

This educator demonstrates effective instructional practices. Level 3 is characterized by "teacher-directed success" while Level 4 teaching is characterized by "student directed success." Level 3 practices are expected of all effective educators.

Level 2 Practice:

An educator demonstrating Level 2 practices is making attempts but does not fully demonstrate effectiveness. This educator has potential to become effective, but requires clear, specific, and actionable feedback to improve his/her practice. An educator whose practice is at Level 2 is a high potential special education teacher. High-quality feedback is essential in improving his/her practice.

Level 1 Practice:

This special education teacher should receive immediate and comprehensive professional learning and support(s) designed to address the identified area(s) for growth. (MDE 2021, pp. 13-14).

MDE conducted training for school district employees who would be responsible for evaluating special education teachers (MDE, 2021). The training offered the employees the opportunity to, a) understand multidimensional performance, b) practice using and scoring the MPGS, and c) review the importance of inter-rater reliability (MDE, 2021). Providing continuous support to teachers to cultivate effective teachers, teachers need and

want feedback. Feedback does not always need to come in the form of the act of teaching, but also the results of teaching. Timely, and informative feedback has been cited as being vital to improving teacher effectiveness. The Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric is a streamlined revision of The Mississippi Statewide Teacher Appraisal System (MDE, 2021). The performance goals and standards were condensed for efficiency, but the efforts to develop the model remained the same. The domains cultivated the desired outcome of what constitutes an effective special education teacher.

Special Education Teacher Perception of Teacher Evaluation

Special education teachers view teacher evaluations as a means to critique their ability to fulfill their responsibilities to students with disabilities. Special education teachers understand that teacher observations are unavoidable and will continue throughout their career. “Special education teachers often feel overworked, underappreciated, and discouraged in comparison to their general education counterparts” (Snyder & Pufpaff, 2021, p. 5). “Education reform legislation has led to an upwelling of mandatory teacher evaluation for all elementary, middle school, and high school educators, including those who teach special education” (Snyder & Puffpaff, 2021, p. 1). While education reform efforts continue to improve teacher evaluations, Snyder and Puffpaff (2021) referred to special education teachers’ evaluation as “retrofitted” because it yields very little information (p. 2). Research conducted on measuring general education teachers’ perceptions confirms how teacher evaluations have proven to be effective in making high-stake decisions as well as improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Jones, 2016). On the contrary, there is a dearth of information

regarding special education teachers' perception of how effective teacher evaluations models are at high-stake decision making, improving teacher effectiveness, or improving student achievement (Jones, 2016). Guartico, (2016) stated that research examining the perception or perspectives of special education teachers' views of evaluations or evaluation models are nearly non-existent.

Guartico (2016) and Lawson (2015) both conducted studies on how special education teachers perceived their evaluation process. Lawson (2015) used the REST observation tool to examine how special education teachers in California perceived the evaluation of their instructional processes. Lawson (2015) explored four areas: a) their perception of being evaluated by administrators without a background in special education, b) their perception of the validity and reliability of RESET rubric items, c) their perception of receiving feedback from administrators without a background in special education compared to receiving feedback from administrators with a background in special education, and d) and recommendations to change rubric items to effectively evaluate special education teachers.

When delving into the responses from the special education teachers, Lawson's (2015) first theme indicated that special education teachers wanted more useful feedback from administrators rather than simply focusing on the formalities of conducting the evaluation. The second theme was split in terms of the fairness of the evaluation process. Some special education teachers felt that the evaluation process was fair, while others felt that evaluation process did not account for their non-teaching responsibilities, such as IEPs, parent communication, and coordinating services. The third theme, special

education teachers voiced that the delivery of instruction is different than general education teachers, and feedback of good instruction should be reflective of that difference. The last theme was that special education teachers wanted more observations to identify areas of improvement and growth. The findings indicated that the special education teachers were more concerned with receiving more walk-throughs and visits as well as receiving more effective feedback from their administrators.

When Guartico (2016) studied how special education perceived the *Framework for Teaching* model and identified four themes: 1) how they perceived the evaluation modes, 2) how they perceived the implementation of the evaluation, 3) effective administrators' feedback, and 4) recommendations for future evaluation models relative to special education teachers' preparation and professional development. The first theme from the study revealed that the rubric items were not specific to the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers. Special education teachers felt the rubric items were geared more towards general education teachers. As it relates to implementation, the second theme, there was an indifference toward how the evaluation was administered. Special education teachers viewed the implementation of their evaluation as a mere to-do-list, whereas general education teachers felt that the evaluation was implemented with fidelity. The third theme, feedback, was perceived to be minimal at best. Again, the majority of the special education teachers perceived this as another area of weakness, due to administrators' lack of knowledge of special education programs but viewed their peers' evaluation and feedback as being exceptional, relevant, and useful. Finally, the last theme related to the authenticity of the evaluation model,

administrators' preparation, and scoring issues. Guartico's (2016) study revealed that special education favored changing the evaluator, suggesting that they be evaluated by evaluators with special education background or by their peers who are familiar with special education. The participants also favored changes in scoring to ensure professional development would be available, if needed. Guartico (2016) also reported that special education teachers were adamant about being evaluated by evaluators who are familiar with special education.

The fundamental purpose behind teacher evaluations is to provide teachers with ongoing professional development to improve teacher effectiveness and increase student achievement (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 2009). Teacher supervision has been in existence since the 1700's, evaluation has shifted from administrators supervising teacher's behavior to administrators influencing and evaluating teachers relative to student outcomes (Snyder & Pufpass, 2021). Evaluating general education teachers is already complex and challenging for administrators, and the task is even more challenging when evaluating special education teachers (Snyder & Puffpass, 2021). "Special education teachers often feel overworked, underappreciated, and discouraged in comparison to their general education counter-parts" (Snyder & Pufpaff, 2021, p. 5). Special education teachers are becoming more and more frustrated with being underappreciated coupled with being measured inadequately, by state standards, when compared to their counterparts (Ryan et al., 2017).

Administrator and Special Education Teacher's Evaluation

Students with disabilities (SWD) require specialized instruction. Without additional support, these students are at risk of performing well below their peers academically, behaviorally and functionally (Cook & Schirmer, 2003). Therefore, SWD needs direct and effective instruction. Specifically, SWD requires the use of instructional strategies that are intentional and differentiated to their specific need (Cook & Schirmer, 2003). Research indicates that classroom instruction for SWD has been underused and poorly delivered (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009). This is partially due to administrator's inability to provide support to their teachers for lack of training in this specialty area (Cook & Odom, 2013). After the performance evaluation, many administrators are unable to provide support to teachers to improve instruction due to their lack of knowledge of special education instructional practices (Sweigart et al., 2016).

In the wake of policy leaders and legislation granting states flexibility to develop their own teacher evaluation systems, it is incumbent that the design allows for the differentiation between effective and ineffective teachers (Holdheide et al., 2010). Information obtained from classroom observations remains the primary source of data principals collected to evaluate teacher's performance (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2014).

> One of the predominant evaluative measures in use is the formal classroom observation which: 1) allows for diagnosis and development of instructional practice, 2) remains the most commonly used data source in teacher evaluations, and 3) functions as the predominant means by which school principals acquire information about their teachers' instructional practices. (Lawson & Knollman 2017, p. 6)

Research has been conducted on the reliability and validity of teacher evaluation instruments; however, little research has been conducted on how applicable those instruments are when evaluating special education teachers, (Holdheide et al., 2010).

> A national survey of 1143 state and district directors of special education was conducted and, 85.6% of respondents reported that the same observation protocol is used for all teachers including special educators, and 72% of districts did not allow for a slightly modified process for evaluating special educators. Observation instruments applied to all teachers may not account for the specialized strategies special educators use in their classrooms. (Lawson & Knollman 2017, p. 7)

Aside from the teacher evaluation instrument lies a larger issue of whether the individual conducting the classroom observations and teacher evaluations possesses knowledge to effectively evaluate and provide feedback, to special education teachers. There is also an emerging interest as to whether school administrators modify teacher evaluation instruments when evaluating special teachers (Holdheide et al., 2010). “School administrators often lack a knowledge base regarding evidenced-based instructional strategies recommended for students with disabilities” (Lawson & Knollman 2017, p. 7). It is this lack of knowledge, coupled with an evaluation instrument designed to evaluate general education teachers “may impact administrator’s ability to provide an accurate and valid score of a special educator’s teaching” (Lawson & Knollman 2017, p. 7).

Lawson and Knollman (2017) conducted research on administrators’ ability to evaluate special education teachers’ effectively. The researchers interviewed school

administrators who were responsible for evaluating special education teachers. Administrators were asked to describe in detail the specific training they received to effectively use the evaluation instrument to evaluate special education teachers. The administrators responded that they had not received any training prior or during the time that they were responsible for providing special education teachers with an effective evaluation to promote teacher's growth and development. Administrator 3 stated the following:

> In terms of specific training for a special education credentialed person, I had none. Zero. Zero training. And that's basically the same with the general education teachers as well. We didn't get an awful lot of training. (Lawson & Knollman 2017, p.11).

There has been prior research conducted on the same topic, and administrators often responded in the same manner and stated that there has only been one instrument used to evaluate general education teachers and special education teachers (Holdeide et al, 2010). The participants in this study expressed a need and an interest to receive ongoing training on how to effectively evaluate special education teaches as well as expressing the need for preparatory programs to provide course offering for evaluating specialty areas (Lawson & Knollman, 2017).

