

ABSTRACT

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND NEED  
OF A SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING  
DIFFICULTIES ATTENDING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS  
IN THE ATLANTIC UNION CONFERENCE

by

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## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND NEED OF A SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES ATTENDING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE ATLANTIC UNION CONFERENCE

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### Purpose of the Study

Support programs have been known to be very effective in helping students succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend elementary schools operated by the Atlantic Union (AU) Conference. The study also identified elements of a support program that teachers perceived as both available and necessary for the academic growth and development of these students.

## Method

This study employed a survey research methodology in which survey questionnaires were used to gather information from teachers in Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools operated by the AU Conference. The study utilized self-administered survey questionnaires sent to 265 subjects, from 55 elementary schools operated by the AU Conference.

## Results

Approximately 43% of the teachers reported that support programs were available for students with learning difficulties attending schools in the AU conference. Not surprisingly, about 93% of the teachers indicated there is a need for such a support program. Except for ethnicity and Conferences, no relationships were found between reported availability and demographic characteristics ( $p>0.05$ ) and perceived need and demographic characteristics ( $p>0.05$ ). Teachers employed by the New York (New York and Greater New York) Conference perceive that a comprehensive and collaborative system is available, whereas Northeastern teachers perceive that valuing and addressing diversity, assessment procedures, and comprehensive and collaborative systems are needed. The African American and Caribbean American teachers perceive a greater need for all elements of a support program with the exception of skills development and support. The responding teachers also believe that parents, teachers, and students experience various challenges in not having a support program and that there are many advantages in having such a program.

## Conclusions

Findings of this study indicate that the majority of AU Conference elementary school teachers perceive that there is a need for a support program to assist students experiencing learning difficulties. Findings also indicate that nearly half of AU Conference elementary school teachers perceive that although some elements of a support program (assessment procedures and positive learning opportunities) may be currently available, elements needed may strongly outweigh availability. These results strongly suggest that there may be a significant need for additional support programs for children with learning difficulties attending AU Conference elementary schools. This study also provides data that may be useful to policy makers and school administrators regarding the specific elements of a support program that teachers perceive as being needed.

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Lileth Althea Coke

July 2013

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UNION CONFERENCE

A dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

by

Lileth Althea Coke

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Date approved

This study is dedicated to my best friend and husband, George Coke,  
and to our two daughters, Alet and Colet Coke. Their love,  
encouragement, support and understanding gave me the  
strength I needed to attain my academic goal. I  
am forever blessed to have such a caring,  
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important and valuable experiences in the life of a child. For most students, learning is a normal, natural process which does not require significant effort. However, for some, learning is a tedious process because they face a variety of learning difficulties that may place them at risk for failure (Center on Education Policy, 2012; Legters & Slavin, 1992; Pallas, 1989).

To address this educational dilemma, federal regulations such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and changes in the Individual with Disability Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) mandate that students with learning difficulties be provided the necessary support services that will address their learning needs.

Designed to promote equal educational opportunities for students with learning difficulties, these regulations require that the following steps be followed: (a) Search: each state and school system should have a procedure for identifying students who might have learning difficulties; (b) Find: once a student with a potential learning difficulty has been identified, a system should be put in place to evaluate; (c) Evaluate: a comprehensive and multidisciplinary evaluation should be done, and (d) Create an IEP: an individualized educational program (IEP) should be developed, written and implemented to meet the child's educational needs (Brinkerhoff, 2004; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2006; Wilmschurst & Brue, 2005). These and other federal mandates which

advocate for educational rights require that all schools be well versed in grade-level curriculum and meet the diverse learning needs of students with learning difficulties. Consequently, educators are to ensure that the learning environments they create are truly supportive (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, 2010).

### **Background of the Problem**

An examination of literature reveals that in the United States more than 11% of school-age students have some form of disability that affects their educational performance (Office of Special Education Program, 2008). Fifteen percent of the population or one in seven Americans has some type of learning disability (National Institute of Health, 2008). Approximately 48% of children under 18 years old are at risk for failure (Center on Education Policy, 2012; Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003), and there is a national increase of special needs in the American society (Bryant, Smith, & Bryant, 2008; Winters & Greene, 2009). When one compares the number of students classified as ‘learning disabled’ with the estimated prevalence of learning challenges, it is apparent that many students who have learning challenges remain unidentified (Williams, 2006). The National Education Association (2011) states that because the number of students enrolled in special education programs has risen 30% over the past 10 years and that nearly every general education classroom across the country includes students with disabilities, coupled with the high percentage of at-risk-for-failure kids, schools and school districts must determine the best way to conduct programs and figure out how to address learning difficulties.

In addressing this national educational dilemma, federal laws mandate that public schools offer a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004;

NCLB, 2001). Federal funds generated under IDEA consume the cost of these services, thus making them available and free to eligible students. Despite the increased interest in the provision of support services for students with learning difficulties, there is a lack of information in literature regarding the type of support services available to students who attend private/parochial schools and who experience learning difficulties. An examination of non-refereed journals associated with parochial education indicates that early in the 21<sup>st</sup> century some of these private schools, which account for over 25% of the nation's schools, are now providing support services to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties (Eigenbrood, 2005).

### **Private Schools**

According to the Council for American Private Education (2010), private schools are considered as America's first schools. Historically, it was private schools that established the country's foundation for education. Presently, private schools play a major role in the American educational system where there is a rich diversity of schools. Some are rooted in religious tradition, some provide intensive academic experiences, and some are specialized for specific populations. Statistical findings indicate that there are 33,740 private schools in the United States, serving 6 million Pre-K-12 grade students, which account for over 25% of the nation's schools, and enrolling about 11% of all students (Council for American Private Education, 2010).

Some examples of private educational organizations that are now providing support services for students with learning difficulties are the National Catholic Educational Association, the Bureau of Jewish Education, and the Lutheran Elementary School Association. According to the National Catholic Educational Association (2010),

42% of Catholic elementary schools in the United States now provide support services to students with special needs. These services include support for students with learning difficulties such as attention-deficit disorder, Asperger syndrome, learning disability, dyslexia, and others (National Catholic Educational Association, 2010).

The Bureau of Jewish Education has an established Special Education Program which caters to the needs of students with learning difficulties as well as to their families (Jewish Special Education International Consortium, 2009). The Jewish Special Education International Consortium was developed primarily to strengthen special education through central agencies for Jewish education and to provide a context in which communities' special educators can build a professional network.

The Lutheran Elementary School Association provides special education and related services to children with learning difficulties through an organized accredited body known as the Lutheran Association for Special Education (LASE). This is done in the context of a religious environment. LASE currently provides special education and related services to students including special education, resource support, and speech-language therapy. Educational Resource Consultants provide support for parents and general classroom teachers while tutors provide academic support through the “Learning Connection” after-school tutoring program (Lutheran Association for Special Education, 2009).

The Atlantic Union (AU) Conference of Seventh-day Adventists elementary school system is a part of the Adventist educational system, which is the largest Protestant Christian school system in the world (Glavin, 2004). The AU Conference is the northeast regional arm of the Seventh-day Adventist church with over 100,000

adherents in New York and the New England states. This union has 500 churches, 65 elementary and secondary schools, one college, and one university (AUC, 2009). These 65 schools cater to the academic needs of over 4,000 students living in Bermuda, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont (AUC, 2007; NAD, 2007).

The AU Conference embraces a philosophy that fosters a balanced development of the whole being, that is, physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual faculties of each student. This philosophy requires the cooperative effort of the home, school, and church to prepare learners to be responsible and competent citizens in this world and the world to come (AUC Office of Education, 2009). Consequently, this system seeks to meet the educational needs of the students and prepare them to meet the academic standards set by the United States Board of Education (USBOE) as well as those set by the North American Division (NAD) of Seventh-day Adventists.

A non-refereed study done by the North American Division indicated that 681 elementary teachers, from a population of over 2,000, reported having at least one student with learning difficulties in their classes. The study indicated that 20% of the teachers reported having students with physical challenges, 52% identified students with speech/language impairment, 57% identified students with Mathematics challenge, 64% identified students with processing difficulties, 66% identified students with reading challenges, 67% identified students with ADD/ADHD/emotional behavior, and 39% identified students with known IEPs (NAD Office of Education, 2007).

Although federal laws, such as the IDEA of 2004 (IDEA, 2004), provide for the academic support of students with learning difficulties, there is no evidence that the AU

Conference elementary school system has an established support program catering to the needs of students with learning difficulties.

### **Rationale for the Study**

The availability of a support program that caters to the unique social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral needs of students who experience learning difficulties has been an integral part of public and some private schools' operation. According to Raskind and Goldberg (2005), an effective support program can have a positive impact on the holistic educational development of students who experience learning difficulties.

Although federal laws do not mandate parochial/private schools such as AU Conference elementary schools to provide support programs for students with learning difficulties, there are several reasons why these schools should provide these much-needed services. These reasons include: (a) statistics have shown that 15% of the population or one in seven Americans has some type of learning disability (Bryant et al., 2008; Matthews, 2003; National Institutes of Health, 2010; Winters & Greene, 2009) and (b) since the AU Conference elementary schools provide open admission to all students, it is highly probable that students with learning difficulties will be enrolled.

Secondly, the philosophy of Adventist education rests on the belief that teachers make a difference in the lives of their students and that they should teach purposefully to empower all their students (Alexander, 1989). Additionally, the mission of the AU Conference Education Department is to educate students to perform to the best of their ability and to ensure maximum development of each individual's potential (AUC, 2009). By not addressing the learning difficulties in the school system, all children will not function to the best of their ability or to their maximum potential.

Thirdly, literature on reasons why students experience learning difficulty reveals that the major cause of most learning difficulties is not the learning disabilities like deafness, blindness, and mental retardation but because of weak underlying cognitive skills, which if not addressed, will lead to academic failure (Brain Trainers, 2011; Learning; Franchise, 2013). Fourthly, support programs have been in existence in the American educational system for 44 years and have shown positive impact on the academic performance of students with learning difficulties (Friend & Bursuck, 2005; Mertens, 1995; Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007; Unger, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Winzer, 1993). Empirical data also strongly suggest that students who experience learning difficulties and who attend parochial schools, like AU Conference elementary schools, may benefit from such a program (Georgia Department of Education, 2008; Katsiyannis & Maag, 1998).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Due to the prevalence of learning difficulties among students nationally and internationally, there is a strong possibility that teachers will encounter students with such difficulties (DuPaul & Stoner, 2003; Pearman, 2009). Having students with learning difficulties in an environment where there is no support service could have a negative effect on their academic performance since students with learning difficulties are not able to function within a regular classroom without extraordinary attention from their teacher.

The problems that exist are:

1. There has been a steady growth in the population of students with learning difficulties (Bryant et al., 2008, Winters & Greene, 2009). According to Haley (2010) learning problems are found at all levels of the socioeconomic spectrum; however, they

come disproportionately from environments without the financial clout to provide adequate services to meet their needs and these students will experience significant academic struggles if no one takes the initiative to alleviate the problem.

2. Although federal laws, such as the IDEA (2004), provide for the academic support of students with learning difficulties, there is no evidence that the AU Conference elementary school system has a support program that is providing for the special needs of students with learning difficulties who may be attending these schools. IDEA mandates that each local educational agency (LEA) “must locate, identify, and evaluate all children with disabilities who are enrolled by their parents in private, including religious, elementary schools and secondary schools located in the school district served by the LEA” (IDEA, 2004; 34 CFR § 300.131[a]).

The intent of this study, therefore, was to investigate teachers’ perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend elementary schools in the AU Conference. Additionally, the study identified elements of a support program that teachers perceive as desirable to these elementary schools.

An important principle for bridging the academic disconnect between students with learning difficulties and a support program for students attending elementary schools in the AU Conference is to ascertain the teachers’ perceptions. Historically, teachers have always played a major role in changing how children are taught. They play an integral role in the educational growth and development of students. It is for this reason that federal laws mandate that teachers become part of the planning and

implementation of educational programs for children, especially those with special needs (IDEA, 2004).

At the signing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of December 2004, President George Bush said:

The people who care most about the students are of course the teachers, and especially the parents, who know their needs and know their names. So we're giving more flexibility and control over the students' education to parents and teachers and principals. We'll make sure that schools can change a student's educational program to better meet their needs. (White House Press Release, 2004)

It was assumed that an examination of teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for student attending AU Conference elementary schools would provide objective data that may contribute to our understanding of whether or not a need exists, and provide information for identifying relevant resources to address such a need.

### **Purpose of This Study**

The primary purpose of the study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend elementary schools operated by the AU Conference. This study also identified elements of a support program that teachers perceived as needed or desirable for the academic growth and development of students.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Students with learning difficulties need a supportive environment to function successfully in school. This type of environment enables them to capitalize on their strength and cope effectively with their weaknesses (Larkin, 2001). The use of a support

program that provides appropriate intervention for addressing the needs of students with learning difficulties is supported by Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and his concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). He identified the zone of proximal development as "the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). According to Vygotsky's theory, children can do more with the help and guidance of an adult or a more experienced person than they can do by themselves (Maccarelli, 2006).

A support program is of vital importance in cognition or information processing of an individual (Hardman, Drew, & Egan, 2002). It is designed to address the education of individuals with disabilities and other special needs (EAHCA, 1975; Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments, 1990; Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974; IDEA, 2004; Osher, Quinn, & Hanley, 2002) because "children with learning disabilities do not perform as well as normal children on some memory tasks" (Hardman et al., 2002, p. 182). According to the U.S. Department of Education and Office of Special Education (1994), its objective is to address the unique social, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive needs of students with learning difficulties. In addressing these needs a support program:

1. *Expands positive learning opportunities and results.* This is to provide curricula instruction and extra-curricular activities to build academic, behavioral, and social skills to help students to become successful in their academic career as well as in life.

2. *Strengthens school and community capacity.* This includes the expansion of initiatives that will improve the readiness and capacity of an environment to provide needed services to students with learning difficulties.

3. *Values and addresses diversity.* The goal of this element is to identify approaches that will improve the capacity of individuals and systems to respond skillfully, respectfully, and effectively to students, families, teachers, and other providers in a way that recognizes, affirms, and values their differences.

4. *Collaborates with families.* This reorients family-school interactions and builds a partnership in which the service planning reflects the input of families' goals, knowledge, and culture for the education of students with learning difficulties.

5. *Promotes appropriate assessment.* This requires assessment to include curriculum-based evaluation and measurement procedures to monitor overall student performance and improvement.

6. *Provides ongoing skill development and support.* This process supports the collaborative effort of teacher, the home, the school and other support services in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of those students. It also targets the field-based training of regular educators, reducing student-teacher ratios, adopting different approaches to discipline that keep the students in class, provides collaborative effort between special educators in classroom with regular educators and brings other support service providers such as guidance counselors, social workers, health specialists, therapists, and psychologists into the school.

7. *Creates comprehensive and collaborative systems.* This element provides coordinated support services and offers a continuum of education and treatment services

(direct instruction, pull-out programs, inclusion programs, resource programs, therapeutic programs) to best meet the individual needs of students with learning difficulties. In addition, it facilitates linkages among public school districts, the education program, the student's family, and social service agencies in order to link the students, the alternative program staff, families, public school personnel, and staff of different social service agencies in providing a close net support for students facing academic challenges (Georgia Department of Education, 2008; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Special Education, 1994; Woodruff et al., 1998).

As an important strategy in the educational system, the support program is designed to address the different learning styles of individuals in an individualized, systematic, and developmental way and therefore is greatly influenced by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Lev Vygotsky states that children learn through interactions with their surrounding culture, and that learning is enhanced when they work in their zone of proximal development (ZPD). To reach the ZPD, children need the help of adults or more competent individuals to support their learning process. Like Howard Gardner (1993), Vygotsky stresses the importance of looking at each child as an individual who learns distinctively and stresses that children can do more with help and guidance from the more experienced individuals (Maccarelli, 2006). He considers learning to be a shared or joint process in a responsive social context and states that students are capable of far more competent performance when they have proper assistance, "scaffolding learning" from knowledgeable adults.

Vygotsky defined scaffolding instruction as the "role of teachers and others in supporting the learner's development by providing support structures to get to that next

stage or level” (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). According to Van Der Stuyf (2002), the support given to children who experience learning difficulties helps them learn how to link old information or familiar situations with new knowledge. Van Der Stuyf (2000) further states that the support provided are activities and tasks that

1. Motivate or enlist the child’s interest related to the task
2. Simplify the task to make it more manageable and achievable for a child
3. Provide some direction in order to help the child focus on achieving the goal
4. Clearly indicate differences between the child’s work and the standard
5. Reduce frustration and risk
6. Model and clearly define expectations of the activity to be performed (p. 3).

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) mention some of the many advantages of a supportive environment to students with learning difficulties.

1. It engages the learner, in that he/she does not passively listen to information presented but, instead, through the prompt and or the support of teachers, the learner builds on prior knowledge and forms new ones.

2. In dealing with students with low self-esteem or learning difficulties, it provides the opportunity to give positive feedback to the students; for example, instead of an “it’s too hard, I cannot do it” attitude, a supportive environment provides the “I can because you will guide me” attitude.

3. It minimizes the level of frustration of the learner, which is a typical characteristic of students experiencing learning difficulties, which if not addressed can lead to frustration, which could cause a barrier to learning.

4. A supportive program is individualized so it can benefit each learner (Van Der Stuyf, 2002).

### Research Questions

The following research questions were established to guide the study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the *availability* of a support program for students with learning difficulties with regard to (a) positive learning opportunities, (b) strengthening of school capacity, (c) valuing and addressing diversity, (d) collaborating with family, (e) using assessment procedures, (f) promoting skills development and support, and (g) providing comprehensive and collaborative systems?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the *need* of a support program for students with learning difficulties with regard to (a) positive learning opportunities, (b) strengthening of school capacity, (c) valuing and addressing diversity, (d) collaborating with family, (e) using assessment procedures, (f) promoting skills development and support, and (g) providing comprehensive and collaborative systems?
3. Is perceived *availability* of a support program for students with learning difficulties related to (a) demographic variables (gender, race, years of experience, educational level, licensure) (b) employment-related variables (conference, employment position, status), and (c) exposure to information about learning difficulties (number of special education/inclusion classes, opportunities for staff development)?
4. To what extent is perceived *need* of a support program for students with learning difficulties related to (a) demographic variables (gender, race, years of experience, educational level, licensure) (b) employment-related variables (conference,

employment position, status), and (c) exposure to information about learning difficulties (number of special education/inclusion classes, opportunities for staff development)?

5. Is there a relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need with regard to a support program for students with learning difficulties?

