

Special Educators' Working Conditions


In Self-Contained Settings for Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (EBD):

- Significant mental health needs
- Intertwined academic and behavioral challenges
- High risk of negative long-term outcomes (e.g., dropout, unemployment)
- 37% of K-12 students with EBD served in self-contained schools & classes
- Effective intervention can reduce/eliminate behavior challenges

Skilled Teachers

- *Largest school-based influence on students*
 - Lifetime income
 - College attendance
 - Teenage parenthood
 - Attendance
 - Graduation
- *Teacher Attrition*
 - Weaker student outcomes
 - Reduces average teacher experience

 **Especially important for students with EBD**

Working Conditions

- *Defined as:*
 - **Social Resources** (school culture, admin. support)
 - **Logistical Resources** (e.g., planning time, curricula)
 - **Demands**
- *Predict:*
 - Burnout
 - Stress
 - Attrition, intent to leave
 - Instruction

“Teachers’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions.”
Hirsch, 2006

Teachers of Students with EBD:

- *Compared to other special educators:*
 - More stressed
 - More burned out
 - Higher turnover
 - Less experienced
 - Less likely to be fully certified
- *Experience challenging working conditions:*
 - Isolated in their schools
 - Feel misunderstood by colleagues, administrators
 - Limited planning time
 - Responsible for many subjects, grades
 - Many extra responsibilities

Purpose:

- 1) Descriptively examine the nature of the working conditions special educators experience in self-contained settings for students with EBD
- 2) Examine how working conditions interact with one another, with stress, burnout, and intent to leave



Inform efforts to improve working conditions for special educators, and thereby improve access to skilled, well-supported teachers for students with EBD

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Methods:

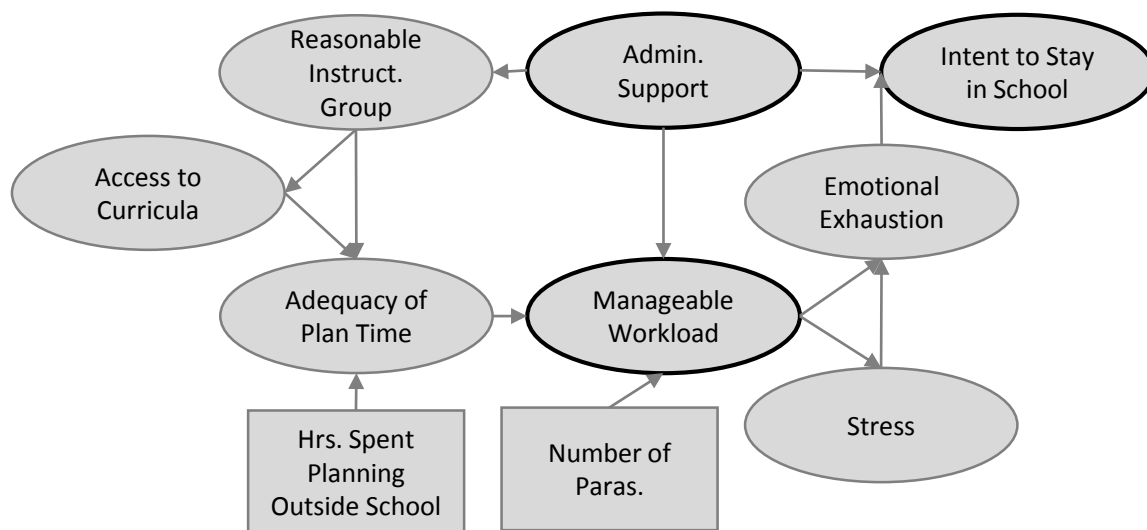
Nationally representative survey of 171 special educators (51% response rate) in self-contained schools and classes for students with EBD

❖ Special educators:

- Teach an average of 9 students (8 with EBD)
- Plan an average of 9.83 hrs/wk, outside the school day
- Do not feel they have adequate time to do their jobs well
- Feel more stressed about planning and providing academic instruction than about any other responsibility
- Teach an average of 9.42 subject/grade combinations

Results: *Working Conditions*

Predict Intent to Continue Teaching



❖ Special educators are more likely to plan to stay when they:

- Report more manageable workloads
- Spend less time planning outside of school
- Are less emotionally exhausted and stressed
- Supervise fewer paraprofessional staff
- Experience stronger administrative support
- Have stronger instructional curricula
- Feel their planning time is adequate
- Feel instructional groups are reasonable

❖ Administrative support predicts other working conditions.

❖ Adequacy of planning time and workload manageability explain relationships between working conditions and intent to stay.

Implications for Practice

- Ensure special educators have:
 - Adequate planning time
 - Appropriate curricular resources for all areas they teach
 - Instructional groups that share common instructional needs
- Help principals to:
 - Communicate support
 - Reduce extraneous responsibilities
 - Protect planning and instructional time
 - Provide curricular resources for all subjects/grades special educators teach
 - Learn about students with EBD