Summary:

Teacher effectiveness and their ability to improve student's achievement has become a continuous debate. Although, there have been questions surrounding teacher effectiveness and whether it can be measured, teacher evaluations have proven to be

effective at improving teacher's instruction. Teacher evaluations have often become highly politicized because they can be tied to high-stake decisions such as tenure, employment, termination, and career advancement. There has also been a growing consensus that many evaluation models across the country are flawed and have failed at improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Randi Weingarten, President of American Federation of Teachers (2010), acknowledged that teacher evaluations are perfunctory, superficial, and inconsistent. Teacher evaluations rely on observations conducted by administrators who have minimal training as an evaluator and little to no knowledge of evaluating general education teachers or special education teachers effectively. Nationwide, schools and school district are under pressure to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap among America's students. Although research has confirmed that teacher evaluations are ineffective at providing teachers with the timely feedback needed to improve their instruction, it does not negate the fact that they are needed.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric (MSEGR) can be used to effectively evaluate special education teachers, how special education teachers perceive the MSEGR, and if administrators without a special education background are confident at evaluating special education teachers using the MSEGR. This study was guided by Shinkfield and Stufflebeam's Evaluation Theory. This theory recognizes the limitations of other models, offers solutions to address the limitations, and promotes continuous positive teacher support. Shinkfield and Stufflebeam's Conceptual Framework focuses on improving teacher's effectiveness,

whereas many other models place emphasis on teacher's behavior. "The proactive application of this model can facilitate decision making and quality assurance, its retrospective use allows the evaluator to continually analyze teacher performance and provide viable feedback for future advancement" (Stufflebeam & Shinfield, 2012, p. 312). Their model offers four components that are necessary to design an effective evaluation model: 1) context, 2) inputs, 3) process, and 4) products. As described in Chapter Three, data was collected to better understand how special educators perceive the MSEGR, whether administrators without a special education background are confident with evaluating special education teachers using the MSEGR, and if the MSEGR's design can effectively evaluate special education teachers. This qualitative research study obtained data through open-ended and conversational communication that lends itself to an inductive process.

CHAPTER III - METHODS

Teacher quality and the instruction teachers provide has been identified as the most influential factor in student academic achievement (Kane & Cantrell, 2012). Teacher evaluations are the most powerful instrument used to evaluate the quality of a teacher (Lawson & Knollman, 2017). The information obtained from teacher evaluations remains the most useful information for administrators to improve the development of their teachers. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the effectiveness of the Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric (MSEGR) when evaluating special educators and the extent to which administrators without a special education background possess the knowledge to effectively evaluate special education teachers, while also examining special education teachers perceptions of their lived experiences when being evaluated by administrators without a special education background, using the MSEGR.

Research Design:

This research utilizes a qualitative phenomenological approach, using an interview protocol to examine the effectiveness of the Mississippi Special Education Professional Growth Rubric (MSEGR). The research is guided by the conceptual framework of Shinkfield and Stufflebeam's Evaluation Theory (2012), while incorporating an elicitation technique. Shrinkfield and Stufflebeams' framework has four areas, context, inputs, process, and products, which help assist programs with developing an effective evaluation model. In addition, this qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to allow teachers and administrators the opportunity to share their lived experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of the Mississippi Special Education

Professional Growth Rubric. The semi-structured interviews allowed teachers and administrators to express their perceptions regarding the use, and the level of feedback provided to special education teachers after an evaluation. Semi-structured interviews allow the researchers the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to ensure that the interpretation is correct. The researcher chose a qualitative phenomenological method because it provided the participating administrators the opportunity to examine the Mississippi Special Education Rubric, while gaining insight on the lived experience of teachers who taught students with specific learning disabilities. The research has the potential to add to administrators' previous knowledge, by viewing the evaluation process through the eyes of special educators who are experiencing these events firsthand. By doing so, the researcher aimed to understand what characteristics teachers felt the evaluation and the evaluation process has on their professional growth. According to Merriam, phenomenology (2009) builds on the principle that a person's reality is interpreted based on the experiences and lives of others. Because this study sought to recognize and understand how able administrators, who do not have a background in special education to evaluate special education teachers using the MSEGR and how each of them perceive the effectiveness of the MSEGR for evaluating special education teachers, a phenomenological approach serves as the best approach for this study. Van Manen (2016) described phenomenology as the attempt to explain internal and external experiences through interviews. Moustakas (2010), explained that phenomenology is a method that supports the researcher's ability to clearly observe and interpret a phenomenon.

Research Participants:

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted from the University of Southern Mississippi prior to participant recruitment and data collection. The researcher utilized a purposive research sampling method to recruit secondary administrators in Mississippi who did not have background in special education and special education teachers in Mississippi who teach students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Creswell (2014) described purposeful sampling as the means to use the researcher's own judgement when selecting the participants. The researcher asked potential participants if they: 1) Identified as a practicing secondary administrator in Mississippi without a background in special education; 2) if they were responsible for evaluating special education teachers; and, 3) if the special education teacher's self identifies as a practicing special education teacher in Mississippi who teaches students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Secondary special education teachers and secondary high school administrators without a background in special education will be selected from different schools and school districts in Mississippi. Selecting participants from different schools and school districts across Mississippi gives the research a diverse perspective. Due to the difference in school types, no specific school will be targeted. To avoid bias, male, and female participants will be selected to participate. Alase (2017), believes that purposeful sampling allows for a deeper understanding of lived experiences. Employing purposive sampling in qualitative phenomenological research provides assurance that the most qualified subjects will be selected (Alase, 2017).

The researcher recruited participants from high schools across Mississippi. The researcher utilized listservs to communicate with secondary administrators and special education teachers to find participants who fit the inclusion criteria. The researcher's goal was to recruit 6-8 Mississippi high school administrators without a background in special education and 6-8 Mississippi special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities. The first six to eight participants who respond (6-8 special education teachers and 6-8 administrators) will be selected to participate. A demographic survey was emailed to potential participants and returned prior to the interview. Upon receipt of the demographic survey, the researcher emailed the participants a copy of the Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric to be used to elicit insight on participants' lived experiences.

Approvals:

IRB protocols required the researcher to send approval notices to the superintendent requesting that he/she grants permission to interview special education teachers and administrators in their district. Once permission was granted an informed consent letter was developed for each of the participating administrators and special education teachers to read and sign before going forward with the study. High school special education teachers and high school administrators consented to being tape recorded. This informed consent document contained all key facts of the study. Although the researcher did not interview a vulnerable population, administrators and special education teachers who were recruited to participate may put themselves in a compromised condition, if the participants do not agree with the school or school

district's philosophy regarding the MSEGR or by discussing administrator's feedback after being evaluated. Privacy and confidentiality will be guaranteed.

The researcher used a coded system that identified participants using an individual letter(s) and number. Using this strategy, the participants' identity will only be known by the researcher. Maintaining participants confidentiality remains essential in research. The researcher assured the interviewees that the zoom account, which was established for the soul purpose of the study was closed upon conclusion of the study and all tape-recorded interviews were destroyed according to IRB procedures. Overall, the risk factors were low for this population, as well as the probability of harm or injury. The participants who were recruited to participate in the study are highly educated adults who would have at the very least a modicum of interest in the study.

Positionality:

The researcher was born in Gulfport, Mississippi, graduating from Gulfport High School. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts in Special Education from The University of Southern Alabama, her Master of Arts in Special Education from William Carey University, and she is currently enrolled in The University of Southern Mississippi doctoral program. She has worked in education for 14 years, 8 of those years in Special Education, she currently holds the position of Student Service Coordinator, in Laurel School District. Informed by her commitment to become a more effective special education teacher, she understands the importance of teacher evaluations, as well as the need to be evaluated by a knowledgeable special education administrator who has been equipped with an effective evaluation model.

Instrumentation:

Each participant in the study responded to questions that were open-ended in nature. The semi-structured interviews took approximately one hour to conduct. Semi-structure interviews allowed the participants to respond to open ended questions, while allowing the researcher to maintain conversations with the participant. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The interview protocol and questions have been meticulously chosen and are sensitive to the needs of the participants (Appendix A). The interview questions were open-ended, to allow participants the ability to respond from their perspective (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured questions allow the researcher an opportunity to probe and ask more pertinent questions to reveal participants actual lived experiences.

Procedures:

The researcher conducted interviews via Zoom or via phone if the participant(s) or researcher experienced technical issues. Zoom will be the interview platform of choice due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Labinjo et al. (2021) found that "Zoom contributes to high quality and in-dept qualitative interviews when face to face interviews are not possible" (p. 3). The researcher created a Zoom account for the sole purpose of the research. The researcher contacted each participant via email or by phone to set up a date and time to conduct the interview. Prior to the schedule date, the researcher emailed each participant a Zoom meeting ID, Zoom Meeting password, a copy of the Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric (MSEGR) and a phone number as a backup if either the researcher or participant begin to experience technical difficulties. The researcher used the MSEGR as an elicitation device. Each participant was able to refer back to the

MSEGR while responding to the interview questions. Potential participants were assured that their participation is completely voluntary, they could decline to answer questions that made them uncomfortable, and that they could discontinue their participation at any time. Once participants logged into the Zoom portal, they were asked to consent to being tape recorded. After the participant agreed to the recorded interview, the researcher introduced herself to the participants and thanked them for their willingness to participate in the study. The researcher provided a brief overview of the interview process and responded to any clarifying questions the participants had prior to beginning the semi-structure interview process.

The researcher utilized a visual semi-structured interview technique. Cooper (2017) identified a three-stage visual method semi-structured interview process. The stages Cooper (2017) identified are "1) introduction and review; 2) compilation of data; and 3) the scrutiny of data collection" (p.87). This technique allows the participants to respond to the interview questions, while continuing to maintain a conversational style response. The approved interview questions (Appendix A) were used to guide the semi-structured interview process. The semi-structured interview process for each participant lasted 45 min to an hour. The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded, not only to identify themes, but it is "connecting themes back to the data and the data back to the themes" (Parameswaran et al.,2019, p. 633).

The interview protocol and questions were meticulously chosen and are sensitive to the needs of the participants. The questions were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the dissertation committee prior to the semi-structured interviews. The

researcher acknowledged participant's feelings, knowledge, demographics, values, experience, and opinions during the interview process.

Data Analysis:

Webb and Welsh, (2019), indicated that the purpose of phenomenological study is not designed to solve the problem indicated in the study, but to find meaning of the problem through the lived experiences of the participants. Alase (2017), expressed the importance of allowing the participants to share their lived experience. So, therefore, it is important for the researcher to collect and analyze the participants responses accurately.