6. What are teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a support program?

### **Significance of Study**

This study adds to the scholarly research and literature in the field of special education as it relates to the education of students with learning difficulties in elementary/private schools in the AU Conference. It also provides valuable information for educators, parents, and policy makers, to facilitate decisions regarding support programs in AU Conference/private schools.

The study is important because: (a) there has been a national increase in the percentage of students who need special education services (Winters & Greene, 2009), (b) the *Service Plan*, the most recent amendment to *IDEA* (2004) opens the opportunity for parochial or religious schools to have better access to educational services for students with learning difficulties, and (c) there is evidence that support programs help students achieve academic standards set by the states or federal government.

The results of this study may be relevant to: (a) parents of children with special needs, who are looking for solutions to their child's/children's learning difficulties, (b) educational administrators who are seeking to maintain best practice in the educational system, (c) teachers and educational professionals who work with children with learning

difficulties in parochial schools, and (d) general education teachers who work in AU Conference elementary schools and who are faced with the challenge of teaching children with learning difficulties without the know-how or without the necessary resources to meet the needs of these children (Pearman, 2009).

Up to the present time there is minimal information in the literature on the topic of support programs or even special education programs in AU Conference schools. Accordingly, a high probability exists that students with learning difficulties are attending AU Conference elementary schools without the provision of a support program as federal laws require (*IDEA*, 2004). With respect to these conditions, this research may provide information that AU Conference educators need to know as they service the children in their care.

### **Definition of Terms**

The purpose of this section is to define specific and unique terms used in the study in order to provide clarity to the reader.

*504 Plan.* A plan for individuals with disabilities qualifying under the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973, specifying that no one with a disability can be excluded from participating in federally funded programs or activities, including elementary, secondary, or postsecondary schooling (Mauro, 2011; Weinfield & Davis, 2008).

*Appropriate education/free appropriate public education.* The guaranteed right of children with disabilities to receive an education that meets their unique needs at no cost to parents. It is also defined as education catering to the emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social well-being of the individual (Weinfield & Davis, 2008).

*AU Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.* The headquarters of Adventist elementary schools located in the Northeastern Region of the United States, which includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, and the island of Bermuda (AUC, 2007; NAD, 2007).

*Individualized education program (IEP).* A written plan, developed to meet the special learning needs of each student with disabilities (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

*Inclusion education.* Refers to a strategy, an approach, or a method of education where children with special educational needs are enrolled in general education classes and are provided with support services necessary for their needs (Vergason & Anderegg, 1997).

*Learning difficulties (Learning challenges).* Problems frequently occurring in people of average or below average IQ which affect their ability to learn and perform at grade level. The term encompasses learning disabilities as well as emotional disturbances, such as disruptive behavior or anxiety, or physical disabilities that affect learning (Weinstock, 2009).

*Learning Disability (LD).* A neurological disorder that results from a difference in the way a brain is wired; a condition that causes significant learning problems most often related to reading and writing; a disability of unexpected underachievement that is typically resistant to treatment (Bryant et al, 2008).

*Learning style.* Refers to the way a child learns, the way he perceives, interacts with, or responds to his environment (Vergason & Anderegg, 1997).

*Related services.* Developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that may be required to enable students with disabilities to benefit from special education as specified in the *IDEA* (1990) including: speech therapy, audiology, psychological services, physical therapy, occupational therapy, early identification and assessment, recreation, counseling, medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes, school health services, transportation, and social work services (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

*Special education.* (a) A broad term covering programs and services for students who deviate physically, mentally, or emotionally from the norm to an extent that they require unique learning experiences, techniques, or materials in order to be maintained in the general education classroom; (b) as defined by IDEA, special education is specifically designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with disability such as a learning disability, mental health problems, or specific physical or developmental disabilities. The services include instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in the hospital, in institutions, and in other settings (IDEA, 1990; Sorrells, Reith, & Sindelar, 2004; Vergason & Anderegg, 1997); and individualized education and services for students with disabilities and sometimes for students who are gifted and talented (Bryant et al., 2008).

*Special Needs Child.* Describes a child who has disabilities and who therefore requires special services or treatment in order to progress or who requires special adaptations made to their instruction or environment in order to learn (Jewell-Jenkins, 2009).

*Support Program/Student Support Program/Systems of Support.* A coordinated set of services and accommodation matched to the student's needs (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

*Student Support Team.* An interdisciplinary group that uses a systematic process to address learning and/or behavior problems of K-12 students in a school (Georgia Department of Education, 2008); a collaboration of experts and interventionists to problem solve systematically and provide research-based interventions on behalf of struggling learners (Bailey, 2010).

*Teacher.* Includes principals who are also involved in the teaching of students (Grady, 1990).

*Teachers' perceptions.* (a) The negative or positive experience of the situation as described/explained by the teacher, (b) teachers' views, feelings, awareness, and understanding of special education services and of their roles in decision making in the education of their students (Ballester-Concepcion, 2007).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of a study consist of factors or conditions that are not within the researcher's control; it is that which can restrict the scope of the study or may even affect its outcome (Cline & Clark, 2000). Primarily, the findings of this study have limited generalization because data used came from a nonrandom sample of elementary school teachers from five conferences in the Atlantic Union (AU) Conference.

There are three limiting factors of this study.

1. Some participants may be teaching in multi-grade schools where they will not exclusively be elementary school teachers, but may also teach junior high or even high-

school students. Data from teachers teaching in multi-grade schools may have significantly changed the findings since these teachers may have different views of a support program based on their middle-school/high-school experience.

2. Some teachers may function as administrators (principals, vice principals, etc.) where they may not be exclusively teachers or administrators. Data from teachers functioning as administrators may have significantly changed the findings since these teachers may have different views of a support program based on their administrative experience.

3. The study measures perceptions of teachers and assumes that perceived need and availability are actual indicators of need and availability. Data from teachers' perceptions have significantly changed the findings since these teachers' perceptions of availability and need may not be actual indicators of need and availability.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations of a study are those characteristics that limit the scope of the research and are determined by the researcher. According to Cline and Clark (2000), it is “those characteristics that limit the scope (define the boundaries) of the inquiry as determined by the conscious exclusionary and inclusionary decisions that were made throughout the development of the proposal” (p. 3). This study has three delimitations. The first one is that the participants of this study work for the AU Conference. The advantages of this type of design are that the researcher is able to get information that may not be available from other sources and that it provided an unbiased representation of population of interest.

The second delimitation is that the participants teach at the elementary level. This design is necessary as the study investigates elementary school teachers. The third delimitation is that the participants teach in elementary schools located within the United States of America. This design is very significant because this research is in support of the tenets of the *IDEA* (1990) and only American citizens are governed by this mandate.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 focuses on the background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, rationale for the study, theoretical framework, significance of the study, delimitations and limitations of the study, definition of terms, and organization of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature on the historical development of a student support program and its impact on academic performance.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to collect and analyze the data.

Chapter 4 consists of the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 presents the summary and conclusions, and discusses the findings and recommendations of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students who have learning difficulties and attend elementary schools that are operated by Atlantic Union (AU) Conference. The study also sought to identify elements of a support program that teachers perceive as desirable for the academic growth and development for these students. The data from this study will potentially influence policy makers in their decision for the provision of support services for students (with learning difficulties) and who attend AU Conference elementary schools.

In order to fulfill these purposes, a review of literature was necessary to investigate federal laws concerning support programs for students with learning difficulties as well as empirical data that identify the relevance of a support program for students with learning difficulties. These two domains are of great importance in effecting changes relative to students with learning difficulties in AU Conference elementary schools. Consequently this review of literature focuses on: (a) the evolution of support programs, (b) the historical development of federal regulations concerning support programs for children with learning difficulties, (c) essential elements of a

support program, (d) the role of support programs in enhancing academic performance, and (e) learning difficulties and their impact on academic performance.

### **The Evolution of Support Programs**

This section of the literature review describes the history of education for individuals with learning difficulties. Such historical findings have been well documented in literature (Friend & Bursuck, 2005; Mertens, 1995; Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007; Unger, 2007; Winzer, 1993) and parallel that of other groups which have been mistreated, ridiculed, and excluded due to their lack of conformity to a perceived norm.

Throughout the evolution of support services for the education of individuals with learning difficulties, one can see that societal attitude, federal law, and pedagogy are distinctly entwined. According to Winzer (1993) and Unger (2007) during the Prehistoric and Egyptian era, 3000 BC, archeological findings indicate that many of the children who were born with disabilities were allowed to die in the early stages of childhood while others were treated by shamans, priests, and magicians. Some of these pre-civilized individuals thought that some deformities were a result of demon possession, and so cave dwellers treated individuals with disabilities by chipping holes in their skull to allow the demons to escape.

During the Early Christian era, AD 500-900, attempts were made to provide cures through magic or miracles. People in the ancient era and biblical times seemed to believe that disabilities were the result of a curse, an evil, or a sin committed by a parent, an ancestor, or the individuals themselves (John 9:2). Consequently, it was the norm for disabled individuals to be rejected, punished, or even killed. However, there is evidence that some were treated with kindness or thought of as being possessed with a supernatural

power (Acts 16:16-18; Unger, 2007, p. 1043; Winzer, 1993). Reynolds and Fletcher-Janzen (2007) indicate that ancient Greek and Roman societies provided the first evidence of attempts made to scientifically understand and treat individuals with disabilities. Motivated by the high rate of infanticide, it was at this time that physicians and scholars began to look at disability as being treatable and sought to preserve the lives of disabled individuals (p. 1042).

The period of the Renaissance brought a change in the overall value of human life, which formed the backbone for a more caring and tolerant society. Out of this new humanistic awareness grew the worth and value of every individual, the struggle for freedom, and the interest in caring for as well as educating individuals with disabilities; hence, a change developed in the way individuals with disabilities were perceived (p. 1043). Reynolds and Fletcher-Janzen (2007) state that the first recorded attempt to educate individuals with learning difficulties dated back to 1555 when a Spanish monk, Pedro Ponce de Leon, taught a group of students to read, write, speak, and master academic skills.

A further review of the literature on individuals with disabilities during the pre-civilized era seems to focus mainly on adults; however, with the transitioning of a more civilized age, attention to children started to grow. In France, for example, individuals like Jean Marc Gaspard Itard (1775-1838), a French physician, was hired to work with an 11-year-old child, Victor, who was found living and behaving like a savage animal in the woods. Itard's method of dealing with Victor is documented in the book, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* (1801). Victor was deaf and mute and there was great disagreement among professionals about his potential. Itard worked with him and at first considered his effort

a failure, but with further evaluation, he recognized that he could only measure Victor's progress by comparing Victor's present performance with how he was at the beginning and not with the expected norm of children his age. Itard then concluded that in fact Victor had made great progress. As a result of his experiment with Victor, the concept that children with disabilities could benefit from specialized instruction began to grow (Friend & Bursuck, 2005).

Itard's instructional materials, methods, and procedures formed the basis, for more than a century, in addressing the education of individuals with disabilities. His example led the way for other ideas by Edouard Seguin (1812-1880) in France and by Maria Montessori (1870-1952) in the United States. Some of these ideas include the education of the whole child, individualized instruction, beginning instruction at the child's level of performance, and the importance of proper relationship between parents, teacher, and student in enhancing academic success (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007).

Some models of special programs used to address the needs of students were:

*Education for Individuals With Hearing Impairment:* Historical documents state that the education of the deaf was one of the disabilities that got early educational attention. For example, in 1644 John Bulwer (1614-1684) of England published the first book in English on the education of the deaf, and other authors followed suit. One great book written by George Dalgarno (1628-1687), *Didasopholus: Or the Deaf and Dumb Man's Tutor*, was cited by Reynolds and Fletcher-Janzen (2007) who say that "the author made the startling assertion that people who are deaf have as much capacity for learning as those who can hear" (p. 473). Other countries sought to educate the deaf at an early beginning; for example, in Germany, Samuel Heinicke (1729-1784) developed a method

of oral instruction which included lip reading and speaking skills. This oral method of instruction was further developed by Friedrich Moritz Hill (1805-1874) and eventually became an accepted practice worldwide for the education of the deaf (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007).

Organized education for the deaf in the American society started through the training of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (1787-1851) using Sicard's French method of training. Gallaudet was chosen to start the first school for the deaf in 1817, and it became the first school in the United States for children who were deaf. It is also identified as the first educational program in American society for children with exceptionality and has now grown to be the American School for the Deaf (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007). The authors further mention that the educational growth and development of individuals who were deaf were assisted by the benevolence of individuals like Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922), inventor of the telephone, and Helen Keller (1880-1957). Helen was a strong advocate, herself being deaf and blind from childhood, and she is referred to as a "living example of the effectiveness of special educational methods in overcoming even the most severe disabilities" (p. 1043).

*Education for Children With Visual Impairment:* The education of blind children started in France with Valentin Haüy (1745-1822) who was the founder of the National Institute for the Young Blind in Paris. His success gave way to the development of other schools for the blind. The first school for the blind in the American society started with Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876) now known as the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. Quite important to the growth and development of the education for the blind was Haüy's creation of a system of embossed letters which were

read by fingers. This method was adapted by many, but proved somehow challenging until Louis Braille (1809- 1852) developed this method into a system known as Braille. This involved a systemic order of raised dots representing letters of the alphabets used for reading. This system of reading was successful, became universal, and is presently organized by a standard code (p. 1044).

*Education for Children With Mental Retardation:* The education of children with mental retardation grew out of the attention given by Itard (1775-1838), a French physician, to Victor, a boy living as a savage in the woods referred to earlier in this chapter. The United States' first school for mental retardation started in 1839 when a blind and mentally retarded child was accepted at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Massachusetts. Other subsequent schools gradually developed, and in 1917 there were four states that provided institutional care for individuals with mental retardation (p. 1044).

*Education for Children With Orthopedic Disabilities and Other Health Problems:* Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century only minimal provision was made for individuals with orthopedic disabilities. In United States, for example, the first special class for such need started in Chicago public schools in 1899 and 1900. However, this grew after the enactment of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (p. 1045).

*Education for The Emotionally/Behaviorally Disturbed:* There was little or no evidence of attention given to students with mental retardation until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Literature shows that this started in the 1930s. However, it was observed that there was reluctance in the acceptance of such responsibility in the education of students with mental retardation in public schools (p. 1845).

Within the American society the growth and development of academic support for individuals with learning difficulties during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was part of the wider movement that involved the abolition of segregated social class, the establishment of a just society, and the recognition of human rights for all members of the society (p. 1044).

It was during the mid-1800s when literacy became mandatory in the American society that learning disabilities among children became more obvious. With such a change in the educational system, teachers began to observe the differences in students' behavior, and, consequently, educational pioneers vouched for improved methods and techniques for the training and education of all. It was during this century that a more organized support program, the special education program, became a branch of the educational system in the American society (Winzer, 1993, p. 5).

Although the special education program dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, its national expansion into the foundation of the educational system was not realized until 1975 when the landmark federal law, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975), which later became the IDEA (1990) was enacted. As a result of such law, federal involvement in the education of individuals with learning difficulties grew substantially, and, consequently, nearly every decision made on behalf of special education has to be made in accordance with regulations propagated by IDEA (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2002, p. 19).

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, large metropolitan school districts like New York City's public schools faced several problems. Although a large number of immigrant children knew little or no English, many spoke English but did not understand the curriculum. Also truancy was a problem. In order to address these learning challenges, some of these

large school districts instituted support services for the students. Some of these services catered to the needs of immigrant students experiencing difficulties in learning English, which today is known as English as a Second Language (ESL). Services to facilitate students who were performing extraordinarily high were also established and are now called gifted classes (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005).

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a major problem that city schools faced was the extreme difference in learning levels among students in compulsory education classes. In order to address this problem a special education program was established with services offering a wide variety of curricula approach (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005, p. 4).

Since World War II, the support services provided for children with disabilities through the special education department have expanded greatly. There has been an increase in the development of new special classes and new special schools, not only at the elementary and secondary level but also at the college and university levels. At the onset of the program, the type of children served was specifically those classified as “trainable mentally retarded,” but since then the services have become generally available for other categories of children with or without disabilities who experience academic challenges (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2002, p. 476).

Another category of children that has become accessible to services includes the gifted and talented children, a group of students who are not disabled but are considered as exceptional and qualified for services. Early- and pre-school children with disabilities now receive services. This was decided because of the commonly held concept that the development of young children can be changed through early educational intervention. Students with severe, profound, and multiple disabilities—a group that includes various

degrees of mental retardation, physical disabilities, sensory disabilities, and behavioral disorders—many of whom were previously denied access to services and not served by public schools—are now an integral part of the program and receive services suitable to their level of learning. Also there is an organized “child find” procedure which locates children in need of special services, specialized attention, improved multidisciplinary approaches, and parents’ education (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2002, p. 476). Guided by federal regulations and federal funds, several new programs have been created to provide appropriate education to students with learning difficulties and to give them an educational opportunity comparable to their non-disabled peers.

### **Federal Regulations for the Education of Individuals With Learning Difficulties**

#### Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Cases

During the early 1960s and 1970s a great awareness was brought to individuals with academic challenges because of a number of court cases. One of the major thrusts of these lawsuits was that students who were experiencing learning difficulties were not given the educational opportunities to accommodate their academic needs (Gearheart & Weishahn, 1986). Included in this review is the impact that some of these court cases had on the awareness and support for individuals with learning difficulties in the American society. These court cases led the way to the enactment of federal laws, which protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. Some of these cases are included in the sections below.

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954): The Supreme Court found state laws establishing separate public schools for Black and White students unconstitutional, making *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) an important historic milestone in the life of

the American nation; it initiated educational and social reform throughout the United States and was a catalyst in launching the modern civil rights movement. Previous to this case, the U.S. was steeped in racial segregation which was verified in 1896 by the court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), where it was legal to be separate but equal. This meant that if the facilities were equal though separate it was not violating the Fourteenth Amendment. The *Brown v. Board of Education* case asserted that the system of racial separation was unconstitutional and unfair. It proved that school segregation solely on the basis of race deprives children of equal educational opportunities and violates the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. It substantiates the fact that it is illegal to discriminate against any group of people; therefore, the “separate but equal doctrine” previously practiced was no longer acceptable in the American society. The Supreme Court told Americans that

education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954)

Despite the fact that this ruling had a crucial message for racial desegregation there were also implications for other groups who had been excluded from equal educational opportunities. This included students with disabilities because they were segregated and denied access to education. Prior to the *Brown* decision, state law either permitted or explicitly required the exclusion of the “weak minded,” also referred to as

the disabled. This infamous legislation eradicated the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which previously vouched “separate but equal” railway cars, which was the basis for segregated schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954; *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896; Weber, Mawdsley, & Redfield, 2007; Weinfield & Davis, 2008).