Participants responses were transcribed by the researcher and read several times to ensure understanding. The goal behind this process is to look for embedded meaning of the participants narration of their lived experiences (Webb and Welsh, 2019). The researcher then utilized the questionnaire form to notate marginal notes while interviewing the participants. This allowed the researcher to identify common themes. Identifying commonalities and differences allowed the researchers to make relevant meaning of the phenomena (Webb et at., 2019)

The interviews were transcribed within a week of the actual interview. The interview protocols assist participating administrators with voicing their perception of the MSEGR and the decisions that were made based on the evaluation. The interview protocols also assisted participating special education teachers with voicing their perception of the MSEGR and their evaluations. The researcher believed that interviews would provide a rich understanding of the phenomenon. Individual interviews allowed the researcher to have an in-depth conversation of topics that were not covered in the interview process.

The data was analyzed through the lens of the research questions. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to analyze participants' responses to identify codes. Lichtman (2013), states that thematic analysis assists the researcher in focusing on the themes from the data. Thematic analysis highlights and identifies patterns with the data that are vital to defining the phenomenon related to the research (Lichman, 2013). Using constant-comparative analysis, data from the interviews were coded and analyzed to formulate categories to assist with developing themes. The researcher examined the categories to find overall ideas and interrelate concepts (Saldaña, 2016). These themes assisted in formalizing the results and findings.

Summary:

Chapter III provided an extensive review of the methodology of the study. This chapter identified the role of the researcher and the possible bias she recognizes through the research process. This information was described to illustrate how the researcher effectively addressed the research process.

CHAPTER IV – PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Teacher quality and the instruction teachers provide has been identified as the most influential factor in student academic achievement (Kane & Cantrell, 2012). Teacher evaluations are the most powerful instrument used to evaluate the quality of a teacher. The information obtained from teacher evaluations remains the most useful information for administrators to improve the development of their teachers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the effectiveness of the Mississippi Special Education Growth System (MSEGR) when evaluating special educators by administrators who do not have a background in special education. Marzano (2012) stated that most teacher evaluation systems fail at accurately measuring teacher quality, mainly due to the lack of discrimination between effective and ineffective teachers, as well as the lack of distinction between special educators and general educators. Furthermore, I was interested in exploring the extent to which administrators without a special education background possess the knowledge to effectively evaluate special educators to make a sound judgement of a teacher's effectiveness and administrators' ability to provide evidence-based strategies for teaching students with specific learning disabilities. The lack of knowledge in any of these areas could adversely affect the administrator's ability to provide an accurate score of a special educator's performance. Additionally, this study explored administrator and special educators' perception about the MSEGR as an evaluation instrument to effectively evaluate special educators based on the pre-established domains and rubric items.

All too often we tend to overlook the human aspect of teacher evaluations. Donaldson & Donaldson (2013) reported that policymakers and school districts put forth

extraordinary efforts to ensure that every student is educated by highly qualified teachers, but even the most sound, valid, and reliable teacher evaluation instrument by itself cannot ensure that a teacher is highly effective, without considering the human side of the evaluation process. Teachers have reported that the evaluation process experience is neither respectful nor constructive (Aydin & Aslan, 2016). The study is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education perceive the effectiveness of the rubric items and pre-established domains on the Special Education Professional Growth System when addressing the unique job responsibilities of their special educators?
2. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide evidence-based strategies to special educators who teach students with specific learning disabilities to improve their instructional practices?
3. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide immediate feedback to special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities.
4. What are special educators' perceptions of how accurately the Special Education Professional Growth System reflects and captures special educator’s effectiveness and capabilities?
5. How do special educators perceive their evaluation and results when being evaluated using the Mississippi Professional Growth System?

Demographics of Participants:

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experience of six secondary public-school administrators in Mississippi stated not having a background in special education and eight Mississippi secondary special education teachers who have acknowledge teaching students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Administrators and special education teachers participated in a 30-minute open-ended phone or virtual interview. Administrators responded to 13 interview questions and special education teachers responded to 10 interview questions. Inclusion criteria were established prior to the study (see Table 1). Participants had to meet one of the inclusion statements in Table 1.

Participants who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study. Administrators who participated in the study stated that they did not have a background in special education, they were the supervising administrator who was responsible for evaluating special education teachers, and they were employed in a secondary public school in Mississippi. The special education teachers who participated in the study stated that they teach students with specific learning disabilities and are employed in a secondary public school in Mississippi. Four males and two female secondary administrators voluntarily participated in the study and as well as three males and five female secondary special education teachers. The data gathered was analyzed in response to the five research questions presented in this study.

Table 1

Inclusion Criteria:

1.	A practicing secondary administrator in Mississippi without a background in special education.
2.	A secondary administrator without a background in special education, who is responsible for evaluating special education teachers.
3.	A practicing special education teacher in Mississippi who teaches students with Specific Learning Disability.

Demographics:

Table 2 displays basic demographic information about special education administrators who participated in the study, although few specifics were presented so as to maintain the participants' confidentiality. Participants resided in central Mississippi or the Gulf Coast. Sixty-six percent of the administrators were male and 33% were female. Two administrators had more than 5 years of experience, three had 3-5 years of experience, and one had 1-2 years of experience in working as administrators. Information was not collected about how many years they had taught before becoming an administrator.

Table 2

Special Education Administrators:

Participants	Gender	Yrs. of Exp.	Geographical Area
P1	M	3-5yrs	Central Mississippi
P2	M	3-5yrs	Central Mississippi
P3	M	1-2yrs	Central Mississippi
P4	M	5+ yrs.	Gulf Coast Area
P5	F	5 + yrs.	Central Mississippi
P6	F	3-5yrs	Gulf Coast Area

Table 3 displays basic demographic information about the special education teacher participants. The same strategy was employed to maintain participants' anonymity. These participants also worked in central Mississippi or the Gulf Coast area, Seventy-five percent of them were female, while only 25% were male. Two had 8-12 years of experience, three had 3 – 7 years of experience, and three had 1 – 2 years of teaching experience.

Table 3

Special Education Teachers:

Participants	Gender	Yrs. of Exp.	Geographical Area
SE1	M	1-2	Gulf Coast Area
SE2	M	3-7	Central Mississippi
SE3	F	1-2	Gulf Coast
SE4	F	8-12	Central Mississippi
SE5	F	3-7	Central Mississippi
SE6	F	8-12	Central Mississippi
SE7	F	1-2	Central Mississippi
SE8	F	3-7	Gulf Coast Area

Results

The administrators and special education teachers' interviews were transcribed verbatim and prepared for data analysis. The participants were extended the opportunity to review the transcripts for errors, omissions, or misunderstandings. While analyzing and coding the data, possible themes and sub-themes were identified from participants' interviews. Most of the administrators' responses indicated that they did not perceive all the item indicators and pre-established standards measured by the MSEGR to be effective when evaluating special education teachers. Each research question, along with their themes, is discussed in detail below.

Research Question 1:

To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in special education perceive the effectiveness of the indicators and pre-established standards on the Mississippi Special Education Professional Growth Rubric when addressing the unique job responsibilities of their special educators?

The themes and subthemes related to RQ1 are inappropriate evaluation indicators, classroom setting, duties, responsibilities, and expectations. The results of research question one (RQ1) indicated that the majority of the participating administrators agreed that the pre-established standards within the MSEGR are not applicable to the role and responsibilities of special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities (SLD).

Reliability Issues:

Special education administrators are responsible for observing and evaluating special education teachers who teach students with SLD. Special education teachers are expected to be observed at a minimum of three times a year and evaluated once a year guided by the Mississippi Special Education Professional Growth Cycle (Appendix D). Administrators have voiced how they struggle to rate special education teachers appropriately using the MSEGR (add citation if statement not from your participants). They have expressed how special education teachers' expectations do not align with the expectations of the MSEGR. Each administrator participating in the study shared their lived experiences and perception about the challenge of evaluating special education teachers using the MSEGR.

Administrators were asked to address the evaluation process and whether the established standards and performance indicators were adequate to evaluate special education teachers. P1 revealed:

> We are expected to evaluate our special education teacher using the MSEGR, which is difficult to do considering that pre-established domains and indicators do not align with our instructional practices.

Several of the participants indicated that the expectations that they have for their teachers do not allow them to use the MSEGR with fidelity. Special education administrators who have less than two years of experience have expressed how they struggle to effectively use the pre-established standards and indicators to measure their teachers' effectiveness. They also shared how this issue lies with the majority of the pre-established standards. P3 voiced that the behaviors indicators in the MSEGR, were written to allow administrators the opportunity to provide special education teachers with constructive feedback. This is difficult to do considering that the indicators are not an indication of what is expected from the special education teachers.

P3voiced,

> When using the MSEGR, is like checking off a box indicating a completed task. Using what I know to be effective is more useful to my special education teachers than trying to make the MSEGR work for special education teachers.

Similar to P1, P6 reported:

> As a relatively new special education administrator who is responsible for observing and evaluating special education teachers, the MSEGR was not helpful

with ensuring that my teachers were performing their daily tasks efficiently and effectively.

Most of the participating administrators support the idea of evaluating teachers to ensure that they are performing at their absolute best and to provide guidance to those teachers who need it, but to do so, they must be provided with an appropriate instrument to effectively complete this task. Many administrators felt that this state issued evaluation instrument negatively impacted their ability to effectively evaluate and support their teachers.

When addressing questions eight and nine in response to RQ1 administrators were asked if they used any other methods to evaluate their special education teachers and if they had an opportunity to change anything about the MSEGR, what changes would they make? Two of the six participating administrators admitted using an alternate evaluation instrument to evaluate their special education teachers. P4 expressed how challenging it was to use the state issued evaluation instrument, so therefore he developed an evaluation instrument that was specific to the functions of his special education teachers. Similar to P4, P5 shared that the reason she decided to alter her evaluation instrument was because there was a need for differentiation. A 'one-size fits all' approach is not appropriate when teachers are providing different services in their classrooms. P5 expressed that the MSEGR is an instrument for general education teachers, used to evaluate special education teachers.