*The Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972): This was a case between the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, where the PARC was demanding access to education for all handicapped children. Prior to the case the state of Pennsylvania did not cater to the education of children with mental retardation. Consequently the parents of such children had to find alternative schools for their children’s education. As a result of this case, students with learning difficulties could not be excluded from regular classrooms and the state had to provide access to free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for these children (*PARC v. Pennsylvania*, 1972).

*Mills v. Board of Education* (1972): This is a civil case brought against the District of Columbia Public Schools for failing to provide education to children with learning difficulties. As a result of this case, students could not be excluded from school because of their behavioral, emotional, mental needs, etc. It mandates that students have a hearing before exclusion or placement in a support program and that all students have a right to a free public education appropriate to their need (*Mills v. Board of Education*, 1972).

*Frederick L. v. Thomas* (1977): This civil case was brought by Frederick L. against the President of the Board of Education of Philadelphia on behalf of exceptional children who were deprived of education appropriate to their special needs. Resulting

from this case, Philadelphia public schools were directed to search systematically for learning disabled students and provide the necessary education for their academic growth and development (*Frederick L. v. Thomas*, 1977).

*Board v. Rowley* (1982): This is a case brought against the Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District on the provision of appropriate equipment to assist Amy Rowley, a deaf student, with necessary equipment to assist her ability to hear. The Supreme Court affirmation of this decision supported comparable appropriate education for other students with disabilities (*Board v. Rowley*, 1982).

*Freston v. Board of Education* (2007): In this case the cost of private school education provided for a special education student was reimbursed by the state of New York. This opens the possibility for other students with learning difficulties attending private schools to be reimbursed in similar situations (*Freston v. Board of Education*, 2007).

These and other court cases were very important in formulating the bases for support to individuals with learning difficulties. They open opportunities for free and appropriate education for students with learning difficulties. They also provided opportunities for parental involvement in the evaluation as well as in the placement of their children in the most suitable environment.

#### Landmark U.S. Federal Laws

Despite the fact that there was a positive attitude about the benefits of educating students with special needs, the acquisition of a particular delivery program remained inconsistent for many years. A review of literature shows that in 1948, for example, only 12% of all children identified with learning disabilities received support, and as late as

1962 only 16 states had laws that included students with disabilities for educational support. Literature also shows that during this period of time, in most states, even students with a mild form of disabilities were not allowed in school and those with more severe disability were totally excluded (Bryant et al., 2008).

Congress then studied the existing problems and drew the following conclusions:

(a) that 1 million of the children with disabilities in the United States were entirely excluded from the public school system, (b) more than half of the number of students with disabilities were not receiving appropriate educational services, (c) the special needs of the students were not met, (d) services in the public school system were inadequate and forced families to find services outside the system, (e) if given adequate funding, educational agencies could be able to provide effective services to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Bryant et al., 2008, p. 15; IDEA, 2004).

The years following World War II brought in a time of increased opportunities for all Americans, leading to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and opportunities for individuals with disabilities in the 1970s. The U.S. federal government augmented federal regulations to facilitate educational services for individuals with disabilities. Since then, there has been significant progress in meeting national objectives in developing and implementing effective programs and services to meet the needs of individuals with learning difficulties.

Policymakers reacted to court cases by passing certain federal laws to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. Due to the enactment of these federal laws, support programs are now available to assist students with learning disabilities and their families (Bryant et al., 2008).

Included in the following sections are some of the federal laws that provide for individuals with learning difficulties.

*The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):* The ESEA (1965) was instituted by the U.S. Department of Education. It provides funding to elementary and secondary education. This includes money for teacher training or professional development, materials, resources, and parental involvement. Title 1 of the Act provides funding for schools and districts with a high percentage of students with low performance and who are of low-income families (ESEA, 2011; Weinfield & Davis, 2008).

*The Rehabilitation Act:* The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 or Vocational Rehabilitation Act (VRA) is a law that is considered to be the hallmark civil rights statute protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities. It defines a “handicapped person,” tells what “appropriate education” means, and prohibits discrimination against students with disability as it relates to federally funded programs. This law mandates that “no qualified handicapped person shall, on the basis of handicap, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity which receives or benefits from Federal financial assistance.” It also authorizes payment of federal funds to institutions after they comply with regulations concerning the education of students with disabilities. It ensures that the education provided to students with disabilities is comparable to that which is provided to students without disabilities (Bateman, 2001, p. 6; Friend & Bursuck, 2005; IDEA, 2004; Rehabilitation Act, 1973; Vaughn et al., 2006, p. 6).

*The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):* The FERPA (1974) is also known as the Educational Amendments Act. It was through this law that federal

funds were granted to states to provide programs for exceptional learners including the gifted and talented. It also gives students and families the right of due process in special education placement. It guarantees confidentiality of student record, and gives parents or guardians the right to inspect or review their child's records and to challenge the accuracy of these records (Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments, 1990; Vaughn et al., 2006).

*Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA):* The EAHCA of 1975 is also known as Pub. L. No. 94-142. It is referred to as "Mainstream Law"; it was the first federal law to protect and fund programs for children with disabilities. It was signed by President Gerald Ford on November 29, 1975, and guarantees a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all children with disabilities, ages 5-21. It stipulates that special education and related services be made available to all eligible school-aged children and youth with disabilities without cost to the parents. It requires that appropriate education, whether regular or special, with related services be designed to meet students' individual educational needs. It requires that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) be provided for each child eligible for special education and related services. It also mandates that all children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive education (LRE) environment and that parents have the right to participate in every decision relative to the identification, evaluation, and placement of their child (EAHCA, 1975; Matthews, 2003; Vaughn et al., 2006).

*Individual With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):* In 1990 the EHACA was renamed the IDEA. This law was again amended in June 1997 and is referred to as IDEA '97. In 2004 it was further amended and renamed the Individual With Disabilities

Education Improvement Act. Over the years, changes in this law have provided individuals with disabilities greater protection and respect. These changes make provision for free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities and define the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as one that is most accommodating to the child and is conducive to learning. Through these provisions students with disabilities can be placed in general education all-day classes, general education with pullout for part of the day classes, a separate special education classroom or a separate school as the needs require and that which is comfortable to the child. These provisions come from federal financial assistance to state and local education agencies guaranteeing special education and related services to children with disabilities (Bateman, 2001, p. 9; EAHCA, 1975; IDEA, 1990; Matthews, 2003; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003, p. 3; Vaughn et al., 2006).

This legislation has had the greatest impact of all laws dealing with disabilities, in that it ensures the rights of students with disabilities and their parents, in the education system. IDEA defines children with disabilities as those who have mental retardation, are hard of hearing, deaf, speech or language impaired, visually disabled, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired, autistic, deaf-blind, multiple handicapped, or having severe, mild, or moderate learning disabilities, or traumatic brain injury. It mandates that the child be individually evaluated, that an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) be developed for the child, and that the eligibility process be repeated at least every 3 years (every 2 years in Pennsylvania), which would enhance a more accurate assessment as well as minimize the error of inappropriate placement in a

special education program (Bateman, 2001; Cartwright, 1989; Friend & Bursuck, 2005; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

The IDEA (1997) states that all students with disabilities should continue receiving services, even if they are expelled from the school. It requires that schools take responsibility to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, that a special education staff worker who is in the system assist general education students when needed and that a general education staff be a part of the IEP team. It also requires that students in special education participate in state-wide and district-wide assessment, and that a structured behavior modification be included in the student's IEP if the child has a behavior problem (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

This law defines special education as “specifically designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in the hospital and institutions, and in other settings, and instruction in physical education” (IDEA, 2004). Also with the amendments to the IDEA came the development of support programs catering to the unique social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and vocational needs of students with learning difficulties. Elements of a support program guiding the education of children with learning difficulties have been refined and amplified through further legislation and through key judicial opinions.

The seven essential elements of an effective program that addresses the needs of these children and as guided by the IDEA law are: Expand positive learning opportunities and results, strengthen school and community capacity, value and address diversity, collaborate with family, provide ongoing assessment procedures, provide ongoing skill

development and support, and provide a comprehensive and collaborative system (IDEA, 1990; Matthews, 2003; National Agenda of Education, 1994; Sorrells et al., 2004; Vaughn et al., 2006).

*504 Education Plan:* This is a federal law that addresses the education of students with special needs who do not qualify as special education students. Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against any person with disabilities in any program receiving federal financial assistance. A 504 Education Plan provides classroom accommodations for students who need them. For example: A child with Attention Deficit Disorder may not qualify for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) under laws governing special education, but as a result of a medically documented disorder, the child can be qualified for a 504 Education Plan (Jussaume, 2003).

*Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments:* These amendments were passed in 1986. This law requires the extension of the free and appropriate education (FAPE) to students with disability at ages 3-5. It also establishes the early intervention programs for toddlers and infants from birth to 2 years with disabilities.

*Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA):* This Act was passed in 1990. It prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector; it protects equal opportunity in employment, transportation, and public services. It also defines disability to include AIDS victims (ADA, 1990).

*Zero Reject/Free Appropriate Public Education:* This legislation mandates that no child should be excluded from education, that all students with disabilities, even those in private schools, have the right to a free appropriate public education despite the nature or severity of their disability. In accomplishing the zero reject, a *child find* system is in place

to alert the public that services are available for students with disabilities, and ensuring that students with such need are identified. This process also ensures that students with communicable diseases such as AIDS cannot be excluded from schools (ADA, 1990; Friend & Bursuck, 2005; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003).

*No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*: The ESEA of 1965 was amended in 2001 with President Bush's signing of the NCLB Act (2001), also called ESEA. This law seeks to improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, and it mandates the closure of achievement gaps with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind, despite the level of difference in his/her academic performance rate. This Act emphasizes four concepts: (a) accountability for academic proficiency for the disadvantaged, (b) flexibility in how districts use funds, (c) research-based education to provide interventions that have been researched to be effective, and (d) parent options to expand school choice for students in Title 1 schools to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind (NCLB, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2004; Weinfield, Davis, Wilmshurst, & Brue, 2005).

There were other federal regulations that sought the well-being of individuals with disabilities. These include: the Training of Professional Personnel Act (1959), which helps train leaders to educate children with mental retardation; the Captioned Films Act (1958), another training provision for teachers of students with mental retardation (Pub. L. No. 85-926 and Pub. L. 87-715 [1961]), which supported the production and distribution of accessible films; the Teachers of the Deaf Act (1961), which provided training for *instructional* personnel for children who were deaf or hard of hearing. There was also the ESEA (1965) and the State Schools Act (1965). These provided states with

direct grant assistance to help educate children with disabilities and the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act (1968), and the Economic Opportunities Amendments (1972), which came about to authorize support for exemplary early childhood programs and increase Head Start enrollment for young children with disabilities (Matthews, 2003; Sorrells et al., 2004).

Before the enactment of these federal laws, the fate of many individuals with disabilities was dire. Many lived in state institutions where education was seen as a privilege rather than a right. These laws brought tremendous changes in the lives of these children and their families. Through the increased federal involvement in the education of children with learning difficulties a foundation is now laid for local and state educational policies to provide educational opportunities for children with learning difficulties (Matthews, 2003; Sorrells et al., 2004).

According to Wilmshurst and Brue (2005), the major goal of these legislations is to improve educational results for children with learning difficulties, to ensure that they have the same opportunities for participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency as their non-disabled peers. On the whole these federal laws seek to open doors of opportunity for children with disabilities and their families. These laws mandate that all children with disabilities have available to them a free public education which provides support services designed to meet their unique needs and to educate them to their maximum potential.

Literature has shown that from the beginning of these legislations, families with disabilities have been considered and provided for in meeting the needs of children with disabilities (Bateman, 2001; Cartwright, 1989, Friend & Bursuck, 2005; Vaughn &

Linan-Thompson, 2003). With the various amendments, even greater support services are available to students placed in parochial schools. Specifically IDEA and its accompanying regulations require that:

1. Students with disabilities enrolled in parochial schools have a right to participate in support services provided in IDEA (2004, § 452).

2. Public school districts must locate and identify students with learning difficulties who are enrolled in parochial schools (2004, § 451). Consequently the proportion of federal funds generated under IDEA by eligible students with disabilities enrolled in nonpublic schools must be used by public school districts to provide services to students in nonpublic schools (§ 453 [a]).

3. The cost of child finding activities may not be charged against the amount of funds that are allocated for the provision of services to students experiencing learning difficulties and attending nonpublic schools (2004, § 452).

4. Support services may be provided on site to eligible students enrolled in parochial schools (2004, § 456 [a]). This provision can include the contracting of teachers already employed by the parochial school (§ 451) providing that the teacher meets the training and licensure requirement similar to the requirement of other special education educators in public schools (§§ 451 & 455).

### **Studies Conducted on Support Programs in Parochial Schools**

There is a plethora of information in literature on support programs for students with learning difficulties who attend public schools; however, there are few studies that directly address support for students with learning difficulties who attend parochial schools. One such study, entitled *Development of Bridges: An Educational Program to*

*Increase the Early Identification and Intervention for Inner-city Catholic School Students Who Have Reading Problems*, was done by Williams (2006). The objective of this study was to find out the effectiveness of the Bridges program in increasing the early identification and intervention for Catholic school students who experience reading problems. This study is similar to the current study in that it investigates the effectiveness of an academic program in improving the performance of students with learning difficulties who attend parochial schools. William's study is different in that it addresses the need of students with reading problems, whereas the current study investigates the availability and need of a support program for students who are experiencing learning difficulties.

Another study, entitled *An Investigation of Knowledge and Beliefs Held by Teachers and Parents in a Parochial School System Regarding Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and the Variables That Predict Their Knowledge*, was done by Pearman (2009). In this study Pearman (2009) investigated how much teachers and parents in SDA parochial schools know and what they believe about ADHD (p. 86). Her study was similar to the current study in that the population included private/parochial schools and addressed the needs of students attending Seventh-day Adventist schools. However, it is different in that it investigated the knowledge and beliefs of parents and teachers concerning Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), whereas this study investigated teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students who are experiencing learning difficulty.

Another study, entitled *Catholic School Children With Disabilities*, was conducted by the Center for Educational Partnerships (CEP) under contract with the

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2002). The study collected information directly from Catholic school personnel, parents, and local and state education personnel. The sample was comprised of 1,004,886 children who attend 2,864 schools, located within 21 states and 32 dioceses. The purpose of the study was to find out to what extent children diagnosed with disabilities were present in Catholic schools, how the Child Find process operates for these students, and to what extent these students receive special education and related services.

The results of the study indicated that Catholic schools serve special-needs children in all disability areas, that the Child Find process was inconsistent and difficult to access for parents of children in Catholic schools suspected of having a disability, that Catholic school children were less likely to be diagnosed with a disability by a public school evaluator than through a private evaluation, that Catholic school children with disabilities appear to be enrolled in roughly the same proportion by ethnicity as their non-disabled peers, that Catholic school students diagnosed as having a disability are not receiving sufficient services through IDEA, and that in the absence of IDEA services, Catholic school teachers, counselors, and administrators utilize innovative strategies for accommodating students with disabilities.

This study is similar to the current study in that it investigated the support given to students with learning difficulties while attending parochial schools. However, it is different in that it investigated the number of students with disabilities who attend Catholic schools if they were being identified and evaluated through the Child Find process and if they were receiving the services necessary to meet their needs.

Although individuals have done research on specific aspects of special needs in parochial schools, to date no one has investigated the availability and need of support programs for children with a wide range of learning difficulties attending Seventh-day Adventist schools. Hence the current study, which addresses the perceptions of teachers on the availability and need of support programs for students with learning difficulties who attend Seventh-day Adventist schools in the Atlantic Union Conference, is different.

### **A Support Program**

A Support Program (SP) is one that is designed to provide support to the student and teacher through a collaborative approach with the intent of improving student performance. It incorporates an interdisciplinary group of professionals (counselors, social workers, a physical therapist, a speech therapist, etc.) that uses a systematic process to address learning and/or behavior problems of students, K-12, in a school. It is based on the premise that “two heads are better than one” when developing plans for students who are having difficulty in school (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). In some instances it is referred to as “student services,” “pupil services,” and “academic support.” It is also considered as special education and related services designed to meet the unique needs of a child with learning difficulties and can be offered before, during, or after school hours. It is all the resources, services, and personnel whose primary purpose is to support the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral progress of students experiencing learning difficulties (Public Schools of North Carolina, 2010).

### **Essential Elements of a Support Program**

While there are numerous models of support programs, there are seven essential elements of an effective program. These elements are identified in the 1994 National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children with Serious Emotional Disturbance. They are guided by the tenets of the IDEA, and were evolved from a 1990 legislative requirement placed on the Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) to engage in the organized planning of support programs for children with learning difficulties (Osher, Quinn, & Hanley, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

These elements play an important role in the development of strategies at a national level in meeting the needs of children with learning difficulties (Osher et al., 2002). They were identified because of the awareness that children with learning difficulties were not consistently or universally receiving the quantity or quality of educational services suitable for their academic needs (Pennsylvania's Approach to the National Agenda, 2010). While the primary objective of these seven elements is to improve results for all stakeholders, the true beneficiaries are the students because they provide helpful support in improving the education of children with learning difficulties. They also benefit educators by providing an atmosphere of collaboration among stakeholders where all can work in a shared problem-solving environment (Osher et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Experts in the field of education have stated that the use of these elements has had a phenomenal impact on students, family members, educators, policy makers, and agencies in improving results for children with learning difficulties (Osher et al., 2002, p. 1). The positive effect of these elements in providing a guideline for best practice for the

education of students with learning difficulties has been well documented by various authors (Osher & Hanley, 1996; Osher et al., 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

These seven interdependent elements collaboratively reflect the intervention necessary to significantly improve the academic performance of students with learning difficulties and they are defined within the following objectives.

#### Element 1: Expand Positive Learning Opportunities and Results

The primary objective of this element is to provide students with culturally responsive, student-centered opportunities marked by high academic expectations and tailored to meet the students' individual needs. It also provides an adequate, engaging, useful, and positive learning environment to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. It uses positive and direct student-centered instructional strategies, which are aligned with functional assessment measures geared to meet the children's particular learning styles. This element specifically addresses the short-term objectives in the students' individualized educational program that are based on the results of the functional assessment, as well as the standards set in the general education curriculum. Consequently, students' progress is monitored using ongoing data collection procedures. Its main objective is to provide curricula instruction and extra-curricular activities to build academic, behavioral, and social skills to help students to become successful in their academic career as well as in life.