When asked if participating administrators would recommend any changes to MSEGR, the majority of the participating administrators agreed that the MSEGR needs improvement. Participating administrators P1, P2, and P3 each agreed that the MSEGR

lacks the substance needed to effectively evaluate special education teachers. Although participating administrators agreed that changes need to be made to the MSEGR, it was difficult to identify changes to create a more effective evaluation model. The majority of the participating administrators agreed that the MSEGR needed a complete overhaul in order for it to be effective. Each of the participants agreed that developing an evaluation model for special education teachers can be complex and challenging due to special education teachers' varied responsibilities. In contrast, general education teachers can be more easily evaluated by measuring how well students are performing on common standard norms. Each participating administrator agreed that there is a need for more autonomy when evaluating all teachers. Striving to adhere to the professional growth cycle and aimlessly searching for ways to effectively use the MSEGR to evaluate special education teachers does not improve special education teachers' effectiveness, nor does it aid in connecting teaching practices to growth in student learning.

Research Question 2:

To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide evidence-based strategies to special educators who teach students with specific learning disabilities to improve their instructional practices.

Typically, special education administrators are responsible for assisting special education teachers with setting SMART goals, providing instructional strategies to improve teacher effectiveness, and conducting informal and formal observations. While interviewing the participants, two themes emerged related to research question two: accountability and effectiveness. Examining participating special education

administrators' lived experience, two subthemes emerged, preparation programs and support. Interview questions 2, 11, 12, and 13 allowed participating administrators to share their lived experiences regarding their ability to provide support to special education teachers. Research question 2 and 3 operate in tandem with one another in that both require administrators to expound on how they each support their teachers. When addressing interview question two in response to RQ2, most of the participants agreed that they struggle with providing support and feedback to their special education teachers.

Adequate Support for Special Education Teachers:

In Mississippi, any administrator can be assigned the role of special education administrator with or without a background in special education. Schools and school districts find it acceptable to hire special education administrators who do not have a background in special education to lead special education teachers. Many may find this practice acceptable until special education teachers and students are not getting what they need to be successful. To add to this conundrum, one must question whether the administrators have the ability to recognize the difference and have the capacity to aid in supporting special education teachers to improve student achievement and teacher effectiveness. P5 stated:

> When districts are looking to assign administrators the responsibility of overseeing special education teachers, they need to consider the needs of their students with learning disabilities and the teachers who teach them.

The participating administrators shared their lived experiences, expressing their frustrations and concerns while providing support to special education teachers. Three participating administrators, P1, P2, and P3 expressed the challenges that they faced

when supporting special education teachers. P2 stated that he was completely outside of his wheelhouse and had to work closely with his special education teachers to understand and recognize their specific skillsets. P1 shared that it was a grave mistake to assume that he could provide special education teachers with the same support that he provided general education teachers. He doubted his ability to take into account the services special education teachers provide or the modifications and accommodations they provide to ensure that students with disabilities' needs are being met. P3 shared the same frustrations as P1 and P2. Because of his lack of knowledge, his expectation is that special education teachers need to do what is necessary for their students to be successful. He admitted that he places the responsibility on the special education teachers to put strategies in place to support their students.

Two of the six administrators have more years of experience. P5 shared that providing strategies to support special education students is no longer a challenge adding that when she is observing her teachers, she not only provides them with strategies and feedback to improve effectiveness and student achievement, but she also evaluates the environment to make sure that it is conducive to learning. P5 also acknowledged she struggled in the beginning, and it was a challenge to ensure that students were rigorously taught. P5 also stated:

> Having a basic foundation of special education can prove to be significant when evaluating special education teachers. When an administrator lacks the ability to discern whether or not a special education teacher has the ability to provide effective instruction to students with disabilities, they will not have the ability to provide their teachers with purposeful feedback.

P4 stated,

> I have several years of experience as a special education administrator. I am comfortable with providing my teachers with instructional feedback and strategies. My first year, I could not fathom how I would begin to learn what constitutes an effective special education teacher.

When addressing questions 11, 12, and 13 in response to RQ2, participating administrators understood that special education administrators can no longer focus only on ensuring that students with disabilities rights are not being violated and whether accommodations are being met. In response to the previously mentioned interview questions, participating administrators, through their lived experiences, responded to whether their special education teachers benefited from their evaluations, if having prior knowledge of special education would have made them a more effective evaluator, and if there was any information, they would like for their special education teachers to share with them regarding their evaluation. The majority of principal participants agreed that as a special education administrator, not having a background in special education made evaluating special education teachers more daunting than evaluating general education teachers. The responses from the interviews suggested that administrators need some form of exposure to special education prior to becoming a special education administrator.

Inadequate Preparation:

Each of the participants agreed that their preparation program did not provide them with an adequate amount of special education information. Research has stated that to be an effective administrator in the 21st century, administrators need to be educated in

all aspects of education (Kim et al., 2019). P4 stated that, “effective special education leaders are those who are prepared to lead special education teachers.” Colleges and universities need to do a better job by incorporating special education courses into their administrative programs. Each of the administrators shared that most of what they have learned about special education has come from state and district training.

P6 stated,

> Schools and school districts simply assign administrators the role of special education administrators, knowing that they do not have a background in special education. As a result, students with learning disabilities are the ones who lose out.

P2 also shared,

> It is difficult being a new special education administrator, not only because you are trying to learn your job, or because you do not have a background in special education, not even because we are responsible for leading special education teachers. It is because you are assigned other duties, such as behavior facilitator, textbook administrator, or even athletic administrator. Which makes it difficult to observe and support special education teachers effectively.

Effective Observations:

Administrators must be proactive when evaluating special education teachers. However, because of the logistics of the MSEGR, it causes special education administrators to struggle evaluating special education teachers and providing them with effective instructional strategies and feedback. Two of the six administrators acknowledged that the MSEGR does not allow for an effective evaluation, effective

feedback, or opportunities to provide special education teachers with effective instructional strategies. P5 stated that her teachers expressed how much they appreciated her for using an additional evaluation model to evaluate them, considering how difficult it would be to receive an appropriate rating using the MSEGR.

P4 explained,

> I do not use the MSEGR to evaluate my teachers. I set the standards of expectations for my special education teachers, which allows me to provide them with useful instructional information. Information that they can use to improve classroom instruction and student achievement.

P5 agreed with P4 and stated that,

> When I evaluate my special education teacher with the criteria that I have set for them, I am able to provide them with feedback that indicates their glows (things that they are doing correctly) and grows (things that they need to improve upon). The MSEGR pre-established standards are not appropriate for the expectations that I have for my teachers. My teachers have shared how they appreciate the time that I put into ensuring that they have what they need to be successful. Special education teachers do better on evaluations when they understand what they are being evaluated on.

Four of the six participating administrators agreed that not having a background in special education made the transition into this position rather difficult. Expressing how this lack of knowledge causes difficulties when observing or evaluating special education teachers. The majority of them shared that the feedback provided was usually based on professional attributes, such as patience and communication skills P1 stated,

> Due to the lack of literature addressing how to effectively evaluate a special education teacher, I struggled with providing constructive feedback and support to my special education teachers after an evaluation or observation. I am familiar with things such as time on task, teaching from bell to bell, classroom management and proximity, but having the responsibility of providing effective strategic strategies after an observation or evaluation is still a challenge.

P2 explained,

> Observing and providing teachers with feedback is essential to their success. Not having the ability to lead your special education teacher can affect students with disabilities directly or indirectly.

Participating administrators expressed that in order for special education administrators to earn the trust of their special education teachers, special education administrators must possess a sufficient level of knowledge in special education. Special education administrators play an important role in the effectiveness of their special education teachers. P5 stated, “In the absence of administrative support and leadership, is the absence of effectiveness.” How can schools and school districts expect special education teachers to be effective without the support of their leader? Many special education teachers leave the profession due to the lack of support and guidance, so therefore, schools and schools districts should consider hiring knowledgeable leaders to support and guide special education teachers.

Research Question 3:

To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide immediate feedback to special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities.

After transcribing and coding the participants' responses, supporting special education teachers was the theme that emerged. There were three subthemes that emerged, preparation program, administrative support, and teacher's responsibilities. The passage of different forms of legislation, such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Every Student Succeeds Act significantly transformed the way special education administrators support their special education teachers. What was common among all the legislation was increasing the level of accountability for both teachers and administrators. Administrators' responsibilities are expected to go beyond compliance and overseeing federally mandated programs. Twenty-first century special education administrators are now expected to observe, evaluate, and provide feedback to improve special education teachers' effectiveness. Research question three is in tandem with research question two because both questions refer to administrator support.

In the new era of accountability special education administrators are expected to support special education teachers by providing them with instructional strategies to improve their effectiveness by improving how they deliver instruction to students with learning disabilities. By raising the expectations of administrators to support special education teachers, stakeholders are expecting special education teachers to raise the expectations they have for their special education students. Questions 3,4,5, and 6 were devised to garner information related to RQ3. Administrators expressed through their

lived experience their ability to observe and evaluate special education teachers. They discussed the difficulties of evaluating and providing feedback, and barriers that interfere with effectively evaluating special education teachers.

The majority of the participating administrators expressed that the task of overseeing special education teachers can be a challenge when you do not have a background in special education or have not been exposed to special education best practices. Each participating administrator agreed that observing and evaluating special education teachers using the MSEGR has its own set of challenges. As previously stated, most of the participants agreed that the pre-established standards do not align with a special education teacher's daily duties and responsibilities. P5 stated that the pre-established standards would be effective if, and only if, the special education and general education teachers were teaching in a co-teaching environment. P4, like P5, found it necessary to establish his own standards to evaluate his teachers and using only what he could use from the MSEGR. He said that "When you know what you are expecting from your special education teachers it is easy to evaluate them. I have learned that it is when you do not know what you are looking for is what causes the problems."

The Mississippi Department of Education published an evaluation guide to help support special education administrators to effectively evaluate special education teachers. Three of the six participating administrators felt that this guide was developed to assist the number of special education administrators hired, who did not have a background in special education, to better understand the evaluation process. They suggested that streamlining and publishing this document would take out the guess work for administrators when evaluating special education teachers.