#### Element 2: Strengthen School and Community Capacity

As is mentioned in literature, the poor academic performance of students is the result of various contributing factors. Some of these factors include school environment, home environment, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity background, and the students'

demeanor towards school work. In light of this discovery, when addressing students' learning difficulties, one cannot focus only on the child but also on the contributing factors, as well as strengthening the school and community capacity to meet the academic, vocational, social, and behavioral needs of the students (Matthews, 2003).

Element 2 calls for the expansion of initiatives that will improve the readiness and capacity of an environment to provide needed services to students with learning difficulties. It caters to early intervention, prevention, and pre-referral initiatives, such as early screening and teacher consultation. It supports active collaboration among regular and special education teachers, service providers (such as social workers, counselors, therapists, etc.) and families that will enhance learning for these students. This includes providing field-based training for regular educators, using special educators as consultants, reducing the teacher-student ratio, teaming special educators in the classroom with regular educators, and providing health specialists and other service providers for the school as is necessary for the growth and development of students experiencing learning difficulties (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

### Element 3: Value and Address Diversity

The American society is composed of a shared core culture, referred to as a macro culture, and many subcultures. Due to this complex and diverse nation, its core culture can be quite difficult to describe. However, Banks and Banks (as cited in Vaughn et al., 2006) describe this macro culture as:

1. Equality of opportunities for individuals in the society
2. Individualism and the notion that individual success is more important than the family, the community, and nation-state

3. Social mobility through individual effort and hard work
4. Individualistic attitudes towards values and behaviors
5. Belief in the nation's superiority
6. Orientation toward materialism and exploration of the environment.

Vaughn et al. (2006) further state that students are greatly influenced by this core culture and at the same time they are influenced by their own home cultures, or micro cultures. These micro cultures are based on factors such as national origin, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, gender, age, and disability. Vaughn et al. (2006) mention that sometimes the core values of the macro culture and the micro cultures are similar, and when that is the case it will be easier for learning to take place, as the pursuit of common goals has shown to increase cross-ethnic friendships. However, when the core values of the macro cultures and the micro cultures are different, the teacher will need to help students to understand and mediate differences. To assume this mediation, teachers and other individuals working with students need to be knowledgeable of such diversity and be able to merge the different cultures into school life and the curriculum (Vaughn et al., 2006, p. 281).

The goal of this element is to identify approaches that will improve the capacity of individuals and systems to respond skillfully, respectfully, and effectively to students, families, teachers, and other providers in a way that recognizes, affirms, and values their differences. In addressing values and diversity, this element supports collaborations among families, professionals, students, and communities that identify and provide culturally competent services to address the needs of children with learning difficulties (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 10).

#### Element 4: Collaborate With Family

Families represent a child's most intimate support group and they are the most influential individuals in a child's life, especially in the lives of children with learning difficulties because parents serve multiple roles in the support of their child's education. Parents serve as advocates, as an information source, and in the development of the child's IEP. The importance of family involvement cannot be overemphasized, because literature has identified that the strength of families and their involvement in schools can make a difference in the lives of the children (Bryant et al., 2008).

The goal of this element is to enhance collaborations that fully include family members on the team of service providers that implement family-focused services to improve educational outcomes of students with learning difficulties. Such services should be open, helpful, culturally competent, and accessible to families and schools as well as community-based. It also requires that service providers seek and facilitate active parental involvement when planning assessments and when determining what services to provide. Consequently, its main objective is to reorient family-school interactions and to build a partnership in which the service planning reflects the input of families' goals, knowledge, and culture for the education of students with learning difficulties (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

#### Element 5: Promote Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate assessment of students' academic and behavioral need for the provision of intervention is essential to successful support programs. This form of assessment must be based on identifying students' needs in relationship to the curriculum and to their individualized education program, rather than on global achievement and/or

ability measures (Howell, Fox, & Morehead, 1993). This element requires assessment to include curriculum-based evaluation and measurement procedures to monitor overall student performance and improvement. To accomplish this assessment, the academic and social skills curricula for the student must be identified and implemented. A functional assessment must also be a continuous process, and the results should be used to make systematic adjustments in the student's educational program (Howell et al., 1993; Matthews, 2003). As stated in the National Agenda (U.S. Department of Education, 1994) such assessment should

support the early screening and identification of children . . . by a multidisciplinary team of professionals and parents so that these children's problems are addressed before a cycle of failure, truancy, dropping out and delinquency is established. This target supports practical and timely assessments that enable teachers and schools to use appropriate strategies and to assure that interventions are producing desired results. Furthermore, this target encourages the development of sensitive identification and assessment procedures to meet the needs of all children and prevent the exacerbation of emotional and behavioral problems. These procedures should be accurate, linguistically appropriate, and culturally fair and should provide necessary information to enable educators to provide appropriate educational experiences for all students with learning difficulties. (p. 12)

#### Element 6: Provide Ongoing Skill Development and Support

Because students and staff are more productive in environments where they feel welcome, safe, and valued, support programs should actively provide each person with the skills and support necessary to create safe, productive, caring environments (Matthews, 2003). This element calls for approaches that improve the capacity of individuals and systems to respond skillfully, respectfully, and effectively to students, families, teachers, and other providers in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values their worth and dignity.

It supports a collaborative effort of teacher, the home, the school, and other support services in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of those students. It also provides for best practice in pedagogy in ensuring that students have access to challenging curricula, effective teaching, and a rich learning experience catering to their academic as well as their social needs and helping them to perform to the best of their ability.

It supports active collaboration among regular and special educators, service providers, and families that enables these students to learn. It also targets the field-based training of regular educators, reducing student-teacher ratios, and adopting different approaches to discipline that keep the students in class, provides collaborative effort between special educators in the classroom with regular educators, and brings other support services such as guidance counselors, social workers, health specialists, therapists, and psychologists into the school (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 9).

Improving the performance of students with learning difficulties requires new skills, new approaches, best practice, and collaboration among all the support group members. In order to provide such services and to improve outcomes of students with learning difficulties, special and general educators as well as other service providers need to have the knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity in meeting the needs of these students. Therefore, the education staff should have special education certification, and support staff should have extensive training in how to serve students with disabilities. In addition, the program must provide a full continuum of educational services, including instruction in academics, independent living skills, social skills, and work-related skills,

and assure procedural protections, including parental notification of evaluation and parental involvement in the review and revision of individualized educational plans.

This element also provides for the ongoing skill development and support necessary for “teachers and other service providers in order to: (1) increase their capacity to teach and work effectively, (2) reduce their sense of isolation, and (3) enhance their commitment to meeting the needs of the students.” It also supports the reorientation of professional roles and preparedness to effectively serve students in this capacity.

“Achieving this target will provide ongoing support and professional development for teachers and other professionals . . . thus fostering their commitment and persistence in meeting the challenging needs of children” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 13).

In accordance with this element, professional development for teachers and other service providers is of vital importance in providing new skills, knowledgeable intervention techniques, and best practice in order to understand, be knowledgeable, and be sensitive in meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 13).

#### Element 7: Create Comprehensive and Collaborative Systems

A comprehensive and collaborative system is one which provides coordinated support services and offers a continuum of education and treatment services (e.g., direct instruction, pull-out programs, inclusion programs, resource programs, therapeutic programs) to best meet the individual needs of students with the learning difficulties. In addition, it facilitates linkages among public school districts, the education program, the student's family, and social service agencies in order to link the students, the alternative program staff, families, public school personnel, and staff of different social service

agencies in providing a close-knit support for students facing academic challenges (Woodruff et al., 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 13).

The importance of this element is to bring services into the child's environment whether it is the home, the school, or the community. Its aim is to help generate comprehensive and seamless systems of appropriate, culturally competent, and mutually reinforcing services. It aims also to develop systems built around the needs of student, families, and communities by providing coordinated services, articulate responsibility, and availing system-wide and agency-level accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

### **The Role of Support Programs in Enhancing Academic Performance**

Support Programs provide educational opportunities, resources, and academic enrichment primarily for students who face academic challenges to help them achieve academic and personal goals. Such programs empower students with the necessary help they need to achieve their full potential and realize their dreams. Students, especially those from urban communities, need opportunities to develop competencies essential to being future leaders of the society. A well-structured student support program will provide the academic and leadership skills necessary to build pathways to success and to identify and address issues which are pivotal in making educational opportunity a reality for students.

The student-support program provides academic and related services to ensure the academic success of students ranging from pre-kindergarten through college graduation. Such services include instruction; tutorial services; and personal, financial, and career counseling which are necessary for academic and social advancement. These services are

provided by social workers, behavior intervention and support specialists, psychologists, educational therapists, and other specially trained staff members and resource staff. The purpose of a student-support program is to provide services that:

1. Assist children in developing age-appropriate competence
2. Influence the school to be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the children it serves with regard to laws, policies, practices, and procedures
3. Assist in eliminating the barriers between the child and school, family and school, community and school
4. Engage the positive forces in individuals, families, and communities to change environmental properties and characteristics that have an adverse effect on the child's growth and adaptive function in school settings
5. Engage community institutions and develop societal resources, networks, and support systems to meet the identified needs of children
6. Utilize research to form policy and practice in the school setting
7. Translate the laws and policies governing schools and children into programs and activities designed to promote school achievement in high-risk children (Klemek, 2010; NEC, 2010, p. 1).

Accordingly, the various needs that the student-support program seeks to address can be categorized into three main areas: counseling services, behavior support, and academic support.

*Counseling Services:* Counseling Services must be available to all students to address areas of personal, academic, and social difficulties. The aim of the counseling services is to:

1. Provide consultation services utilizing available resources from the Office of Special Education, Board of Education, Department of Social Work, Department of Health, and other available resources to support schools and families to maximize the development, participation, learning, and achievement of all children

2. To promote inclusive values and practices that respond positively to diversity; increase the participation of all children; reflect an awareness of diverse cultures, values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs; and promote equality of opportunity in terms of race, disability, and academic performance

3. To provide a high-quality consultation service which seeks continuous self-improvement through ongoing self-review, learning, and continuous development.

*Behavior Support:* A behavior support program can be defined as collaborative services which use current empirically validated practices to identify causes of, intervene to prevent, and appropriately react to problematic behavior. This is a system of support that includes proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behavior to create a positive school environment as well as acceptable citizens for the society (Klemek, 2010).

*Academic Support:* The aim of the academic support is to:

1. Provide teachers with resources, training, and ongoing support for students with learning difficulties
2. Promote high achievement for all students
3. Promote the identification and removal of barriers to learning
4. Provide students' with safety and emotional well-being

5. Develop an individualized education plan (IEP) for students with learning difficulty (The IEP would outline specific strategies that should be implemented in the classroom in order to address students' needs. The plan must be reviewed at regular intervals to determine whether the strategies are effective.)

6. Provide resources and supports for students who have been identified by teachers and/or parents as having problems that are interfering with the learning process.

### **Diagnostic Criteria Regarding Learning Difficulties**

Learning difficulty is one of the many labels that educators give to individuals who experience challenges or failures in their career as learners. It is also a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders. Some terms or labels used to identify this category of students are: learning disabled, low achievers, low performers, remedial, language impaired, disadvantaged, underprivileged, at-risk, culturally deprived, low income, drop out, marginal, disenfranchised, and others (Ingalls, 2003).

From the review of literature, it is quite evident that several factors play a primary role in determining children's educational outcome; such factors include socioeconomic status (Sirin, 2005), home environment ( Baum, 2004; Dotterer, Hoffman, Crouter, & McHale, 2008), race and ethnicity (Battle, 2002; Smith & Lalonde, 2003; Stinson, 2006; Worrell, 2007), school environment (Sanders, 1984), family environment (Seginer & Vermulst, 2002), the child's physical health (Joe, Joe, & Rowley, 2009), the child's personal experience (Kifer, 1975), community environment (Long, Monoi, Harper, Knoblauch, & Murphy, 2007), teachers' experience (Gerber, Finnn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Marks & Louis, 1997), and others. In the experience of a child's educational progress, these factors are intertwined in a complex web of forces, events,

and relationships and can have great effect in limiting a child's potential to learn (Legters & Slavin, 1992). Accordingly, the interplay of these circumstantial factors has a lasting effect on the children's academic success and, more so, on their future.

According to Ingalls (2003), the factors that seem to have the greatest impact on a child's academic success are the home, the school, and the society. Ingalls identifies these factors as inclusive of social/family background, personal problems, and school factors.

Accordingly, he identifies social/family background to include

sibling or parent drop out, low socioeconomic status, membership in an ethnic or racial minority group, dysfunctional family—lack of structure and stability, substance abuse, physical/sexual abuse, single-parent families, lack of family commitment to school, lack of parent education, and poor communication between the home and the school. (p. 18)

Personal problems include “external locus of control, learned helplessness, suicide attempts, substance abuse, low self-esteem, teenage pregnancy, trouble with the law, learning disabilities, lack of life goals, lack of hope for the future, significant lack of coping skills” (Ingalls, 2003, p. 18).

School factors include behavior problems, absenteeism, lack of respect for authority, suspension/expulsion, course/grade failure, tracking/ability grouping, dissatisfaction and frustration with school, lack of available and adequate counseling possibilities, inadequate school service, and school climates hostile to students who do not fit the norm (Ingalls, 2003, p. 18). As was previously mentioned, these circumstances do have a grave impact and can adversely affect children's learning experiences.

### **Behavior Exhibited by Students With Learning Difficulties**

Children with learning difficulties tend to have a considerable amount of personal problems that are often manifested in schools and other social occasions. As mentioned

earlier, the personal problems can be categorized as “external locus of control, learned helplessness, suicide attempts, substance abuse, low self-esteem, teenage pregnancy, trouble with the law, learning disabilities, lack of life goals, lack of hope for the future, significant lack of coping skills” (Ingalls, 2003, p. 18). School problems can be categorized as

behavior problems, absenteeism, lack of respect for authority, suspension/expulsion, course/grade failure, tracking/ability grouping, dissatisfaction and frustration with school, lack of available and adequate counseling possibilities, inadequate school service, and school climates hostile to students who do not fit the norm. (Ingalls, 2003, p. 18)

According to Matthews (2003), typical behavioral academic patterns observed in students with learning difficulties at an early pre-school age include but are not limited to:

*Language Barriers:* Slow development in speaking words or sentences, punctuation problems, difficulty learning new words, difficulty understanding questions, difficulty following simple directions, difficulty expressing wants and desires, difficulty rhyming words and lack of interest in storytelling.

*Motor Skills Challenges:* Clumsiness, poor balance, difficulty manipulating small objects, awkwardness with running, jumping, or climbing, trouble learning to tie shoes, button shirts, or perform other self-help activities, avoidance of drawing or tracing.

*Cognition Challenges:* Trouble memorizing the alphabet or days of the week, poor memory for what should be routine (everyday) procedures, difficulty with cause and effect, sequencing, and counting, difficulty with basic concepts such as size, shape, color.

*Attention Problems:* High distractibility, impulsive behavior, unusual restlessness (hyperactivity), difficulty staying on task, difficulty changing activities, constant repetition of an idea, inability to move on to a new idea.

*Social Behavior Problem:* Trouble interacting with others, playing alone, prone to sudden and extreme mood changes, easily frustrated, hard to manage, and has temper tantrums (Matthews, 2003, pp. 27-29).

Matthews (2003) further identifies typical academic behavioral patterns observed in students with learning difficulties at the elementary level as including:

*Language/Mathematics Challenges:* Slow learning of the correspondence of sound to letter, consistent errors in reading or spelling, difficulty remembering basic sight words, inability to retell a story in sequence, trouble learning to tell time or count money, confusion of math signs, transposition of number sequences, trouble memorizing math facts, trouble with place value, difficulty remembering the steps of mathematic operations such as long division.

*Motor Skills:* Poor coordination or awkwardness, difficulty copying from chalkboard, difficulty aligning columns (math), poor handwriting skills.

*Attention/Organization Difficulty:* Difficulty concentrating or focusing on a task. difficulty finishing work on time, inability to follow multiple directions, unusual sloppiness, carelessness, poor concept of direction (left, right), rejection of new concepts or changes in routine.

*Social Behavior:* Difficulty understanding facial expressions or gestures, difficulty understanding social situations, tendency to misinterpret behavior of peers and/or adults, and apparent lack of common sense (Matthews, 2003, pp. 29-31).

Children who portray the above mentioned behavioral characteristics will face academic challenges and will therefore need to be identified, evaluated, and given

corrective intervention so as to avoid failure and to improve chances for success in academia and ultimately in life (Matthews, 2003, p. 31).

### **The Effect of Learning Difficulties on Academic Performance**

According to Kauffman and Hallahan (2005), a child who experiences learning difficulties will need academic support for various reasons. Some of these reasons are stated below.

#### Challenges in Cognition

Cognition can be defined as the ability to comprehend what is seen or heard, and to be able to infer information from social cues and body language. Individuals with this impairment may have trouble learning new things, making generalizations from one situation to another, and expressing themselves through spoken or written language (Career Center, 2003).

Kauffman and Hallahan (2005) further mention that some of the disabilities that are related to cognition are:

1. *Asperger's Syndrome*: A neurobiological disorder similar to autism and characterized by serious deficits in social and communication skills.
2. *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)*: A neurobiological condition characterized by developmentally inappropriate levels of attention, concentration, activity, distractibility, and impulsivity.
3. *Sensory Integrative Dysfunction*: The inability to take in information through senses (touch, movement, smell, taste, vision, and hearing), to put it together with prior information, memories, and knowledge stored in the brain, and to make a meaningful response.

4. *Learning Disability*: A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, it may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. Learning disabilities do not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

5. *Dyslexia*: A language and reading disability that causes people to have trouble understanding words, sentences, or paragraphs.

6. *Dysgraphia*: A disorder that causes difficulty with forming letters or writing within a defined space.

7. *Dyscalculia*: A disorder that causes people to have problems doing arithmetic and grasping mathematical concepts.

8. *Dyspraxia*: A problem with the body's system of motion that interferes with a person's ability to make a controlled or coordinated physical response in a given situation.

9. *Visual Perceptual Deficit*: Difficulty receiving and/or processing accurate information from the sense of sight, although there is nothing wrong with vision.

10. *Auditory Perceptual Deficit*: Difficulty receiving accurate information through auditory means, even though there is no problem with hearing. The problem is in how the brain interprets what is heard.

11. *Tourette's Syndrome (TS)*: An inherited, neurological disorder characterized by repeated and involuntary body movements (tics) and/or uncontrollable vocal sounds. In a minority of cases, the vocalizations can include socially inappropriate words and

phrases called coprolalia. These outbursts are neither intentional nor purposeful.