Each participating administrator agreed that the more they work as a special education administrator, the more they learn about how to support their special education teachers. P3 mentioned the profound impact of COVID and how the resulting learning loss has added to an already challenging situation to improve academic achievement of students with learning disabilities. Many of the participating administrators stated that when deciding to obtain their administrative licensure, they welcomed the challenge to lead, never considering that they would be hired to lead such a vulnerable population, especially in the wake of COVID and learning loss caused by student attending school remotely. They acknowledged that special education teachers as well as students with learning disabilities suffer when the person assigned to leading them lacks the expertise to do so.

P2 explained,

> That all that I know about special education, I learned from attending special education training that was provided by the district and what I have learned on the job. Which is sad, because the teachers as well as the students deserve to be supported and guided by administrators who understand how to effectively support special education teachers.

Research Question 4:

What are special educators' perceptions of how accurately the Special Education Professional Growth System reflects and captures special educator's effectiveness and capabilities?

Teacher evaluations, performance feedback and professional development are critical to the success of special education teachers. Teacher evaluation models must be

valid, and reliable to capture the true meaning of a teachers' job performance. In the new era of accountability, teacher effectiveness is vital to ensure the academic success of students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). The Mississippi Department of Education and its constituents developed the Mississippi Professional Growth System to establish a consistent standard of a proficient teacher, to assist special education administrators to evaluate special education teachers effectively and give administrators the opportunity to provide special education teachers with feedback to improve their effectiveness. During interviews with the participating special education teachers, most of them expressed dissatisfaction with their evaluation and the MSEGR. They indicated that most of the pre-determined standards were not appropriate for the job they perform in their inclusion classes. Ineffective pre-established standards were the theme that emerged from interviewing special education teachers. Quantifying the role and responsibilities of special education teachers has been a challenge for many administrators. The era of accountability has precipitated many of the changes and expectations that have been placed on special education teachers and special education administrators. As previously stated, special education administrators understood and support teacher evaluations, while also acknowledging that for them to provide special education teachers with an effective evaluation, followed up with effective feedback, the evaluation model must be appropriate. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the MSEGR. Each of the special education teachers who participated in the study felt that the MSEGR did not capture their expected roles and responsibilities, nor did it capture how effective special education teachers are in an inclusion setting.

Inappropriate Pre-Determined Standards:

The majority of the special education teachers who participated in the study expressed their dissatisfaction with the MSEGR, explaining how the pre-established standards do not align with their teaching and non-teaching responsibilities. SE1 shared that he is not responsible for ensuring lesson plans meet the College and Career standards, which is Domain 1, on the MSEGR. Like many others, they shared concerns regarding their rating because they will not meet or exceed the expectations in Domains I-III because they are irrelevant to their work. SE7 added:

> The only domain that I view as effective is Domain IV: Professional Responsibilities. The indicators in this Domain are a reflection of special education teachers' responsibilities,

SE5 added,

The MSEGR is a model that was developed for general education teachers with special education teachers' responsibilities sprinkled throughout it. The majority of the special education teachers expressed that they welcomed being evaluated but want to be evaluated using a model that will lend itself to their professional growth. SE4-SE8, shared some of the same sentiments. The majority of these special education teachers are performing duties that are not represented in the MSEGR. SE6 respects that her administrator is involved in their day-to-day duties but acknowledged that her job responsibilities are not represented on the MSEGR, so her administrator modifies the evaluation model to ensure support and effective feedback. SE3 stated:

> The MSEGR does not allow administrators to evaluate special education teachers' strengths or weaknesses because the evaluation model pre-established standards are designed to evaluate general education teachers.

Like SE2, many of the participating special education teachers agreed that the MSEGR did not capture their effectiveness or capabilities. Unlike the other special education teachers, SE2 acknowledged that the mode was ineffective, but a

Research Question 5:

How do special educators perceive their evaluation and results when being evaluated using the Mississippi Professional Growth System?

For more than a decade, teacher evaluations have been an integral part of education. In the new era of accountability, an enormous amount of attention has been placed on teachers' effectiveness and student achievement. In response to the demands placed on accountability and student achievement, districts have worked tirelessly to develop a special education evaluation instrument to gauge teacher effectiveness. Special education teacher evaluations have the potential to be used to align professional development opportunities to teacher's needs. The majority of the participating special education teachers shared some of the same sentiments regarding their evaluation experiences. After being observed and evaluated, special education teachers expressed that just like their general education colleagues, they deserve to be evaluated by administrators who are knowledgeable, and they deserve to be evaluated with an effective evaluation model. Other participants agreed that they need to be provided feedback, support, and professional development opportunities to improve their craft as a special education teacher. Many of the special education teachers who participated in the study felt that the

MSEGR did not capture their expected roles and responsibilities, nor does it capture how effective special education teachers are in an inclusion setting. There were eight special education teachers who participated in the research. While transcribing the participants' responses, three themes emerged: collecting accurate data, measuring teachers' effectiveness, and evaluation falling short and two subthemes, model accuracy and challenges for evaluations.

Collecting Accurate Data:

Considering that evaluation models or systems are state specific, there are a wide variety of instruments used to evaluate special education teachers. Most special education models are quantitative in nature. Special education teachers have voiced that using one quantitative model or system may be a challenge when measuring a special education teacher's effectiveness due to their varied roles and responsibilities. The data collected from special education teachers' evaluations should be used to close the achievement gap between disabled and non-disabled students. Objectively observing special education teachers and providing them with timely feedback should ultimately result in student growth. SE1 stated that the "MSEGR does not allow administrators to accurately calculate what I do well as a special education teacher."

Many special education teachers who participated in this study shared their dismay about not being observed, evaluated, or provided feedback regarding their performance. SE1was evaluated and shared his confusion regarding how his rating was obtained due to many of his job responsibilities not being indicated on the MSEGR. SE2, stated that the pre-established indicators in Domain IV are useful indicators for evaluating special education teachers if and only if they are expected to perform the

duties, which he is not. Because of that, he questions how he could possibly receive an effective evaluation when only a small portion of the MSEGR captures what he does in his role as a special education teacher.

SE2 expressed,

> I was not satisfied with my evaluation. My frustration was not with the MSEGR, it was with my administrator for not providing me with an evaluation that would have supported my professional growth and not having the ability to address my concerns during the evaluation. I have taken concerns to my administrator regarding my academic and professional challenges, I expect my administrator to address those concerns. The response that I am almost always given is to speak with the general education teacher to see if we can find a way to support the student(s).

Special education teachers and special education administrators are well aware of the importance of evaluations and feedback to examine teaches strengths and weaknesses and whether or not students with disabilities are receiving effective instruction to improve academic achievement. It is necessary for special education administrators to be prepared when meeting with their special education teachers. Special education teachers are responsible for understanding how to meet students with learning disabilities' needs in a multitude of subjects and in a multitude of ways. They are also responsible for collaborating with parents, teachers, and other educational stakeholders, so it is imperative for administrators to be prepared to provide special education teacher with support and effective feedback, like many of the participants, SE3 revealed that feedback is almost irrelevant in his school district. SE4, reported that she received feedback from

her administrator, but acknowledged that the feedback that was provided could not be tied back to the MSEGR.

Measuring Teacher Effectiveness:

There is a plethora of research that measures teacher effectiveness in a general education setting. Administrators who do not have a background in special education confirmed that they are more confident evaluating general education teachers than special education teachers. Special education teachers' effectiveness cannot be measured in the same manner as a general education teacher. Administrators who do not have a background in special education have admitted that without having a background in special education coupled with only a few years of experience, evaluating a special education teacher can pose a challenge.

Special education teachers continue to express how pivotal feedback is to a teacher's career. Sharing that administrators' ability to provide meaningful and purposeful feedback has the possibility to improve their effectiveness. SE5 shared how incomprehensible it is to see special education teachers viewed less than general education teachers. Studies have shown that there are two reasons why administrators evaluate teachers and provide feedback and that is to promote accountability and professional development. To prove credible, administrators should have a working knowledge of special education and have the ability to provide feedback on what a teacher is doing correctly and areas of improvement. SE1 expressed being evaluated, but not being sure how the administrator obtained the score and was never provided professional development opportunities to improve a low scoring area. SE6 stated,

> Without proper data to support an evaluation, administrative support, or feedback to improve instructional strategies, special education teachers have the potential of becoming frustrated in their ability to teach students with disabilities.

Evaluation Falls Short:

To date, the Mississippi Department of Education, policy makers, school administrators, and researchers have searched for ways to ensure that special education teachers are evaluated using a quantifiable evaluation system or model that would provide a score that ascertain a teacher's level of mastery. There has been limited research that explores how to effectively evaluate special education teachers. Each of the participating special education teachers agree that the MSEGR is not an effective model to evaluate special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities in an inclusion setting. SE1, expressed how he did not benefit from his evaluation. SE2, stated that he could not understand how the pre-established standards would be used to evaluate him considering that only one was directly related to his job performance. SE3 had the same concern as SE2, stating that,

> In my district we examined, reviewed, and discussed the MSEGR as a department. Most of the special education teachers questioned how the predetermined standards were relevant to their role and responsibilities. I am not responsible for lesson plans, adapting curriculum based on the student's need, coaching [or] modeling, nor do we provide students with opportunities to choose challenging tasks and instructional materials.

Special education participants SE6 and SE8 administrators did not have a background in special education, but they have worked as special education administrators long enough

to understand how to lead and effectively support their special education teachers. Their special education administrators use the professional growth cycle very effectively. SE6 stated "I have been observed twice this year and provided feedback. I am confident that, if I needed anything in the form of support, I am comfortable reaching out to my administrator." Both special education participants stated that their administrators evaluated them using the MSEGR and supplemental evaluation instrument. The special education participants stated that their administrators chose to use an additional instrument to supplement the MSEGR to capture the full scope of the roles and responsibilities of their special education teachers. SE8 stated, "I am happy that I have an administrator who can help me with more than just how to deliver instruction, but to assist me with my IEPs as well." Both SE6 and SE8 shared the same sentiments regarding how hands-on their administrators are; they are aware of what is going on in the inclusion classes and review the data to make decisions on the student's needs. Both special education participants agreed that having an administrator who is familiar with special education makes a world of difference for special education teachers and students. In the wake of Covid, many special education students have fallen further behind their non-disabled peers. With this being the reality of special education, it is a great relief to have knowledgeable administrators who can assist both general education teachers and special education teachers with improving the academic achievement for all students.