Involuntary symptoms can include eye blinking, repeated throat clearing or sniffing, arm thrusting, kicking movements, shoulder shrugging or jumping.

12. *Acquired Brain Injury*: Can significantly affect many physical, cognitive, and psychological skills. Physical deficit can include ambulation, balance, coordination, fine motor skills, strength, and endurance. Cognitive deficits of language and communication, information processing, memory, and perceptual skills are common. Psychological status is also often altered. Adjustment issues are frequently encountered by people with this disability. Grigorenko (2008) states that students with this type of memory and conceptual difficulties experience problems remembering main ideas or in understanding critical features of a particular concept and that they often give attention to irrelevant situations of a concept or problem.

As is further suggested by Grigorenko (2008), students with cognition challenges can be benefited from an instruction that initially introduces concepts and principles with a high level of clarity and frequent reinforcement of significant concepts. Also, it is necessary that such knowledge being taught is relevant and suitable to the learner's cognitive level (p. 234).

### Difficulty in Learning Academic Subjects

Raquette and Tuttle (2003) state that in order for learning to take place, all of the brain functions need to be coordinated, integrated, and synchronized. According to Levine (1992, as cited in Reguette & Tuttle, 2003), in order for a child to learn he needs to be able to:

1. Concentrate and focus on one thing, finish a task, and control what he says or does
2. Tell the difference between different images
3. Understand time and sequence of events
4. Store and recall information
5. Understand and express language
6. Coordinate motor and muscular movement
7. Make friends and work in groups
8. Solve problems and work creatively.

In further describing the function of the brain, Levine (1992, as cited in Raquette & Tuttle, 2003) uses a scenario to similarize the function of the brain with that of an air-traffic controller keeping planes in the air, allowing some to land and others to take off at the same time successfully. The authors further explain that the brain is constantly functioning, managing the control of the body. When an individual has learning disability in any particular area, there will be a difference in performance. Because of the difference in the structure of the brain and the coordination of activities in the brain, problems with learning will be created (p. 38).

Grigorenko (2008) states that students with this type of knowledge deficit experience a wide range of problems in learning complex concepts; however, they can be benefited from support services that include differentiated instruction, practice to scaffold learning, and pre-teaching opportunities to ensure that students understand new concepts (p. 235).

## Difficulty in Focusing and Sustaining Attention

Children who have difficulty in focusing and sustaining attention are characterized as inattentive. Eide and Eide (2006) state that attention is the result of a whole network of brain function requiring coordinated actions of different parts of the brain. It requires physical as well as mental networking for a child to be attentive. When there is a breakdown in this networking, the whole attention structure will fail. A child with such behavior will portray problems with multitasking, forgetfulness, listening, organization, sustaining attention, task persistence, and motivation. Many of these behaviors result from problems with different areas of the attention-control system of the body and so can be produced by various causes. Typical examples of such behavior are failure to give close attention to fine details, difficulty maintaining attention on a particular task, does not seem to listen when spoken to, often does not follow through with an instruction, fails to complete a task, loses things easily and can become distracted by extraneous stimuli (Eide & Eide, 2006). The author also mentions that students who have difficulty in focusing and sustaining attention require a thorough evaluation as different conditions can cause attention problems; however, it can be improved with the correct teaching methods (p. 200).

## Difficulty in Communication Through Speech, Hearing, and Seeing

Eide and Eide (2006), founders of the Eide Neurolearning Clinic, state that when a child faces challenges in communication through speech, hearing, and seeing, it is important that he/she receives academic support because language is a gateway through which most of the child's education has to pass, and when this gateway is blocked then all areas of the child's education will be severely affected. They state that language

problems can pose a threat to all aspects of a child's education and in particular a threat to the child's future. Children with language problems struggle in all areas of learning because language is the foundation to understanding the entrance to intellectual development. When students have such learning difficulties they will have trouble understanding instructions, principles, and even questions on a test. Consequently, the authors say, when a child has a learning problem it is of paramount importance to provide the necessary support to help the child to perform to the best of his/her ability (p. 170).

Hardman et al. (2002) state that a support program is of vital importance in cognition or information processing in an individual with learning needs because "children with learning disabilities do not perform as well as normal children on some memory tasks" (p. 87). Johnson (1999) also supports this point in reporting that children with learning disabilities have differing, rather than uniformly deficient cognitive abilities and that their attention problems have been associated with learning difficulties. Such problems have often been clinically characterized as "short attention span." In some cases, children with such problems exhibit considerable daydreaming and can be very distractible, and if not addressed can become a hindrance to academic growth (Hardman et al., 2002).

Other researchers have found out that some children with learning difficulties have selective attention problems, which make it difficult to focus on important tasks or information. Some researchers also suggested that children with learning difficulties perform better in a classroom setting where individualized attention can be given and where their particular needs are met. Besides this, other researchers state that children with learning disabilities perform better in an inclusive environment where students are

placed into an age-appropriate general education classroom (Sorrells et al., 2004).

Despite the method used, whether inclusion or mainstream, an overwhelming review of literature supports the fact that an academic support program is of vital importance to the academic success of students with learning difficulties. The analysis presented in many studies on the topic is based on the assumptions that:

1. Learning difficulties reflect internal problems in processing information that typically affect academic school performance (Morrison & Cosden, 1997).
2. Learning difficulties demonstrate significant problems in school achievement and other behavioral symptoms such as hyperactivity, distractibility, and perceptual problems.
3. The academic achievement level of children with learning difficulties is far below that of their peers (Zigmond et al., 1995).
4. Children with learning difficulties have difficulty in problem solving, also called high-order processing (Swanson, 2001).
5. Children with learning difficulties often have problems with transition; they are impulsive, moody, and impatient; they also appear to be restless and talkative (Dobbins, Sunder, & Soltys, 2007).

Many educators believe that most academic and social learning is based on factors such as student aptitudes or abilities, instructional environment, and teaching methodology. While these three variables do not form a complete structure capable of containing all of these factors contributing to learning, they certainly account for many of the variables educators would agree are important to success in school. Also many studies have shown that when students with learning difficulties are placed in the general

classroom without available academic support that appropriately meets their different learning needs, then learning is actually non-effective (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007).

### **Assistive Programs for Students With Learning Difficulties**

Federal funds have been allocated to improve education and provide extra services at the pre-school, elementary, secondary, and post-high school levels. Various federally funded programs are available and cater towards prevention or remediation of learning difficulties. Included are some of the following programs:

#### **Title I**

Title I, Part A of the ESEA (1965) as amended, is a federally funded program designed to improve educational opportunities for students. It caters to the needs of low-achieving, disadvantaged students and provides financial assistance through State educational agencies (SEA), local educational agencies (LEA), and schools with high numbers or percentages of poor children. Its primary purpose is to help ensure that all children meet challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The goals of Title I services are:

1. To develop positive attitudes towards academic content areas
2. To deliver academic instruction according to the students' needs
3. To increase academic achievement
4. To support the classroom instructional program
5. To involve students in independent learning, reading, and writing at school

and at home (through scaffolding)

6. To encourage and assist parents in supporting their children's development.

More than 50,000 public schools across the country use Title I funds to provide additional academic support and learning opportunities to help low-achieving children master challenging curricula and meet state standards in core academic subjects. Under Title I, local educational agencies (LEA) are required to provide services for eligible private school students as well. In particular, section 1120 of Title 1, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the NCLB, requires a participating LEA to provide eligible children attending private elementary schools, their teachers, and their families with Title I services or other benefits that are equitable to those provided to eligible public school children, their teachers, and their families. Therefore, Title I services provided by the LEA for private school participants are designed to meet their educational needs and supplement the educational services provided by the private school (U.S. Department of Education, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

According to Legters and Slavin (1992), most Title 1 funds provide instructional services to students in reading, mathematics, and/or languages. These funds are allocated to schools on the basis of the number of low-income students they serve; however, the funds are used to serve students according to their educational needs and not according to their poverty level. The primary purpose of the Title 1 services is to assist eligible low-achieving students and to supplement, not supplant, educational effort. Consequently, it provides five principal models of services which are: pullout, in class, add-on, replacement, and school-wide.

For the pullout service, students are taken out of their classroom for 30-40 minutes to receive remedial instruction in a subject that they are having difficulty with. The instruction for such a remedial session is done by a certified special education teacher and is done in a class of eight or fewer students. With the in-class model, the teacher, preferably a teacher's aide will work with eligible students within the classroom. The add-on model provides services to eligible students outside of the regular classroom, for example, summer school or afterschool programs. The replacement model includes placing eligible students in self-contained classrooms where they receive all their instruction. The school-wide model involves services where all students in a high-poverty school become benefitted from the Title 1 funds; this model is quite rare (Legters & Slavin, 1992, pp. 19-22).

### Head Start

Head Start offers educational programs for children ages 3 to 5, and a wide variety of opportunities and support services for their families. It is the purpose of this program to promote the school readiness of low-income children by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development in a (a) learning environment that supports children's growth in language, literacy, mathematics, science, social and emotional functioning, creative arts, physical skills, and approaches to learning; and through the (b) provision to low-income children and their families of health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services that are determined, based on family needs assessments, to be necessary.

## Special Education

A special education program offers specifically designed instruction to identified students with an individualized educational plan (IEP) at no cost to parents. Programs and services include classroom instruction, consultation, auxiliary support, adaptive supplies and materials designed to meet the identified educational goals of special education students. In recent years, great progress has been made in providing equal access to free and appropriate education for all students with academic needs through the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS).

The purpose of the special education program is to improve academic, behavioral/emotional, and social results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities ages birth through 21 by providing leadership, financial support, and a wide array of services to parents, individuals, states, and local districts. By providing funding to programs that serve infants, toddlers, children, and adults with disabilities, the OSERS works to ensure that these individuals are not “left behind” in school, in employment, or in life. Consequently it ensures that every individual with a disability maximizes their potential to participate in school, work, and community life (U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Ever since its inception in American society during the early 1970s when the first legislation was passed, the special education program has undergone severe scrutiny and criticism; however, many studies have been conducted that prove its effectiveness on the academic growth and development of individuals with learning challenges. Some studies are those conducted by Al-Shammari, Al-Sharoufi, and Yawkey (2008); Allington and McGill-Franzen (1992); Chandler (1984); Endress, Weston, Marchand-Martella,

Martella, and Simmons (2007); Fitton and Gredler (1996); Good and McCaslin (2008); Hoover (1984); Hunter (2002); Kroesbergen, Van Luit, and Maas (2004); Macrine and Sabbatino (2008); McInerney and Hamilton (2007); and Tindal (1985); these and many other studies have identified the effect that special education can have on the academic growth and development of individuals with learning difficulties.

Eligibility for special education depends on assessment of individual students' level of performance. A variety of procedural and legal safeguards provided by federal mandates are in place to ensure that students receive appropriate and unbiased services. Therefore, before it can be determined that a child needs special education services, a process of investigation has to take place as is mandated by federal laws such as IDEA (2004).

In determining if a child is eligible to receive the special education program, the investigation process includes:

1. *Initial Referral:* According to the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID, 2002), a referral is a statement asking that the school district evaluate a child to determine if he or she needs special education services. This written statement should be addressed to the chairperson of a public school district's Committee for Special Education (CSE). Such referral could be made by the parent, the child's teacher, or a professional in the child's school. Additional people who may also make a referral include doctors, judicial officers (such as a family court judge or a probation officer), or a designated person in a public agency; a student over 18 years and younger than 21 years, who is an emancipated minor, may also refer him- or herself (VESID, 2002).

2. *Individual Evaluation*: Once the referral is made, the first priority is to evaluate the child in order to determine the disability. This is done when the child is referred to a multidisciplinary team called the Committee on Special Education (VESID, 2002). As identified in *A Parent's Guide to Special Education* (Wilmshurst & Brue, 2005), this committee must include:

- a. Parent(s) of the student
- b. Regular education teacher of the student
- c. Special education teacher of the student
- d. School district representative who is qualified to provide or supervise special education and is knowledgeable about the general curriculum and the availability of resources of the school district
- e. An individual who understands and can talk about the evaluation results and how these results affect instruction. (This person may also be the special education teacher/provider, regular education teacher, school psychologist, school district representative, or someone whom the school district determines has knowledge or special expertise regarding the student.)
- f. School psychologist
- g. School physician (upon request)
- h. Parent member (unless the parent requests that the parent member not participate)
- i. Other people who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student, including related services personnel as appropriate (as requested by the parent or school district)

j. The student, if appropriate.

The evaluation process of the CSE includes various assessment tools and strategies. It includes a physical examination, a psychological evaluation, a social history, observation of the child in his or her current education setting, and other tests such as speech or language and vocational assessment. This evaluation is comprehensive and provides information about the child's unique abilities and needs, and the process should be completed within 60 days of the date of request (Weinfeld & Davis, 2008).

1. *Determining Eligibility*: After the child is evaluated, the CSE has to determine if the child is eligible for special education services and programs. Weinfeld and Davis (2008) state that the condition of eligibility is determined if all three answers are "yes" to the following questions: (a) Does the student meet criteria for one or more of the disability definitions? (b) Does the student's disability adversely affect his educational performance? And (c) Does the student require special education services to address his educational needs? (Weinfeld & Davis, 2008, pp. 88-92).

2. *Individualized Education Plan (IEP)*: The other important stage in this process is the development of the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which is like a road map for all educators involved in the child's academic growth. It describes the child's disability and outlines the various services necessary to support the child in a setting most suitable for his/her specific needs. The IEP is a very important document both for the child with a disability and for those who are involved in educating him/her. When administered correctly, the IEP will improve teaching, learning, and performance results. Each child's IEP describes the educational program that has been designed to meet the child's unique needs. Once the IEP is developed, the CSE arranges special

education programs and services, which should become effective within 60 school days. They also determine when and where those special services will be provided, and placement is done as close as possible to the child's home, one that is least restrictive where he or she will not have to change his or her friends or be in an uncomfortably new environment (Weinfeld & Davis, 2008).

3. *Annual Review/Reevaluation*: At least once a year the parent and other members of the committee will review the child's IEP. On such occasion the committee will make decisions about any necessary changes to the child's program. Additionally, at least once every 3 years, the school district will reevaluate the child. A reevaluation may occur if conditions prove necessary or if a parent or the child's teacher requests a reevaluation. A reevaluation may also become necessary to determine the child's individual needs, educational progress and achievement, the child's ability to participate in regular education classes, as well as the child's continuing eligibility for special education services (VESID, 2002).

### **Demographic Variables and Their Effect on Teachers' Perceptions**

Historically, teachers have always played a major role in the educational growth and development of students and they also play a significant role in changing how children are taught. Researchers have discovered that teacher attitudes can influence students' behavior, achievement, self-concept, social relationships, and thinking ability (Sa-U & Rahman, 2011). For these reasons, researchers use teachers' perceptions to evaluate pedagogy (p. 1).

In viewing perception from a cognitive point of view, Eggen and Kauchak (2007, as cited in Adediwura & Tayo, 2007) state that "background knowledge in the form of

schemas affect perception and subsequent learning” (p. 166). They further state that perception cannot be done in a vacuum and that it depends on some background information to trigger reaction. Accordingly, teachers’ perception of the need and availability and need of a support program for students with learning difficulties will be perceived differently by teachers with long-standing years of experience and educational background from those teachers considered as having limited teaching experience as well as limited knowledge of special education. Teachers with adequate educational experience and years of teaching experience, therefore, will have a different perception of the students’ needs because, as identified by Adediwura and Tayo (2007), they will have minds already pre-occupied with memories and reactions that will cause them to evaluate a situation differently. The authors continued to say that perception may be energized both by present and past experience, individual attitude at a particular moment, the interest of the person, the level of attention and the interpretation given to the perception (p. 2). Consequently, a teacher’s perception of the availability and necessity of a support program for students with learning difficulties may be greatly affected by certain demographic variables such as years of teaching experience, level of educational background, and ethnicity.

A study done by Sa-U and Rahman (2011), which investigated factors influencing teachers’ perceptions of teaching thinking, revealed that sense of efficacy, value of teaching critical thinking, and structure of learning are factors affecting teachers’ perceptions; that internal context factors and external context factors also impact teachers’ perceptions. It is, therefore, no surprise that federal laws mandate that teachers

become part of the planning and implementation of educational programs for children, especially those with special needs (IDEA, 2004).

### **Conclusions**

Bailey (2010) states that in addition to the academic rigor of school work, students often face social and emotional challenges that create barriers to their success. When students are confronted with one or more of these stumbling blocks, additional support through counseling, tutoring, skills development, mentorships, and even cultural activities can increase their chances for academic success. This implies that a support program is vital in designing structural plans and strategies to assist students and teachers. Many schools use support programs not only for students with learning disabilities who need interventions but also to identify and to provide help to students who are at risk for failure (Bailey, 2010, p. 58). According to the Georgia Board of Education (2008), there has been a renewed emphasis on the importance of support programs in schools given that:

1. The 1997 re-authorization of *IDEA* emphasized that students with disabilities should receive the maximum time appropriate in the regular classroom. To accomplish this, teachers need support with specialized teaching methods.

2. Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* of 1973 and the Americans With Disabilities Act (1990) have been emphasized by the federal government as applicable to the schools' handling of students with physical and mental disabilities. A Support Program documentation process can meet most Section 504 requirements.

3. Educators realize that conditions beyond mere academics are often pivotal for students at risk of failure. The success of the broad approach used by Support Programs has shown the value of collaboration, especially across agencies.

4. Increased concern about school safety has called for more effective classroom behavior management. Collective wisdom of support program members can assist teachers and administrators with this challenge (Georgia Board of Education, 2008, p. 8).

Lee-Tarver (as cited in Bailey, 2010) says that as pressure for academic success increases, more and more students will need a support program to “scaffold” them to academic success. This is the thrust of Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development (Raymond, 2000).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the need and availability of a support program for students with learning difficulties who might be attending elementary schools operated by the Atlantic Union (AU) Conference. The study sought to identify elements of a support program that teachers perceive as desirable for the academic growth and development for these students. The chapter is divided into nine sections including an introduction, research design, population and sample, instrumentation, content validity of instrument, data collection procedures, research questions, data analysis, and a summary of the chapter.

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the *availability* of a support program for students with learning difficulties with regard to (a) positive learning opportunities, (b) strengthening of school capacity, (c) valuing and addressing diversity, (d) collaborating with family, (e) using assessment procedures, (f) promoting skills development and support, and (g) providing comprehensive and collaborative systems?
2. What are teachers' perceptions of the *need* of a support program for students with learning difficulties with regard to (a) positive learning opportunities,

(b) strengthening of school capacity, (c) valuing and addressing diversity, (d) collaborating with family, (e) using assessment procedures, (f) promoting skills development and support, and (g) providing comprehensive and collaborative systems?

3. Is perceived *availability* of a support program for students with learning difficulties related to (a) demographic variables (gender, race, years of experience, educational level, licensure) (b) employment-related variables (conference, employment position, status), and (c) exposure to information about learning difficulties (number of special education/inclusion classes, opportunities for staff development)?

4. To what extent is perceived *need* of a support program for students with learning difficulties related to (a) demographic variables (age, gender, race, years of experience, educational level, licensure) (b) employment-related variables (conference, employment, position, status, class size), and (c) exposure to information about learning difficulties (number of special education/inclusion classes, opportunities for staff development)?

5. Is there a relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need with regard to a support program for students with learning difficulties?

6. What are teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a support program?

### **Research Design**

This study employed a survey research methodology in which survey questionnaires were used to gather information from teachers in Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools operated by the AU Conference. The survey items included teachers'

perceptions of statements regarding elements of a support program as well as the availability and/or the need of a support program. Demographic information was collected about the participants and their perceived opinion of the advantages and disadvantages of a support program for students with learning difficulties.

According to O'Connor (2011) a survey research design is one that is used to measure variables by asking people questions and then examining relationships among these variables. This methodology is used because survey design attempts to capture attitude or patterns of behavior. The advantages of this type of design are that the researcher is able to get information that may not be available from other sources, it provides an unbiased representation of population of interest, and it provides a standardized means of measurement in that the same information is collected from every respondent (Owens, 2002). The disadvantages, however, are that respondents tend to give socially desirable responses that make them look good or seem to be what the researcher is looking for, it is difficult to access the proper number and type of people who are needed for a representative sample of the target population, and it is possible that a lot of people may not participate in surveys (O'Connor, 2002). However, this methodology is preferable because it best fits the purpose of obtaining "information about the preferences, attitudes, practices, concerns, or interests of a group of people" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 11).

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study included all 286 elementary school teachers employed by the Atlantic Union Conference during the 2011-2012 school year. However, only those teachers working in schools located in the United States were invited to

participate in the study; hence, survey questionnaires were distributed to the 265 elementary school teachers working in Greater New York Conference, Northeastern Conference, New York Conference, New England Conference, and Southern New England Conference. The survey instruments were mailed to the principals of each participating school, who distributed them to all the teachers in the 55 elementary schools. The participants were invited to participate in the research through standard research protocol, as is explained in the data collection procedure.

### **Instrumentation**

This study used a survey questionnaire (see Appendix D) to collect data from elementary school teachers. Through a careful analysis of literature on support programs (Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003; IDEA, 1990; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Special Education, 1994) elements of an effective support program were shown to assist students with learning difficulties. These essential elements were used as the basis for the development of the questionnaires. The literature directed the development of the survey and created the foundation upon which the validity of the instrument is based.

The questionnaire used for this study was an adapted format of the questionnaire used by Grace Kelly from Andrews University. Kelly's questionnaire was used to measure stakeholders' perceptions of the availability and the need of a guidance counseling program for elementary schools located in Jamaica. The instrument for this study was divided into three parts (Appendix D); the first part consisted of 13 items which measured demographic variables of the respondents, such as teachers' demographics (age, gender, race, years of teaching experience, licensure), teachers'

employment status (conference, employment status, class size), and teachers' educational background (number of special education/inclusion classes, opportunities for staff development, and educational level).

Part Two consisted of 32 questions measuring two concepts (availability and need), and each item was measured along a 3-point Likert-type scale: No=1, Not Sure=2, and Yes=3. Missing data were coded as zero. These questions were geared to measure structural components of a support program, such as instructional/developmental component, management/governance component, and enabling/support component (Adelman & Taylor, 1994, 2007; Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003). Hence they were based on the elements of a support program as identified in literature (Georgia Board of Education Rule, 2000; Georgia Department of Education, 2008; Osher et al., 2002, p. 3; U.S. Department of Education & Office of Special Education, 1994, pp. 6-8). They measured the teachers' perceptions and were arranged to identify the availability (the present situation as it relates to a support program at the schools) and the need (that which they desire the student support program to be) for a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend AU Conference elementary schools.

Part Three consisted of three open-ended/short-answer questions designed to further measure teachers' opinion of the availability and the need of a support program. Hence, these questions gave teachers the opportunity to express their opinion of any challenges that they may experience in teaching students with learning difficulties and also their perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of having a support program in the school.

In general the survey questions used for the study were primarily close-ended and a few open-ended questions, which allowed for different types of responses from a cross section of the population. The survey consisted of 48 questions, with 32 questions formatted on a 3-point Likert-type scale, while 13 questions required circled responses and 3 questions were short-answer questions.

Participants were expected to respond in two ways: (a) to identify the current status of a support program in the school and (b) to identify elements of a support program that are desired (i.e., whether or not they think the program would enhance the academic and behavior need of their student). Hence, the questions were designed to measure the structural components of a student support program.

### **Validity of Instrument**

An effective instrument provides confidence in the accuracy of the data collected. According to Anatasi and Urbina (1977), an instrument is identified as “what the test measures and how well it does so” (p. 113). For an instrument to be identified as valid and reliable it must measure what it intends to measure, must be accurate, and must measure consistently (Cox, 1996).

The validity of the questionnaire for this study was ascertained through (a) a careful review of the literature (see citation in Tables 1-3) and (b) expert judgment (see Appendix E). The review of literature helped to determine characteristics of an effective support program for students with learning difficulties, a program that is research-based and effective. The literature, therefore, drove the development of the survey and created the foundation upon which the validity of the instrument was based. Tables 1-3 document

Table 1

*Survey Questions Reflecting Instructional Component*

Instruction Variable	Primary Variables	Survey Items	References
The goal of having all students achieve high standards as reflected in performance standards, school curriculum, instructional method, assessment and evaluation	<p>Element 1-Expand positive learning opportunities and results</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To engage students in culturally responsive and student-centered opportunities to learn.</li> <li>2. To engage students in activities tailored to their individual needs.</li> <li>3. To engage students in extra-curricular activities that build academic and social skills.</li> </ol>	<p>My students participate in support programs that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide opportunities whereby they can be engaged in culturally responsive activities (Item 22)</li> <li>2. Provide the help that they need to enhance their learning style (Item 23)</li> <li>3. Provide activities tailored to meet their individual learning needs (Item 24)</li> <li>4. Provide extra-curricular activities that build academic and social skills (Item 25)</li> <li>5. Provide a functional curriculum to meet their individual cognitive, social, vocational, and behavioral needs (Item 26)</li> </ol>	<p>Adelman &amp; Taylor, 1994, p. 25</p> <p>Adelman &amp; Taylor, 2007, p. 71</p> <p>Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6</p> <p>U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, pp. 6-8</p> <p>Osher et al., 2002, p. 3</p> <p>Georgia Department of Education, 2008, p. 5</p> <p>IDEA, 2004</p>
	<p>Element 2-Strengthening school and community capacity</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <p>To foster initiatives that strengthen the capacity of schools and communities in serving students with learning difficulties in the least restrictive environment</p>	<p>My school:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Supports early intervention, prevention and pre-referral initiatives (Item 27)</li> <li>2. Provides adequate support staff, like special education/inclusion teacher, guidance counselor, speech and language therapist, social worker, and educational psychologist to help the students (Item 28)</li> <li>3. Supports active collaborations among regular and special educators, service providers and families (Item 29)</li> <li>4. Teams special education teachers with regular educators in the classroom (Item 30)</li> </ol>	<p>U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 9</p> <p>Osher et al., 2002, p. 3</p>
	<p>Element 3-Value and addressing diversity</p> <p>Objective:</p> <p>To encourage positive collaborations among families, professionals, students, and communities in order to foster equitable outcomes for all students and result in the identification and provision of services that are responsive to issues</p>	<p>My school provides opportunities that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cater to active collaborations among families, professionals, students and communities (Item 31)</li> <li>2. Provide services that are responsive to issues of race, culture and gender (Item 32)</li> <li>3. Recognize the family and the community as a critical part of the students' life (Item 33)</li> <li>4. Provide the help that students need to enhance their different learning styles (Item 20)</li> </ol>	<p>U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 10</p> <p>Osher et al., 2002, p. 3</p>

Table 2

*Survey Questions Reflecting Management/Governance Component*

Management Variable	Primary Variables	Survey Items	References
This component builds capacity in the system by organizing the instructional and student support components at all levels through planning, budgeting, staffing, directing, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting so that maximum use is made of available resources	Element 5-Promote appropriate assessment Objectives: To promote practices ensuring that assessment is integral to the identification, design, and delivery of services for children with learning difficulties. These practices should be culturally appropriate, ethical, functional, and ongoing.	My school: 1. Supports practical, timely and regular assessment in order to keep track of students' academic progress (Item 37) 2. Supports the use of assessment data in determining services for students' needs (Item 38) 3. Supports the use of assessment data in determining appropriate strategies to ensure that interventions are producing desired results (Item 39) 4. Supports early screening and identification of children with learning difficulties (Item 15) 5. Systematically identifies students with learning difficulties and refers such students to a committee for evaluation (Item 16) 6. Has a designated committee that develops an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students with learning difficulties (Item 17)	Adelman & Taylor, 1994, p. 25 Adelman & Taylor, 2007, p. 71 Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6 U.S. Department of Education & Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 12 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3 Georgia Department of Education, 2008 Georgia Board of Education Rule, 2000 IDEA, 2004
	Element 7-Create comprehensive and collaborative systems Objectives: 1.-To promote coherent services built around the individual needs of children with learning difficulties. These services should be family-centered, community-based, and appropriately funded.	My school: 1. Provides coherent services built around the needs of students, families and communities (Item 42) 2. Provides individualized and family-centered services that can respond promptly during any crisis (Item 43) 3. Provides ongoing training and workshops to educators, families, and other service providers in order to sustain networking (Item 44) 4. Provides individualized attention and related services to students with learning difficulties (Item 45)	U.S. Department of Education & Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 14

Table 3

*Survey Questions Reflecting Support Component*

Support Variable	Primary Variables	Survey Items	References
This component seeks to displace barriers that affect student learning and ensures a smooth, seamless continuum of services catering to the academic and behavioral needs of the individual student.	Element 4-Collaborates with family Objectives: 1. To foster active collaboration among family members in order to improve educational outcomes. Services should be open, helpful, culturally competent, accessible to families and schools as well as community-based	My school: 1. Facilitates active parental involvement when planning assessments or when determining what services to provide the student (Item 34) 2. Provides family-focused services in order to improve educational outcomes (Item 35) 3. Supports family-school interactions to build partnerships in reflecting families' goals, knowledge and culture (Item 36) 4. Provides a needs coordinator who meets with parents and their children to discuss the plan of action for their child's academic growth (Item 21)	Adelman & Taylor, 1994, p. 25 Adelman & Taylor, 2007, p. 71 Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6 U.S. Department of Education & Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 11 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3 Georgia Department of Education, 2008 Georgia Board of Education Rule, 2000 IDEA, 2004
	Element 6-Provide ongoing skill development & support Objectives: 1-To cater to the enhancement of knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity among all who work with children having learning difficulties. 2-To provide ongoing support and resources to strengthen the capacity of families, teachers, service providers, and others in order to collaborate, persevere, and improve outcomes of children with learning difficulties.	My school: 1. Has a support program at my school to help students with learning difficulties (Item 14) 2. Provides adequate support staff (special education/inclusion teacher, guidance counselor, speech and language therapist, social worker, etc.) to help the students (Item 18) 3. Provides on-going staff development that empowers teachers with the know-how to work effectively with children who have learning difficulties (Item 19) 4. Provides professional development that increases their capacity to teach students with learning difficulties (Item 40) 5. Provides opportunity for educators to share information and experiences regarding the diversity, the complexity of needs, and the potential for learning and growth of students with learning difficulties (Item 41) 6. List 3 challenges you face when working with students with learning difficulties (Item 46) 7. List 3 possible advantages of having a support program in your school (Item 47) 8. List 3 possible disadvantages of not having a support program in your school (Item 48)	U.S. Department of Education & Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 13 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3

the alignment of survey items on the instrument with the components of effective support systems as identified in literature.

A measure of face validity involved a review of the questionnaire by a group of professionals in the field to determine if the questions were measuring what was intended. Five experts were asked to review the instrument (Appendix E). They included two educational administrators having experience with the needs of students with learning difficulties, one certified special education teacher knowledgeable of the services necessary to assist students with learning difficulties, one special education administrator, who has worked in the capacity of a Committee on Special Education (CSE) member with the New York State Board of Education working in the capacity of assessing students experiencing learning difficulties and identifying special support for their educational pursuit, and one administrator working in the area of educational research.

Specific guidelines were given to the experts as they reviewed the instrument. They were asked to study the items for typographical errors, perform item analysis, determine that the survey was clear and concise, and that it measured what it was intended to measure. Their feedback was then used to modify the questionnaire and to assist in making was clear and concise, and that it measured what it was intended to measure. Their feedback was then used to modify the questionnaire and to assist in making judgment of both the clarity and face validity of the instrument. Through these procedures adjustments were made to the instrument in that questions that were identified as unclear, ambiguous, or unnecessary were modified to ensure clarification of meaning.

Tables 1-3 also provide a brief description of the elements of a support program, the matching survey items, and the references for the supporting literature used to guide the study. A more detailed account of the elements of a support program is included in Chapter 2 of this study, and the survey questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

### Component 1: Instruction

In conjunction with *The World Declaration of Education for All* (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990) this component of the support program ensures that all students, despite their differences, get equal opportunity to achieve at high standards as reflected in performance standards, school curriculum, instructional method, assessment, and evaluation (Adelman & Taylor, 1994; p. 25; 2007, p. 71; Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6; IDEA, 2004; UNESCO, 1994, p. 21). Thirteen survey questions geared to measure teachers' perception of this component are reflected in Element 1–Expand Positive Learning Opportunities and Results; Element 2–Strengthening School and Community Capacity; and Element 3–Valuing and Addressing Diversity.

### Component 2: Management

This component organizes the instructional and student support components at all levels of the support program through planning, budgeting, staffing, directing, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting so that maximum use is made of available resources (Adelman & Taylor, 1994, p. 25; 2007, p. 71; Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6; IDEA, 2004; UNESCO, 1994, p. 23). This component contains Element 5–Promote Appropriate Assessment and Element 7–Create Comprehensive and Collaborative System. Ten survey questions are used to measure teachers' perceptions as they relate to this component.

### Component 3: Support

This component seeks to remove barriers that prevent learning and ensures a smooth, seamless continuum of services catering to the academic and behavioral needs of the individual student (Adelman & Taylor, 1994, p. 25; 2007, p. 71; Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6; IDEA, 2004; UNESCO, 1994, p. 31). This component reflects Element 4–Collaboration With Family and Element 6–Provide Ongoing Skills Development and Support. Twelve survey questions were developed from this component to measure the teachers’ perceptions of the availability and need of a support program.

#### **Reliability of Instrument**

Internal consistency reliability estimates (Cronbach’s Alpha) for the eight Availability and eight Need subscales are shown in Table 4. Alphas for the Availability subscales range from a low of 0.73 for Strengthening School Capacity to a high of 0.88 for Positive Learning Opportunities and Assessment Procedures. Alphas for the Need subscales range from a low of 0.65 for Skills Development and Support, to a high of 0.90 for Comprehensive and Collaborative System. Except for the Need Skills Development and Support subscale, all meet the guideline ( $\alpha \geq 0.7$ ) for an acceptable reliability. Reliability estimates for Skills Development and Support ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ) fall below the criteria ( $\alpha \geq 0.7$ ); however, according to Hanneman (2006), a high average correlation among items suggests that they are all measuring “the same thing.” Therefore, in situations where each item may have an error component, the common components may be expected to “add up” when the items are combined, and errors across items would be expected to “cancel out.”

Table 4

*Scale Reliability Estimates (Cronbach's Alpha)*

Scale	#Item	Availability	Need
General Availability	6	0.85	0.82
Positive Learning Opportunities	7	0.88	0.86
Strengthening School Capacity	4	0.73	0.89
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	3	0.85	0.80
Collaboration With Family	3	0.81	0.79
Assessment Procedures	3	0.88	0.83
Skills Development and Support	2	0.83	0.65
Comprehensive and Collaborative Systems	4	0.81	0.90

**Data Collection Procedures**

During the data collection process for this study the Dillman's Total Design Method (1978) was used to increase the quality and quantity of responses. Dillman (1998) states that an effective method of increasing response rates in the collection of mail or telephone survey includes: use of cover letter, detailed instructions, the use of tracking numbers for each questionnaire, reminder letter sent after 2 weeks, and the use of a reminder postcard after 3 weeks.

In proceeding with the data collection process, permission for conducting the research was first requested from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Andrews University (Appendix B) and the Educational Department of the Atlantic Union (AU) Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Appendix C). Having received the approval from these institutions, the following procedures were followed. First, a list was secured of all the Elementary Schools in the AU Conference along with the name of the Conference where they were located and their mailing address. This list of participating schools was

selected using the following criteria: (a) that the elementary school was located in the United States and (b) that the elementary school operated K-8 classes. Second, the names of all the elementary school principals of the selected schools were secured as well as the names of all the superintendents for each school in the AU Conference along with the Conference address.

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, a letter was sent via email to the AU Conference Educational director (Appendix C) informing her of the date by which the surveys would be distributed, requesting that she inform the superintendents of the participating schools of the date of the survey distribution. Additionally I sent a letter to the principals of the selected schools, informing them of the date the survey would be distributed. A copy of the letter of permission granted by the AU Conference Education Department was included in the letter to the principals.

On November 28, 2011, a package including survey instruments, cover letter (containing detailed instructions for the completion and return of the survey instruments), and a postage-paid return envelope was either mailed (43 schools) or hand delivered (12 schools in close proximity to my address) to each of the 55 principals of the participating schools.

As outlined in the cover letter instructions, the teachers were given 3 to 5 business days to complete the survey questionnaires and to return them in envelopes provided (entitled Completed Survey) to the principals. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, teachers were informed via cover letter, attached to the survey, not to write their names on the survey questionnaire and to return responses in the sealed envelope provided to the principal. The principal collected the completed surveys, which were given in a sealed

envelope entitled Completed Survey, and placed them in a larger postage-paid self-addressed envelope (addressed with my mailing address), and then mailed them.