Analyses:

This phenomenological study was designed to examine administrators', who do not have a background in special education, ability to evaluate special education teachers, provide effective evidence-based feedback in a timely manner and effectively use the

MSEGR to evaluate special education teachers. This study was also designed to explore the perceptions of participating special education teachers and administrators regarding the MSEGR as an effective model for evaluating special education teachers.

The overall finding from this study indicated that special education teachers are not opposed to being evaluated but are reluctant about being evaluated using an instrument that is not fair, relevant, or consistent. Over the years, special education teachers in Mississippi have been evaluated using models that were designed to evaluate general education teachers. Although there have been many changes made to how teachers are evaluated, special education teachers would prefer to be evaluated using a model that is specific to the work of special education teachers. Special education teachers have also expressed how effective feedback is important to their professional growth and development.

The participating special education teachers and administrators acknowledge that teacher observations are an important component to the evaluation process. Observations allow administrators to continue to support teacher growth, which impacts student achievement. However, the participating special education teachers and administrators' comments regarding the MSEGR demonstrated their concerns regarding the pre-establishment standards. They both believe in the overall goals and expectations of the evaluation process, but question if the pre-established standards are appropriate to supporting the performance of special education teachers. Participating administrators voiced through their comments that not having a background in special education can pose a challenge when evaluating special education teachers, coupled with an evaluation model that does not align with special education teacher's classroom expectations. One

unexpected finding was that more experienced administrators were able to create their own evaluation methods to overcome the limitations of the MSEGR.

Summary:

The finding from this research suggests that special education administrators without a background in special education may struggle to effectively evaluate special education teachers. Based on the responses from the special education teachers and special education administrators, they both voiced their opinions on how ineffective they perceive the MSEGR. Special education teachers have expressed how evaluating general education and special education teachers has undergone many changes, while also acknowledging that for the evaluation process to be effective, the evaluator and evaluation model must be suitable for an effective evaluation. Special education administrators shared the difficulty of providing effective feedback using the MSEGR because many of the pre-established standards do not accurately depict the roles and responsibilities of their special education teachers. Most of the special education teachers expressed that they welcome being observed and evaluated but they are opposed to being evaluated using the MSEGR, because it does not measure their classroom expectations. Chapter five will summarize the findings of the research study, while also discussing the explanations and implications for future research.

CHAPTER V - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher quality and the instruction teachers provide has been identified as the most influential factor in student academic achievement (Kane & Cantrell, 2012). Teacher evaluations are the most powerful instrument used to evaluate the quality of a teacher. The information obtained from teacher evaluations remains the most useful information for administrators to improve the development of their teachers. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the effectiveness of the Mississippi Special Education Growth System (MSEGR) when evaluating special educators. Marzano (2012) stated that most teacher evaluation systems fail at accurately measuring teacher quality, mainly due to the lack of discrimination between effective and ineffective teachers, as well as the lack of discrimination between special educators and general educators. Furthermore, I was interested in exploring the extent to which administrators without a special education background possess the knowledge to effectively evaluate special educators to make a sound judgement of a teacher's effectiveness, and administrators' ability to provide evidence-based strategies for teaching students with specific learning disabilities. The lack of knowledge in any of these areas could adversely affect the administrator's ability to provide an accurate score of a special educator's performance. Additionally, this study explored special educators' perception about the MSEGR as an evaluation instrument to effectively evaluate special educators based on the pre-established domains and rubric items.

All too often educational stakeholders tend to overlook the human aspect of teacher evaluations. Donaldson & Donaldson (2013) reported that policymakers and school districts put forth extraordinary efforts to ensure that every student is educated by

highly qualified teachers, but even the most sound, valid, and reliable teacher evaluation instrument by itself cannot ensure that a teacher is highly effective, without considering the human side of the evaluation process. Teachers have reported that the evaluation process is neither respectful nor constructive (Aydin & Aslan, 2016). The study was guided by the following questions.

1. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education perceive the effectiveness of the rubric items and pre-established domains on the Special Education Professional Growth System when addressing the unique job responsibilities of their special educators?
2. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide evidence-based strategies to special educators who teach students with specific learning disabilities to improve their instructional practices?
3. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide immediate feedback to special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities.
4. What are special educators' perceptions of how accurately the Special Education Professional Growth System reflects and captures special educator’s effectiveness and capabilities?
5. How do special educators perceive their evaluation and results when being evaluated using the Mississippi Professional Growth System?

Summary of Findings:

This study focused on the lived experiences of special education administrators who do not have a background in special education ability to effectively provide immediate feedback, instructional strategies, and evaluate special education teacher using the MSEGR. This study also examined whether special education administrators and special education teachers perceived the MSEGR as an effective evaluation model for special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities. The analyzed themes suggested that special education administrators struggled with evaluating, providing feedback, and offering helpful instructional strategies to special education teachers. The themes also suggested that special education administrators would benefit from having a working knowledge of special education when evaluating special education teachers. Balikc (2019) believed that it is important for administrators, who are responsible for the growth and development of special education teachers, to not only have prior knowledge of special education, but also have the ability to apply that knowledge when providing critical feedback after an evaluation.

RQ1. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education perceive the effectiveness of the rubric items and pre-established domains on the Special Education Professional Growth System when addressing the unique job responsibilities of their special educators?

Inappropriate Standards and Expectations:

Most of the participants agreed that the pre-determined domains were not effective when used to evaluate special education teachers. Their responses revealed their lived experiences of the MSEGR pre-established domains. Most of the administrators

who participated in the study expressed how the pre-established domains and indicators did not align with the role and expectations of the special education teachers who worked in their districts. For example, during one class block a special education teacher can provide services to students with specific learning disabilities in multiple classes, which does not allow them to contribute to the lesson design or spend much time with the student(s) to guarantee understanding. Instead, this is usually the responsibility of the general education teacher. This lack of alignment makes it more difficult to evaluate their special education teachers.

RQ2. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide evidence-based strategies to special educators who teach students with specific learning disabilities to improve their instructional practices?

Adequate Support for Special Education Teachers:

The special education administration who participated in the study expressed that their lack of knowledge of special education made it difficult to provide instructional strategies to teachers and students. Two of the participants had more years of experience as a special education administrator and reported feeling more comfortable with providing special education teachers with instructional strategies to support students with disabilities. While also admitting that previous training would have been valuable, they felt that most of what they learned, regarding supporting special education teachers and providing evidence-based strategies to support students, they learned on the job.

RQ3. To what extent do high school administrators without previous experience in the field of special education believe in their ability to provide immediate feedback to special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities.

School Administrator Preparation:

Research question three responses parallel the responses to research question two. Most of the participating special education administrators expressed not having the necessary knowledge of special education to provide special education teachers with immediate feedback after an observation. When meeting with special education teachers to discuss their observation, participating administrators shared that feedback is often limited to personal attributes, such as attendance, adaptability, empathy, and patience. Two of the six participating administrators expressed how they were able to provide their special education teachers with useful feedback because each of them was evaluating their teachers' using standards that were established by collaborating with educational stakeholders in their districts as opposed to using the MSEGR. Their special education teachers were observed and evaluated using those standards, followed by effective feedback to improve teacher effectiveness.

RQ4. What are special educators' perceptions of how accurately the Special Education Professional Growth System reflects and captures special educators' effectiveness and capabilities.

Ineffective Rubric Indicators:

The participating special education teachers agreed that the MSEGR does not capture their classroom duties or classroom expectations, which makes it difficult to receive an effective evaluation. The vast majority of the participating special education

teachers agreed that a well-designed teacher evaluation model can contribute to their level of effectiveness. Liu (2010) believed that special education teachers are more positive when they are evaluated using an evaluation model that is impartial, rigorous and represents their duties and responsibilities. Participating special education teachers expressed some concerns with the pre-established standards and rubric items. While they understand the evaluation models are designed to hold teachers to a high level of expectation, most agreed that the MSEGR did not assess their skills and competences. The participating special education teacher stated that they must be adaptive to their student's needs and much of their classroom instructions are based on the student's background and academic needs and the MSEGR does not account for that.

Due to the lack of effectiveness, administrators of two of the participating special education teachers developed and used an evaluation model as a supplement to the MSEGR that measured the special education teacher's ability to identify student's needs in a number of ways, which is what they are expected to do. They reported that the quality of the evaluation rubric was less than effective when evaluating special education teachers.

RQ5. How do special educators perceive their evaluation and results when being evaluated using the Mississippi Professional Growth System.

Evaluation Falls Short:

The majority of the special education teachers who participated in the study were not satisfied with their evaluation. The participating special education teachers viewed their evaluators as trustworthy and patient but thought they lacked the experience and knowledge to provide an accurate rating. Overall, the participating special education

teachers viewed their evaluation as ineffective, without any supporting data to support their rating.

Limitations:

The following are considered as limitations of this study. These limitations may threaten the internal validity of the research:

1. Data was only obtained from six secondary schools in Mississippi.
2. Participating special education teachers only taught students with specific learning disabilities in secondary schools in Mississippi.
3. Participating secondary administrators worked in secondary schools in Mississippi and did not have a background in special education.
4. Biases for or against secondary administrators may have influenced responses.

Implications for Practice:

Information gathered in this study indicated that special education administrators who do not have a background in special education would benefit from special education training. The training can be provided by colleges, universities, or by school districts. With these findings, one recommendation would be for colleges and universities to collaborate with the Department of Education to imbed a special education course into the administrative curriculum. This will allow administrators to be informed on basic information regarding special education, which would assist in improving their leadership and evaluation skills. Sanchez et al. (2019) stated that there is an inconsistency among the "quality of principal preparation programs" (p.2), also stating that "school leaders cannot simply meet licensure requirements to be effective." Special education teachers'

performance has been reported to be more effective when there is an effective leader at the head.