Adhering to Dillman's Total Design Method (1978), 2 weeks following the survey distribution I sent a postcard to all the principals of the participating schools as a reminder to those who didn't respond and as way of saying thank you to those who completed the survey questionnaires.

### **Data Analysis**

This study employed descriptive, inferential, and correlation statistics for analysis. In analyzing the data, schools were grouped according to conference and each conference was assigned an alphanumeric name. A table was created outlining the number of surveys sent, the number received, and the percentage of surveys returned according to the conference in which the schools are located (see Table 4). The quantitative survey data were then put into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 for statistical analysis. Entering survey data into SPSS allowed me to measure (a) levels of central tendency (mode, median, and mean) and verify if the set of data represents a normal or skewed distribution; and (b) to measure variability (range and standard deviation) to verify how similar or different the responses of teachers were in respect to their perceptions of the need and availability of a support program.

The demographic section of the survey, which included the first 13 questions of the study (Appendix D, Disability Services in Parochial Schools Survey), answered the third and fourth research questions. For the statistical analysis of this demographic section of the survey, a descriptive analysis was employed, where I converted the demographic responses from the circled responses to a letter value so that frequency of

responses could be determined; the data were placed in the SPSS spreadsheet and a conversion of data was made.

The second section of the survey reflected teachers' perceptions of availability and need, which consisted of 32 Likert statements answering research questions 1, 2, and 5. The response of each statement was given a scaled numeric value of No=1, Not Sure=2, and Yes=3 so that both frequency and means could be identified. By using SPSS version 20.0, the survey responses were then analyzed using descriptive statistics, which included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

The final section of the survey included the three open-ended/short-answer questions which answered research question 6. This section required respondents to list three responses to all questions that reflected the teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a support program. The responses were analyzed through the method of content analysis using Microsoft Excel. In instances where respondents gave more than three responses, all responses were recorded, and where there were no responses, then no value was recorded.

According to Acuna and Rodriquez (2011), "missing data are a common problem in statistical analysis. Rates of less than 1% missing data are generally considered trivial, 1-5% manageable, 5-15% require sophisticated methods to handle, and more than 15% may severely impact any kind of interpretation" (p. 1). Olsen (2009) states that data can become missing due to preventable errors, lack of foresight by the researcher, problems outside the control of the researcher, and deliberate plan of the researcher to reduce cost or respondent burden (p. 1). Researchers are quite familiar with missing data during data collection processes, consequently they have to decide in advance how to address this

problem as it can affect the outcome of a research. Howell (2009) and Olsen (2009) further state that data can become missing through three different ways: missing completely at random (MCAR), missing at random (MAR), and missing not at random (MNAR).

According to Acuna and Rodriquez (2011), there are four different ways by which a researcher can treat missing data. They are case deletion (CD), mean imputation (MI), median imputation (MDI), and k-nearest neighbor imputation (KNNI). In experiencing missing data, I first examined the extent of the missing data and its relevance to the analysis. In cases where the missing data are completely at random, then a case deletion (CD) method was applied (p. 2). This process entails the discarding of all cases with missing values for at least one feature, a method less hazardous with no structure or pattern to the missing data (p. 2). For data missing not at random, I used the mean imputation (MI) method. Acuna and Rodriquez (2011) state that this method is most frequently used by researchers and consists of “replacing the missing data for a given feature by the mean of all known values of that attribute in the class where the instance with the missing attribute belongs” (p. 3).

For this study, different statistical techniques were used to analyze the research questions. For the statistical analysis of research questions 1 and 2, a descriptive analysis (mean, standard deviation, and percentages) was employed. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine correlations of independent and dependent variables, to analyze the relationships between teachers’ perceptions of availability and demographic characteristics (years taught, courses taken, staff development, and knowledge). A one-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) test was selected to analyze

differences with more than two independent variables. This technique was used to test for differences in teachers' perceptions of availability and gender, ethnicity, level of education, school position, employment status, conference, and degree. Similar statistical techniques were used for research question 4. For example, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test for differences in teachers' perceptions of need and years taught, courses taken, staff development, and knowledge. A one-way Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) test was selected to analyze differences in teachers' perceptions of need and gender, ethnicity, level of education, school position, employment status, conference, and degree.

A paired sample *t* test was used to compare means on the same or related subjects; it tests to see if the average difference is significantly different. This technique was used to analyze research question 5. In particular, it was used to analyze the differences between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need. Analysis of research question 6 was done through the method of content analysis and Microsoft Excel was used in the process.

### **Summary**

A quantitative research method was used for this study in investigating how teachers perceive the availability and need for a support program for students with learning difficulties in elementary schools operated by the AU Conference. Details were given regarding population and sample size, instrumentation, data collection procedures, research questions, and the statistical analysis that was applied.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend elementary schools operated by the Atlantic Union (AU) Conference. It also identified elements of a support program that teachers perceive as needed or desirable for the academic growth and development of students experiencing learning difficulties. The first three chapters presented the rationale for the study, a review of the literature, and the methodology used to gather and analyze data for the study. This chapter has four sections. First, a description of the response rate is explained. Second, the demographic characteristics of the respondents are delineated. Third, findings from the research questions are discussed. Fourth, the major findings of the data are summarized.

#### **Response Rate**

The respondents in this study were elementary school teachers of the AU Conference. All teachers from the 55 elementary schools located in the United States were invited to participate. On December 5, 2011, 265 surveys were distributed to the participating elementary schools and 149 surveys were completed and returned to the researcher. The return rate of the surveys represented 100% of the participating conferences, 58% of the schools, and 56% of all AU Conference elementary teachers. Table 5 reports the

frequency and percentages of the survey return rate according to the schools within the conferences.

Table 5

*Survey Return Rate*

Schools/Conferences	Sent	Returned	Percentage
A	123	89	72.0
B	52	21	39.0
C	13	5	38.0
D	33	15	45.0
E	44	19	43.0
Total	265	149	56.0

### **Demographic and Descriptive Statistics of Respondents**

The first section of the survey questionnaire consisted of 13 items, which allowed respondents to give some basic demographic and descriptive statistics. Tables 6 and 7 give both the frequency as well as the percentage of responses for each category. The responses are categorized into (a) demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, level of education), (b) employment-related variables (Conference of employment, employment position, employment status, and class size), and (c) experience with special education/inclusion (degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion class completed, understanding/knowledge of special education, and hours of staff development in special education/inclusion).

Table 6

*Summary of Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Variables	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	116	77.9
Male	33	22.1
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
Asian	2	1.3
African-American	74	49.7
Caribbean-American	33	22.1
Latino/Hispanic	9	6.0
White/Caucasian	30	20.1
Other	1	0.7
<i>Years of Teaching Experience</i>		
0-5 Years	61	40.9
6-12 Years	46	30.9
13-19 Years	22	14.8
20+ Years	20	13.4
<i>Level of Education</i>		
High school	2	1.3
Associates	4	2.7
Undergraduate	56	37.6
Master's	84	56.4
Doctorate	3	2.0
Total	149	100.0

## Demographic Variables

As reported in Table 6, the majority (77.9 %) of respondents were females as compared with males (22.1 %). Almost half (49.1%) were African Americans with Caribbean Americans (22.1%) and Caucasians (20.1%) representing nearly a quarter of the respondents. The years of teaching experience ranged from 0-38 years, with the majority (40.9%) of respondents working between 0-5 years. More than half of the respondents held a Master's degree (56.4%) while 37.6% held a Bachelor's degree.

Table 7

*Summary of Employment-Related Variables*

Variables	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Conference of Employment</i>		
Greater New York	21	14.1
New York	5	3.4
Northern New England	15	10.1
Northeastern	89	59.7
Southern New England	19	12.8
<i>Position</i>		
Teacher	128	85.9
Teacher's Aide	3	2.0
Principal	16	10.7
Asst. Principal	1	0.7
<i>Employment Status</i>		
Full-time	141	94.6
Part-time	8	5.4
<i>Class Size</i>		
0-10	41	27.5
11-20	75	50.3
21 and above	33	22.1
Total	149	100.0

## Employment-Related Variables

As reported in Table 7 the majority of respondents (59.7%) worked at schools in the Northeastern Conference; most (85.9%) were teachers and 10.7% were principals. The majority (94.6%) was full-time employees, and the majority of respondents (56.4%) had a class size of between 11-20 students. The years of teaching experience ranged from 0-38 years with the majority (40.9%) of respondents working between 0-5 years. More than half of the respondents held a Master's degree (56.4%), while 37.6% held a Bachelor's degree.

## Experience With Special Education/Inclusion

As shown in Table 8, the majority (68.5%) of respondents reported their certification/degree was in general education; 51.0% were in elementary education and 17.4% were in secondary education. The category 'Other' (17.4%) represents those with a degree in some area other than education; 9.4% had a degree in early childhood education, while 4.7% had a degree in special education. In responding to the number of special education courses taken, the majority of respondents (24.8%) reported two courses, while others (20.8%) reported to have taken one course in special education. When asked to rate their knowledge of special education, the majority (43.6%) reported that they had some degree of knowledge. When asked about the amount of hours spent attending staff development workshops relating to special education/inclusion, the majority (48.3%) reported zero hour of attendance.

## Results by Research Questions

Six research questions guided the study and they are as follows:

*Research Question 1.* What are teachers' perceptions regarding the availability of a support program for students with learning difficulties with regard to (a) positive learning opportunities, (b) strengthening of school capacity, (c) valuing and addressing diversity, (d) collaborating with family, (e) using assessment procedures, (f) promoting skills development and support, and (g) providing comprehensive and collaborative systems?

*Research Question 2.* What are teachers' perceptions regarding the need of a support program for students with learning difficulties with regard to (a) positive learning opportunities, (b) strengthening of school capacity, (c) valuing and addressing diversity,

Table 8

*Summary of Experience With Special Education/Inclusion*

Variables	N	%
<i>Degree/Licensure</i>		
General Education: Elementary	76	51.0
General Education: Secondary	26	17.4
Special Education/Inclusion	7	4.7
Early Childhood Education	14	9.4
Other	26	17.4
<i>Number of Special Education/Inclusion Classes Completed</i>		
None	24	16.1
1	31	20.8
2	37	24.8
3	26	17.4
4	12	8.1
5 or more	19	12.8
<i>Understanding/Knowledge of Special Education Rating</i>		
None to very little	19	12.8
Some	67	44.9
Quite a bit to a great deal	63	42.3
<i>Hours of Staff Development in Special Education/Inclusion (Annual)</i>		
0	72	48.3
1-2	19	12.8
3-4	14	9.4
5-6	14	9.4
7-8	7	4.7
9-10	8	5.4
11 or more	15	10.1
Total	149	100.0

(d) collaborating with family, (e) using assessment procedures, (f) promoting skills development and support, and (g) providing comprehensive and collaborative systems?

*Research Question 3.* To what extent is the perceived *availability* of a support program for students with learning difficulties related to (a) demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, years of experience, educational level) (b) employment-related variables (conference, employment position, status, class size), and (c) experience with

special education (degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion classes, knowledge of special education/inclusion rating, hours of staff development attended)?

*Research Question 4.* Is the perceived *need* of a support program for students with learning difficulties related to (a) demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, years of experience, educational level) (b) employment-related variables (conference, employment position, status, class size), and (c) experience with special education (degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion classes, knowledge of special education/inclusion rating, hours of staff development attended)?

*Research Question 5.* Is there a relationship between teachers' perceptions of *availability* and teachers' perceptions of *need* with regard to a support program for students with learning difficulties?

*Research Question 6.* What are teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a support program for students with learning difficulties?

#### Research Question 1

The first research question addressed teachers' perceptions of the availability of a support program in AU elementary schools for students with learning difficulties. Statements 14 to 45 are related to teachers' perceptions of the availability of a support program for students with learning difficulties in regard to the elements of a support program. A 3-point Likert scale was used with a range of No = 1, Not Sure = 2, and Yes = 3. The statements were in two different formats: Present–there is (measuring availability) and Future–there should be (measuring need). Table 9 gives a summary of the frequency and mean of the responses for the survey items regarding teachers' perceptions of the availability of a support program.

Table 9

*Teachers' Perceptions of Availability*

Items	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	% Yes
<i>Availability General (availability)</i>				
Q14P Spec Ed Support	64	3.00	.00	100.0
Q15P Spec ED Identified	64	2.61	.61	67.2
Q16P Spec Ed Evaluated	64	2.34	.80	57.8
Q 20P Programs that Help Students Learn	64	2.23	.85	50.0
Q21P Needs Coordinator	64	2.05	.86	39.1
Q19P Program to help	64	1.95	.93	40.6
Q17P Develops an IEP	64	1.75	.85	26.6
Q18P Support Staff	64	1.66	.80	20.3
<i>Positive Learning Opportunity (availability)</i>				
Q22P Culturally Responsive Activities	64	2.50	.76	65.6
Q26P Curriculum Meeting Needs	64	2.48	.76	64.1
Q23P Enhanced Learning Style	64	2.48	.71	60.9
Q24P Spec Ed activities	64	2.48	.71	60.9
Q25P Building Social Skills	64	2.47	.82	67.2
<i>Strengthening School Capacity (availability)</i>				
Q27P Early Intervention	64	2.19	.83	45.3
Q29P Teacher Collaboration	64	2.09	.83	39.1
Q28P Support Staff	64	1.73	.88	28.1
Q30P Team Teaching	64	1.50	.76	15.6
<i>Valuing and Addressing Diversity (availability)</i>				
Q33P Family Involvement	64	2.53	.78	70.3
Q31P Group Collaboration	64	2.31	.87	57.8
Q32P Racial Problems	64	2.14	.85	43.8
<i>Collaboration With Family (availability)</i>				
Q36P Family-School Interactions	64	2.44	.81	64.1
Q34P Parental Involvement	64	2.36	.86	60.9
Q35P Family-Focus Questions	64	2.03	.87	39.1
<i>Assessment Procedures (availability)</i>				
Q37P Accurate Assessment	64	2.72	.60	79.7
Q38P Analyze Need Assessment	64	2.63	.70	75.0
Q39P Determine Strategies	64	2.48	.80	67.2
<i>Skills Development &amp; Support (availability)</i>				
Q40P Increase Teaching Capacity	64	2.36	.86	60.9
Q41P Provides Opportunity	64	2.30	.87	56.3
<i>A Comprehensive &amp; Collaborative System (availability)</i>				
Q45P Provides Attention	64	2.25	.85	51.6
Q42P Provides Coherent Services	64	2.03	.82	34.4
Q44P Provide Training	64	1.88	.83	28.1
Q43P Crisis Preparedness	64	1.81	.81	25.0

Note. Q = question.

## Teachers' Perceptions of Availability

A subgroup of the responses of the teachers' perceptions of availability as reported in Table 9 indicated that 64 teachers (43.0%) of the total number of respondents (149) perceived that a support program was available for students with learning difficulties. Based on those 64 respondents, an analysis of the rest of the program was done to measure what elements of a support program were perceived as available by those 64 educators. As reported in Tables 9 and 10, the responses in support of teachers' perceptions of availability were:

For Positive Learning Opportunity, the responses to all items (5 items) ranged between 60.9% and 67.2% with a mean score of 2.48 and *SD* of .54. For Strengthening School Capacity, all items (4 items) ranged between 15.6% and 45.3% with a mean score of 1.88 and *SD* of .57. For Valuing and Addressing Diversity, the responses ranged between 43.8% and 70.3% with a mean score of 2.33 and *SD* of .73. For Collaboration With Family, the teachers' responses ranged between 39.1% and 64.1% with a mean score of 2.28 and *SD* of .69. For Assessment Procedures, the responses to all items (3 items) ranged between 67.2% and 79.7% with a mean score of 2.61 and *SD* of .62. For Skills Development and Support, all items (2 items) ranged between 56.3% and 60.9% with a mean score of 2.33 and *SD* of .79. For Comprehensive and Collaborative System, all items (4 items) ranged between 25.0% and 51.6% with a mean score of 2.00 and *SD* of .64. In summary, the mean score for all variables in this category was 2.3. The response of each statement was given a scaled numeric value of No=1, Not Sure=2, and Yes=3. Having an overall mean score of 2.3 for availability variables reflects that, according to the teachers' perceptions, they are generally unsure as to whether a support program is available in the schools.

Table 10

*Summary of Teachers' Perceptions of Availability*

Availability Variables	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General Availability	64	1.25	3.00	2.20	.47
Positive Learning Opportunities	64	1.00	3.00	2.48	.54
Strengthening School Capacity	64	1.00	3.00	1.88	.57
Valuing and Addressing	64	1.00	3.00	2.33	.73
Collaboration With Family	64	1.00	3.00	2.28	.69
Assessment Procedures	64	1.00	3.00	2.61	.62
Skills Development and Support	64	1.00	3.00	2.33	.79
Comprehensive System	64	1.00	3.00	2.00	.64
Valid <i>N</i> (listwise)	64				

## Research Question 2

The second research question addressed the need for a support program for students with learning difficulties. Statements 14-45 assessed teachers' perceptions of the need for a support program with regard to the elements of a support program. The statements were in two different formats: Present–there is (measuring availability) and Future–there should be (measuring need). A 3-point Likert scale was used with a range of No=1, Not Sure =2, and Yes=3. Table 11 gives a summary of the frequencies and means of the responses for the survey items regarding teachers' perceptions of the need of a support program.