When appointing administrators to lead special education teachers, it is imperative that the candidates are able to understand special education teacher's unique role and responsibilities. They should be comfortable observing and evaluating special education teachers, while also having the capacity to provide feedback and instructional strategies to improve effectiveness. Lawson et al. (2017) stated, "the school administrator uses the information gleaned from formal classroom visits to provide the teacher with feedback, set goals for classroom performance, and make decision regarding retention and tenure" (p. 6). Constructive feedback is necessary to ensure teacher effectiveness. Special education teachers cannot obtain a fair or accurate rating or even improve their classroom instruction if special education administrators are unable to observe and provide data-driven feedback. Therefore, my next recommendation would for states, districts, or schools to provide additional training, in the form of videos, lectures, or classroom observations to special education administrators who do not have the same knowledge and understanding of special education as administrators with a background in special education so that they are better equipped to provide effective feedback, evidence-based strategies, and appropriate evaluation ratings to special education teachers.

Similar to what that participating special education administrators and special education teachers indicated during their interviews, Ruppar et al. (2018) stated that school districts need to re-evaluate their evaluation instruments to ensure that the instrument is relevant, valid, and reliable. The final recommendation would be for special

education administrators to collaborate with educational stakeholders to design a useful special education evaluation that exhibits the role and expectations of their special education teachers. Lawson and Knollman (2017) stated, “School administrators often feel the need to make modifications to observation instruments when evaluating special education instruction” (p. 3). Two of the participating administrators felt more comfortable with evaluating special education teachers after gaining more experience as a special education administrator. They were given the autonomy to develop and use a supplement evaluation model, while only using the pre-established standard and indicators in the MSEGR that were representative of their teachers’ duties and responsibilities. Although little is known about the types of modifications that are made to special education teachers evaluation models or how reliable or valid evaluation models that are designed by school administrators changes are needed to reflect teachers’ expectations.

Recommendations for Future Research:

The first recommendation for future research is to conduct a follow-up study considering that the MSEGR is relatively new. This research would give special education administrators the opportunity to become more familiar with the instrument as well as obtain more training using the model. A follow-up study with a larger sample size that recruited participants from different parts of Mississippi and from different geographical locations would be beneficial in determining whether the same problems described here are more universal. The participating special education administrators voiced, through their responses, how they would have benefited from receiving special education training.

The second recommendation for future research is to consider a study that would be specifically used to examine professional development opportunities for special education teachers and special education administrators at the district and/or state level. Four of the six participants in this study did not expound on their knowledge of professional development or having the ability to discern what type of professional development that they may need, which may suggest that there is a need for special education teachers and administrators to participate in professional development to improve their skills.

An unexpected finding was that more experienced administrators were able to adapt to limitations they perceived in the MSEGR. Therefore, a third recommendation would be to design a study that could compare experienced special education administrators with less experienced ones to determine the role that administrative experience has in the evaluation process of special education teachers.

The final recommendation for future research is to develop an evaluation form for special education teachers to evaluate their administrators on their ability to be effective leaders. A thorough literature search revealed that such a form does not yet exist. The reason this may be important for future research is to determine if special education teachers are getting what they need in the form of observations, effective evaluations, and professional development opportunities. As stated previously, special education teachers expect to have just as an effective evaluation process as their general education colleagues.

Special education teachers have stated that they are not opposed to being evaluated, their only request is to be evaluated just as fairly as their general education

teachers. The final recommendation would be to add a section to the evaluation model where special education teachers can respond to their evaluation. Expressing the ways in which the evaluation and the feedback provided by the administrator promoted, or did not promote, professional growth would contribute to improved classroom instruction to improve student achievement.

This qualitative phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of special education administrators who are responsible for evaluating special education teachers using the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric (MSEGR) and providing effective evidence-based feedback to improve instruction. This study also focused on special education and special education administrators' perception of the MSEGR. Wiezorek and Manard (2018) suggested that the department of education collaborates with colleges and universities informing them that novice administrators need an introductory course to special education, given that new administrators may be responsible for leading special education teachers. Several of the special education administrators who participated in the study stated that they would have benefited from having some form of special education course prior to becoming an administrator.

The majority of the participating administrators and special education teachers were not satisfied with the pre-establishment standard on the MSEGR. Moylan et al (2016) stated, "most observation systems have not been designed to address issues specific to special education" (p. 2). For a special education teacher's evaluation to be effective, the evaluation instrument must be designed to allow the evaluator to measure and provide corrective feedback. Most of MSEGR pre-established standards were not useful for evaluating participating administrators' special education teachers. Ineffective

evaluation standards only allow the evaluator the opportunity to provide a special education teacher with corrective feedback on selected indicators, which is not fair to the special education teacher. Special education teachers deserve to be evaluated just as effectively as their general education colleagues.

Special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities are responsible for providing instruction across all subject areas. Therefore, special education teachers need evaluators who have the expertise and knowledge to be able to effectively evaluate them in these settings. Special education teachers voiced through their responses that their administrators were not knowledgeable enough to provide them with effective feedback to improve their instruction. Special education teachers also expressed how their evaluations lacked the substance needed for improvement. Special education administrators shared how unprepared they were when evaluating special educations teacher and expressed the thought that if their preparatory program had offered courses in special education coupled with professional development, they would have been better prepared to evaluate special education teachers.

Research has shown that designing a special education evaluation model is challenging and implementing such a design can also pose a challenge. These challenges are significant, but we must keep in mind that just like their non-disabled peers, students with disabilities deserve to be taught by quality special education teachers who have the capacity to provide high quality instruction to improve the educational outcomes of students with learning disabilities.

APPENDEX A- IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

118 COLLEGE DRIVE #5116 • HATTIESBURG, MS | 601.266.6756 | WWW.USM.EDU/ORI

NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below 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 regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to Athe 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 involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 22-1240
PROJECT TITLE: Examining the Mississippi Special Education Growth Rubric for Tricia Pittman on 18-Aug-2022 10:27 AM SCHOOL/PROGRAM School of Education
RESEARCHERS: PI: Tricia Pittman
Investigators: Pittman, Tricia~ Lee, David~ IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 28-Nov-2022 to 27-Nov-2023

Donald Sacco Jr.

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

APPENDIX B – PERMISSION LETTER

SUPPERINTENDENT'S PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH LETTER

Date:

Superintendent:

School District:

Dear:

My name is Tricia Pittman, and I am a Student Service Coordinator with Laurel School District. I am also enrolled in the Educational Leadership doctoral program at the University of Southern Mississippi. I have completed my course work and will be conducting research to complete the requirements for my dissertation very soon. The topic I have chosen is administrators and special education teachers' perception of the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric. The study will focus on high school administrators' skills in evaluating and providing timely feedback to special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities. I am requesting permission to contact teachers and administrators in your district requesting them to participate in the study. This study will measure administrators' skills when evaluating special education teachers. While collecting the data, I will interview participants, asking them to respond to open ended questions. The participants will be asked questions pertaining to their level of knowledge of the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric when evaluating special education teachers. Participating special education teachers will respond to open-ended questions pertaining to how they perceive the evaluation process. The interview should take no longer than 20-30 minutes to complete. With your consent, I will schedule a time,

designated place and/or platform to conduct the interview. Any identifying information will be kept confidential. As the inclusion of special education students increases, the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers and administrators change. The results of this study will provide information on what administrators need to know and understand to be educational leaders for special education teachers. Once the study is complete, I will be very happy to share the findings with interested people in your district.

If you grant me permission to conduct this research with administrators and teachers in your district please copy and paste the content of the attached consent form to your district letterhead, sign it, and email it to tspttman@gmail.com. This information can also be faxed to me at 601-847-8001

If you have any question please feel free to contact me via email:tspttman@gmail.com or telephone 228-760-7220. My committee chair is Dr. David Lee, who can be contacted at David.e.lee@usm.edu. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tricia S. Pittman

Doctoral Candidate, University of Southern Mississippi

APPENDIX C - CONSENT FORM

SUPERINTENDENTS' PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH:

CONSENT FORM

As superintendent of _____, I give Tricia Pittman

permission to conduct educational research in the district during the summer semester of the

2022-2023 school year. This research will focus on high school administrators' skills to effectively evaluate and provide timely feedback to special education teachers who teach students with specific learning disabilities. This research will also examine administrators and special education teachers' perception of the Mississippi Special Education Professional Growth Rubric. Permission is granted to Tricia Pittman to interview high school administrators and high school special education teachers within the specified school district. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. All responses will be kept confidential. No individuals will be identified in any of the reports.

_____ _____

Superintendent's Signature Date

APPENDIX D - MISSISSIPPI PROFESSIONAL GROWTH RUBRIC

MISSISSIPPI EDUCATOR & ADMINISTRATOR

OBSERVATION FORM

SPECIAL EDUCATION GROWTH RUBRIC

Teacher Name	Grade Levels	Time of Day
Date of Pre-Observation Meeting	**Date of Observation**	**Date of Post-Observation Meeting**
District & School	**Observer Name or Signature**	

Informal Observation	Formal Observation	Setting
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3	☐ Inclusive ☐ Resource ☐ Self-Contained

DOMAIN I: LESSON DESIGN

Standard 1: Lessons are aligned to the Mississippi College, Career Ready Standards, and/or the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (as appropriate) and represent a coherent sequence of learning

Indicators	
4	Lessons include student learning outcomes and instructional activities that: • are fully aligned to the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards and the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (as appropriate) and students' long-/short-term learning goals • are part of a coherent sequence of learning with ample evidence of identifying prerequisites, adapting curriculum based on student needs, and making connections explicit • reflect collaboration with general education teachers, support staff, **and families**
3	Lessons include student learning outcomes and instructional activities that: • are **fully aligned** to the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards and the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (as appropriate) **and** students' long-/short-term learning goals • are part of a **coherent sequence** of learning **with ample evidence of** identifying prerequisites, adapting curriculum based on student needs, and making connections explicit • **reflect collaboration with general education teachers and support staff**
2	Lessons include student learning outcomes and instructional activities that: • are **partially aligned** to the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards and the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (as appropriate) **or** students' long-/short-term learning goals • are part of an **ineffective sequence** of learning **with limited evidence of** identifying prerequisites, adapting curriculum based on student needs, and making connections explicit
1	Lessons include student learning outcomes and instructional activities that: • are **not aligned** to the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards and the Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards (as appropriate) **or** students' long-/short-term learning goals • are **not part of a coherent sequence** of learning **with limited or no evidence of** identifying prerequisites, adapting curriculum based on student needs, and making connections explicit

Evidence Collected

Notes

- ○ Lesson Plans
- ○ IEPs
- ○ PLC Agendas
- ○ Progress Monitoring
- ○ Results of Formative and Summative Assessments
- ○ Content Enhancements

Performance Level

- ☐ Level 4
- ☐ Level 3
- ☐ Level 2
- ☐ Level 1

DOMAIN II: STUDENT UNDERSTANDING

Standard 3: The teacher assists students in self-regulation and monitors generalization of learning

Indicators	
4	• **Regularly** opens the lesson with a clear introduction and review, model of skills and cognitive strategies, and/or provides clear explanation of concepts, depending on where the teacher is in a learning progression • Uses a **variety of assessments** to effectively monitor student learning and progress • Provides **ample and** effective opportunities for students to monitor their own learning through explicit modeling of strategies to solve problems, regulate attention, organize materials, and/or regulate thoughts • Provides students with timely, positive, and goal-directed feedback in the student's mode of communication (verbal, nonverbal, or written) • Creates opportunities for students to apply teacher and peer feedback to improve performance, enhance learning, and/or reach behavior goals • **Collaborates with others so that students use learned skills in situations other than the original learning environment and in the absence of ongoing instruction**
3	• **Opens** the lesson with a **clear** introduction and review, model of skills and cognitive strategies, and/or provides **clear** explanation of concepts, depending on where the teacher is in a learning progression • Uses **formative assessments** to effectively monitor student learning and progress • Provides **effective** opportunities for students to monitor their own learning through explicit modeling of strategies to solve problems, regulate attention, organize materials, and/or regulate thoughts • Provides students with **timely, positive, and goal-directed feedback** in the student's mode of communication (verbal, nonverbal, or written) • Creates opportunities for students to apply teacher and peer feedback to improve performance, enhance learning, and/or reach behavior goals
2	• **Inconsistently** opens the lesson with an introduction and review, model of skills and cognitive strategies, **and/or** provides explanation of concepts that is **sometimes unclear,** depending upon where the teacher is in a learning progression • Uses formative assessments to **adequately** monitor student learning and progress • Provides **adequate** opportunities for students to monitor their own learning through explicit modeling of strategies to solve problems, regulate attention, organize materials, and/or regulate thoughts Provides students **with limited or non-specific feedback** in the student's mode of communication (verbal, nonverbal, or written)
1	• **Often does not** deliver lessons that are coherent, containing a clear opening, review, model, and sufficient practice opportunity • **Inadequately** monitors student learning and progress • Provides **inadequate** opportunities for students to monitor their own learning through explicit modeling of strategies to solve problems, regulate attention, organize materials, and/or regulate thoughts • Provides students with **little feedback** or it is **not** in the student's mode of communication (verbal, nonverbal, or written)

Evidence Collected	Examples of Evidence
Notes	○ Lesson Plans ○ IEPs ○ PLC Agendas ○ Assessments ○ Content Enhancements ○ Samples of feedback

Performance Level

☐ Level 4
☐ Level 3
☐ Level 2
☐ Level 1

DOMAIN III: CULTURE AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Standard 7: The teacher creates and maintains a classroom of respect for all students.

Indicators	
4	• Communicates respectfully to all students • Provides **ample and** effective opportunities for peer learning and/or flexible grouping • Demonstrates a strong positive relationship with all students and uses effective techniques to deescalate student behavior whenever appropriate • **Promote and model** age-appropriate and culturally responsive teaching practices to foster student engagement across learning environments
3	• Communicates respectfully to **all** students • Provides **effective** opportunities for peer learning and/or flexible grouping • Demonstrates a strong positive relationship with **all** students **and** uses **effective** techniques to deescalate student behavior whenever appropriate • **Effectively** employs age-appropriate and culturally responsive teaching practices to foster student engagement across learning environments
2	• Communicates respectfully to students **with rare exceptions** • Provides **adequate** opportunities for peer learning and/or flexible grouping • Demonstrates a strong positive relationship with **some** students **and/or** uses **ineffective** techniques to deescalate students' behavior **Adequately** employs age-appropriate and culturally responsive teaching practices to foster student engagement across learning environments
1	• **Often communicates disrespectfully** with students • **Rarely or never** uses peer support and flexible grouping strategies • **Does not** demonstrate a strong positive relationship with students and/or **does not** use techniques to deescalate students' behavior • **Inadequately or does not** employ age-appropriate and culturally responsive teaching practices to foster student engagement across learning environments

Evidence Collected	Examples of Evidence
Notes	○ Teacher Quotes-Positive Behavior Interventions ○ Teacher and Student Quotes-Praise ○ Teacher Uses "Tell-Show-Practice", Crisis Prevention, or Other Explicit Techniques ○ Time Tally for Teacher-Directed Learning Versus Peer-Learning or Flexible Grouping ○ Behavior Modification Charts and/or Plans

Performance Level

☐ Level 4
☐ Level 3
☐ Level 2
☐ Level 1

DOMAIN IV: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Standard 8: The teacher engages in professional learning and complies with reporting requirements

Indicators	
4	• Proactively seeks out, participates in, **and shares** professional learning to improve practice based on observer feedback • **Fully integrates** into professional practice the knowledge gained in professional learning communities, collaboration with peers and leadership, and focused professional development • **Promotes** and adheres to standards of professional practice regarding IEP compliance, including IEP meeting organization, individual goal development, and paperwork completion • Maintains confidentiality of information except when information is released under specific conditions of written consent and statutory confidentiality requirements • **Promotes understanding** of federal, state, and local policies/mandates regarding identifying and educating students with disabilities **among students, families, and professionals**
3	• Proactively seeks out and participates in professional learning to improve practice based on observer feedback • Fully integrates into professional practice the knowledge gained in professional learning communities, collaboration with peers and leadership, and focused professional development • Adheres to standards of professional practice regarding IEP compliance, including IEP meeting organization, individual goal development, and paperwork completion • Maintains confidentiality of information except when information is released under specific conditions of written consent and statutory confidentiality requirements • Demonstrates understanding of federal, state, and local policies/mandates regarding identifying and educating students with disabilities
2	• Participates in required professional learning and applies some observer feedback to improve practice • Applies knowledge gained from professional learning but does not fully integrate the new information • Adheres to standards of professional practice regarding IEP compliance, including IEP meeting organization, individual goal development, and paperwork completion with oversight • Maintains confidentiality of information except when information is released under specific conditions of written consent and statutory confidentiality requirements • Demonstrates limited understanding of federal, state, and local policies/mandates regarding identifying and educating students with disabilities
1	• Participates in required professional learning, but applies little or no observer feedback to improve practice • Does not apply knowledge gained from professional learning • Occasionally does not adhere to standards of professional practice regarding IEP compliance including IEP meeting organization, individual goal development, and paperwork completion • Violates confidentiality of information • Does not demonstrate understanding of federal, state, and local policies/mandates

Evidence Collected	Examples of Evidence
Notes	○ Professional Learning Agendas ○ Session Registrations ○ PLC Meeting Agendas ○ Past PGS Observation Feedback and Evidence of Implementation ○ Email or Communication Logs

Performance Level
☐ Level 4
☐ Level 3
☐ Level 2
☐ Level 1

APPENDIX E- ADMINISTRATOR'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for Administrators

1. When using the Mississippi Professional Growth Rubric for Special Education Teachers, what are your thoughts about the evaluation process of this evaluation instrument for special education teachers in your school?
2. After using the Special Education Professional Growth Rubric (SEPGR), to evaluate your special education teachers, what type of feedback or areas of support do you provide teachers in your school?
3. How satisfied with your ability to effectively evaluate special education teachers in your school? What would improve your ability to effectively evaluate the special education teachers in your school?
4. What factors facilitate your ability to evaluate the teaching performance of special education teachers in your school?
5. What difficulties do you have in evaluating the teaching performance of special education teachers in your school?
6. What barriers interfere with effectively evaluating the teaching performance of special education teachers in your school?
7. In what ways does the Mississippi Special Education Professional Growth Rubric provide you with adequate information to effectively evaluate special education teachers in your school?
8. What other evaluation methods or tools do you use in order to evaluate special education teachers in your school? Please describe the method or tool and why you use them.
9. What changes would you recommend for improvement of the MSEPGR?
    a. What changes would you make to the MSEPGR to make it easier to use?
    b. What changes would you make to the MSEPGR in order to better evaluate the performance of special education teachers?
10. What comments have you received about your performance evaluations from special education teachers in your school?
11. In what ways do you feel that the special education teachers in your school have benefited from your performance evaluations?
12. What knowledge do you wish you had in order to effectively evaluate the teacher performance of special education teachers in your school?
13. If you were to receive any information from your special education teachers, regarding their evaluation process, that could possibly benefit you when evaluating them, what would they be?

APPENDIX F- TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions for Special Education Teachers

1. After you have been evaluated, using the Special Education Growth Rubric (SEPGR), what type of feedback or support does your administrators provide?
2. After you have been evaluated, what type of feedback or support would you like from your administrator? Why?
3. After you have been evaluated, have you ever been offered professional development opportunities to improve or stay abreast of the latest trends in special education?
4. In what ways are you satisfied with the SEPGR as an effective evaluation instrument?
5. In the past year, what evaluation tools or models were used to evaluate your teaching performance other than the SEPGR?
6. What do you like about the SEPGR? Please provide specific examples.
7. What do you dislike about the SEPGR? Please provide specific examples.
8. In what ways do you feel a performance evaluation conducted using the SEPGR is useful for your professional growth as a special education teacher?
9. What do you wish your administrator would learn about effective teaching performance in special education?
10. Can you explain to me in detail if there is anything that you would want to share with your administrator about your class that could be beneficial during the evaluation process

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