## Teachers' Perceptions of Need

A subgroup of 139 teachers was used to measure teachers' perceptions of need for a support program. As shown in Table 11, there were 139 teachers (93.2%) of the total number of respondents (149) who agreed that a support program was needed for students

with learning difficulties. Based on those 139 respondents, an analysis was done to measure what elements of a support program were perceived as needed. As reflected in

Table 11

*Teachers' Perceptions of Need*

Item	N	M	SD	%Yes
<i>Availability General (need)</i>				
Q16F Spec Ed Evaluated	139	2.96	.19	96.4
Q15F Spec ED Identified	139	2.96	.19	96.4
Q14F Spec Ed Support	139	2.95	.25	95.7
Q 20F Programs That Help Students Learn	139	2.94	.26	95.0
Q19F Program to Help	139	2.93	.29	93.5
Q21F Needs Coordinator	139	2.93	.31	94.2
Q18F Support Staff	139	2.91	.34	92.1
Q17F Develops an IEP	139	2.87	.40	89.2
<i>Positive Learning Opportunity (need)</i>				
Q26F Curriculum Meeting Needs	139	2.98	.15	97.8
Q24F Spec Education Activities	139	2.97	.17	97.1
Q25F Building Social Skills	139	2.97	.17	97.1
Q23F Enhanced Learning Style	139	2.96	.24	96.4
Q22F Culturally Responsive Activities	139	2.96	.20	95.7
<i>Strengthening School Capacity (need)</i>				
Q27F Early Intervention	139	2.97	.17	97.1
Q28F Support Staff	139	2.91	.33	92.8
Q29F Teacher Collaboration	139	2.90	.35	91.4
Q30F Team Teaching	139	2.87	.40	89.2
<i>Valuing and Addressing Diversity (need)</i>				
Q33F Family Involvement	139	2.96	.25	97.8
Q32F Racial Problems	139	2.95	.25	95.7
Q31F Group Collaboration	139	2.94	.26	95.0
<i>Collaboration With Family (need)</i>				
Q34F Parental Involvement	39	2.96	.25	97.8
Q36F Family-School Interactions	139	2.94	.30	95.0
Q35F Family-Focus Questions	139	2.88	.44	92.8
<i>Assessment Procedures (need)</i>				
Q37F Accurate Assessment	139	2.97	.24	98.6
Q39F Determine Strategies	139	2.97	.21	97.1
Q38F Analyze Needed Assessment	139	2.96	.27	97.1
<i>Skills Development &amp; Support (need)</i>				
Q41F Provides Opportunity	139	2.98	.19	98.6
Q40F Increase Teaching Capacity	139	2.98	.19	98.6
<i>Comprehensive &amp; Collaborative System (need)</i>				
Q45F Provides attention	139	3.00	.00	100.0
Q43F Crisis Preparedness	139	2.96	.22	97.1
Q42F Provides Coherent Services	139	2.96	.24	96.4
Q44F Provides Training	139	2.93	.31	94.2

Tables 11 and 12 for positive learning opportunity, the responses to all items (5 items) ranged between 95.7% and 97.8% with a mean score of 2.95 and *SD* of .19. For strengthening school capacity, all items (4 items) ranged between 89.2% and 97.1% with a mean score of 2.86 and *SD* of .34. For valuing and addressing diversity, the responses ranged between 95.0% and 97.8% with a mean score of 2.93 and *SD* of .25. For collaboration with family the teachers' responses ranged between 92.8% and 97.8% with a mean score of 2.90 and *SD* of .31.

Table 12

*Summary of Teachers' Perceptions of Need*

Need Variables	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General Availability	149	1.50	3.00	2.89	.29
Positive Learning Opportunities	149	2.00	3.00	2.95	.19
Strengthening School Capacity	149	1.25	3.00	2.86	.34
Valuing and Addressing	149	1.00	3.00	2.93	.25
Collaboration With Family	149	1.00	3.00	2.90	.31
Assessment Procedures	149	1.00	3.00	2.95	.24
Skills Development and Support	149	1.00	3.00	2.95	.23
Comprehensive System	149	1.50	3.00	2.90	.29
Valid <i>n</i> (listwise)	149				

For assessment procedures, the responses to all items (3 items) ranged between 97.1% and 98.6% with a mean score of 2.95 and *SD* of .24. For skills development and support, all items (2 items) scored 98.6% with a mean score of 2.95 and *SD* of .23. For comprehensive and collaborative systems, all items (4 items) ranged between 94.2% and 100.0% with a mean score of 2.90 and *SD* of .29. In summary the mean score for all variables in this category was 2.9. The response of each statement was given a scaled numeric value of No=1, Not Sure=2, and Yes=3. Having a mean score of 2.9 for all needs

variables suggests that the teachers perceive that a need for a support program does exist in the schools.

### Research Question 3

The third research question sought to measure the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the availability of a support program their demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, and educational level), their employment-related variables (conference where teachers work, employment position, and employment status), and their experience with special education (degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion classes taken, knowledge of special education/inclusion, and hours of special education staff development attendance). Tables 13-18 provide a summary of the responses of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the availability of a support program and that of their demographic variables, their employment-related variables, and their experience with special education.

#### **Availability and Demographic Variables**

The demographic variables included gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience in AU Conference, and educational level. For this category a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and demographics. The results are reflected in the following tables.

**Availability and gender.** A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and the teachers' gender. Table 13 shows means and standard deviation for each availability

Table 13

*Availability and Gender*

Variables	Gender			
	Male (n=33)		Female (n=116)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	11.33	3.47	10.97	3.72
Strengthening School Capacity	7.15	2.65	6.13	2.11
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	6.48	2.19	6.37	2.39
Collaboration With Family	6.45	2.28	6.24	2.21
Assessment Procedures	7.15	2.22	7.14	2.31
Skills Development and Support	4.79	1.58	4.08	1.68
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	7.24	2.77	7.02	2.56

Table 14

*Availability and Ethnicity (MANOVA)*

Variables	Ethnicity					
	African American (n=74)		Caribbean American (n=33)		White/ Caucasian (n=42)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	10.40	3.84	12.30	2.74	11.21	3.77
Strengthening School Capacity	6.39	2.39	6.58	2.38	6.12	1.98
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	5.95	2.30	7.15	2.17	6.57	2.42
Collaboration With Family	6.03	2.32	6.54	2.26	6.55	1.96
Assessment Procedures	6.80	2.44	7.48	2.11	7.48	2.09
Skills Development and Support	4.15	1.78	4.15	1.68	4.45	1.52
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	6.74	2.76	7.10	2.42	7.14	2.41

variable by gender. Means for males appear to be slightly higher than for females.

However, the result of the one-way multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there were no gender differences related to the availability variables when considered as a set (Hotelling's Trace=0.091,  $F_{(7,141)}=1.84$ ,  $p=0.084$ ). The assumption for the equality of population variance-covariance appears to have been met at the 0.01 level (Box's

$M=49.14$ ,  $F_{(28,12423.91)}=1.61$ ,  $=0.022$ ).

Table 15

*Availability and Years Taught (Pearson)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>p</i>
Teaching Experience (years)	2.01	1.05		
Positive Learning Opportunity	11.05	3.66	-.05	.52
Strengthening School Capacity	6.36	2.27	-.04	.60
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	6.40	2.34	-.04	.63
Collaboration With Family	6.29	2.22	.06	.49
Assessment Procedures	7.14	2.28	.07	.41
Skills Development and Support	4.23	1.68	.15	.06
Competent and Collaborative System	7.07	2.60	-.01	.95
Availability General	13.84	4.62	.02	.80

Note.  $p < 0.01$ ;  $n=149$ .

Table 16

*Availability and Level of Education*

Variables	Education Level			
	Undergraduate ( $n=61$ )		Graduate ( $n=88$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	10.72	3.88	11.28	3.51
Strengthening School Capacity	6.16	2.26	6.49	2.28
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	6.05	2.35	6.64	2.31
Collaboration With Family	6.08	2.20	6.43	2.23
Assessment Procedures	6.87	2.36	7.33	2.22
Skills Development and Support	4.05	1.68	4.36	1.68
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	7.12	2.88	6.98	2.41

**Availability and ethnicity.** A MANOVA was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' ethnicity. Table 14 shows means and standard deviation for each availability variable by ethnicity. Means for Caribbean Americans appear to be slightly higher than for Caucasians and African Americans. However, the results of the one-way multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there are no ethnic differences on the availability variables when they are

considered as a set (Wilks's Lambda = 0.889,  $F_{(14, 280)}=1.21, p=0.27$ ). The assumption for the equality of population variance-covariance appears to have been met at the 0.01 level (Box's  $M=55.78, F_{(56,32132.12)}=0.92, p=0.649$ ).

**Availability and years taught.** A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and the teachers' years of teaching experience. As reported in Table 15, the correlation between years of teaching experience and the availability variables range from -0.05 to 0.15. None of these coefficients are statistically significant. Thus, it appears teachers' perceptions of the availability variables are uncorrelated with years of teaching experience.

**Availability and level of education.** A MANOVA was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and the teachers' level of education. Table 16 shows means and standard deviation for each availability variable by level of education. Means for teachers with graduate degrees appear to be slightly higher than for teachers with undergraduate degrees. However, the results of the one-way multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there were no level of education differences on the availability variables when they are considered as a set (Hotelling's Trace=0.053,  $F_{(7, 141)}=1.08, p=0.381$ ). The assumption for the equality of population variance-covariance appears to have been met at the 0.01 level (Box's  $M=23.78, F_{(28,58169.69)}=0.80, p=0.757$ ).

### **Availability and Employment-Related Variables**

The employment-related variables included current school position, employment status, and conference where the teachers work. For this category MANOVAs were used

to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and employment related variables. The results are reflected in Tables 17-19.

**Availability and current school position.** A MANOVA was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' current position. Table 17 shows means and standard deviation for each availability variable by current school position. Means for teachers appear to be slightly higher than for principals.

Table 17

*Availability and Current School Position (MANOVA)*

Variables	Current School Position			
	Teacher (n=133)		Principal (n=16)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Positive Learning Opportunities	11.11	3.60	10.56	4.23
Strengthening School Capacity	6.26	2.18	7.12	2.85
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	6.37	2.31	6.56	2.68
Collaboration With Family	6.27	2.27	6.43	1.79
Assessment Procedures	7.09	2.29	7.56	2.25
Skills Development and Support	4.19	1.69	4.56	1.59
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	7.07	2.63	7.06	2.49

**Availability and employment status.** A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and employment status. Table 18 shows means and standard deviation for each support program variable by employment status. Means for teachers who are employed part-time appear to be slightly higher than for teachers who are employed full-time. However, the result of the one-way multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there are no employment status differences on the availability variables when they are

considered as a set (Hotelling's Trace=0.053,  $F_{(7, 141)}=1.06$ ,  $p=0.39$ ). As reported in Table 18, there were no significant differences between teachers' perceptions of availability and their employment status.

Table 18

*Availability and Employment Status (MANOVA)*

Variables	Employment Status			
	Full-time ( $n=141$ )		Part-time ( $n=8$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	10.98	3.67	12.37	3.50
Strengthening School Capacity	6.28	2.20	7.62	3.16
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	6.34	2.34	7.37	2.26
Collaboration With Family	6.20	2.21	7.87	1.81
Assessment Procedures	7.09	2.30	8.00	1.77
Skills Development and Support	4.16	1.69	5.50	0.92
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	6.95	2.58	9.00	2.39

**Availability and conferences.** A MANOVA was used to determine if the conference in which teachers work makes a difference in their perceptions of the availability of a support program for students with learning difficulties. For this process the five conferences were put into groups of three based on geographical location and response size. Means and standard deviations for each support variable by conferences are shown in Table 19. As a set (linear combination) of support variables, there are statistically significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) among the three conferences (Pillai's Trace=0.924,  $F_{(7, 140)}=243.88$ ,  $p=0.047$ ). Means for New York appear to be higher than for New England or the Northeastern Conferences. Assumption for equality of population variance-covariance appears to have been violated at the 0.01 level (Box's  $M=102.32$ ,

$F_{(56,17873.5)}=1.65, p=0.002$ ). Thus, Pillai's Trace was used to test the multivariate group differences.

Table 19

*Availability and Conferences (MANOVA)*

Variables	Conference					
	New York (n=26)		New England (n=34)		Northeastern (n=89)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Positive Learning Opportunities	12.08	3.42	10.58	4.02	10.93	3.57
Strengthening School Capacity	6.92	2.48	5.82	2.21	6.39	2.20
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	7.34	2.33	5.94	2.41	6.29	2.27
Collaboration With Family	6.77	2.04	6.15	2.35	6.20	2.22
Assessment Procedures	8.23	1.66	6.58	2.33	7.03	2.34
Skills Development and Support	4.88	1.58	3.82	1.53	4.20	1.73
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	8.65	2.68	6.15	2.28	6.96	2.51

*Note.* New York=New York and Greater New York; New England=Southern and Northern New England.

The results of the follow-up analysis using one-way analysis of variance are shown in Table 20. Assumptions for the equality of population variances (Levene's Test) were upheld at the 0.05 level. To control for the inflation of Type I error since there are multiple dependent variables, the Bonferroni procedure was used (see Warner, 2013).

Thus, for this particular analysis, the level of significance was set at  $0.05/7=0.007$ . As Table 20 shows, significant group differences appear for the comprehensive and collaborative system ( $p=0.001$ ). Pairwise comparison indicates that the presence of a comprehensive and collaborative system is significantly higher in the New York (New York and Greater New York) Conferences ( $M=8.65, SD=2.68$ ) than in the Northeastern Conference ( $M=6.96, SD=2.51$ ) or New England (Southern and Northern New England) conferences ( $M=6.15, SD=2.28$ ). The effect size ( $\eta^2$ ) is large at 0.095. That is,

approximately 10% of the variance in the comprehensive and collaborative systems may be explained by differences in the availability of support programs among the three conferences.

Table 20

*Results of One-way Analysis of Variance–Availability of Conference*

Source	Variable	SS	df	MS	F	P	$\eta^2$
<i>Between</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	35.89	2	17.95	1.35	0.264	0.018
	Strengthening School Capacity	18.12	2	9.06	1.78	0.173	0.024
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	31.47	2	15.73	2.94	0.056	0.039
	Collaboration With Family	7.35	2	3.67	0.75	0.476	0.010
	Assessment Procedures	42.29	2	21.15	4.23	0.016	0.055
	Skills Development and Support	16.82	2	8.41	3.06	0.050	0.040
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	95.36	2	47.68	7.67	0.001	0.095
<i>Error</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	1947.67	146	13.34			
	Strengthening School Capacity	744.02	146	5.10			
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	780.17	146	5.34			
	Collaboration With Family	719.24	146	4.93			
	Assessment Procedures	729.75	146	5.00			
	Skills Development and Support	401.96	146	2.75			
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	907.97	146	6.22			
<i>Total</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	1983.57	148				
	Strengthening School Capacity	762.15	148				
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	811.15	148				
	Collaboration With Family	726.59	148				
	Assessment Procedures	772.04	148				
	Skills Development and Support	418.78	148				
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	1003.33	148				

**Availability and Experience With Special Education**

The teachers' experience with special education variables included degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion courses taken, knowledge of special education/inclusion rating, and hours of staff development attendance. For this category the Pearson correlation coefficient and the MANOVA were used to assess the

relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and their experience with special education. The results are reflected in Tables 21 and 22.

**Availability and degree.** A MANOVA was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and the type of degree the teachers have. A

Table 21

*Availability and Degree (MANOVA)*

Variables	Gen Ed (n=102)		SPED (n=7)		Other (n=40)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Positive Learning Opportunities	10.84	3.71	12.85	2.54	11.27	3.66
Strengthening School Capacity	6.20	2.27	7.86	2.34	6.50	2.21
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	6.26	2.29	7.57	2.15	6.52	2.48
Collaboration With Family	6.24	2.17	6.71	2.14	6.32	2.38
Assessment Procedures	7.00	2.35	8.28	0.95	7.27	2.25
Skills Development and Support	4.22	1.68	4.86	1.95	4.15	1.66
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	6.86	2.59	8.57	2.15	7.32	2.64

Note. GenEd=General Education; SPED=Special Education.

Table 22

*Availability and Courses Taken, Staff Development, and Knowledge*

Variables	N	M	SD	Correlation		
				Course	Staff Dev.	Know.
Positive Learning Opportunities	149	11.05	3.66	-.079	.166*	.027
Strengthening School Capacity	149	6.36	2.67	-.092	.131	.026
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	149	6.40	2.34	-.146	.133	.010
Collaboration With Family	149	6.29	2.22	-.097	.139	-.018
Assessment Procedures	149	7.14	2.28	-.106	.041	-.040
Skills Development and Support	149	4.23	1.68	-.022	.099	.088
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	149	7.07	2.60	-.118	.101	.053
Course Taken	149	2.19	1.59	1.000	.153	.514**
Staff Development	149	3.32	4.72	.153	1.000	.048
Knowledge	149	5.81	1.72	.514**	.048	1.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and the teachers' degree/licensure. Table 21 shows means and standard deviation for each availability variable by degree/licensure. Means for special education appear to be slightly higher than for general education and other. However, the result of the one-way multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there are no degree differences on the availability variables when they are considered as a set (Wilks's Lambda = 0.946,  $F_{(14, 280)}=0.56$ ,  $p=0.894$ ). The assumption for the equality of population variance-covariance appears to have been met at the 0.01 level (Box's  $M=18.68$ ,  $F_{(28, 20461.55)}=0.62$ ,  $p=0.941$ ). As reported in Table 21, there were no significant differences between teachers' perceptions of availability and the type of degree the teachers have.

**Availability and courses taken.** A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and special education courses taken. As reported in Table 22, correlation coefficients between measures of availability and special education courses taken were -0.022 to -0.146, which were all negative and non-significant.

**Availability and staff development attended.** A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and the amount of hours of staff development attended. As reported in Table 22, the correlation coefficients between measures of availability and staff development attended were 0.041 to 0.166. The correlation between positive learning opportunities and staff development ( $r=0.166$ ) was statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ).

**Availability and knowledge of special education.** A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and the teachers' knowledge of special education. As reported in Table 18, correlation coefficients between measures of availability and knowledge of special education were -0.018 to -0.053, which were all negative and non-significant.

#### Research Question 4

The fourth research question sought to measure the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the need for a support program and their demographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, and educational level), their employment-related variables (conference where teachers work, employment position, and employment status), and their experience with special education (degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion classes taken, knowledge of special education/inclusion, and hours of special education staff development attendance). The following tables give a summary of the responses of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the need of a support program and that of their demographic variables, their employment-related variables, and their experience with special education.

#### **Need and Demographic Variables**

The demographic variables included gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience in AU Conference, and educational level. For this category MANOVA and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and demographics. The results are reflected in the following tables.

Table 23

*Need and Gender*

Variables	Male (n=33)		Female (n=114)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	14.85	0.71	14.71	0.99
Strengthening School Capacity	11.61	1.03	11.40	1.47
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.94	0.24	8.74	0.84
Collaboration With Family	8.76	0.94	8.68	0.92
Assessment Procedures	8.91	0.38	8.82	0.79
Skills Development and Support	5.94	0.24	5.88	0.52
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	11.67	1.02	11.59	1.19

Table 24

*Need and Ethnicity (MANOVA)*

Variables	African American (n=72)		Caribbean American (n=33)		White/ Caucasian (n=42)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	14.93	0.58	14.90	0.38	14.28	1.45
Strengthening School Capacity	11.75	0.85	11.75	0.97	10.69	2.00
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.93	0.31	8.97	0.17	8.40	1.27
Collaboration With Family	8.87	0.67	8.97	0.17	8.19	1.36
Assessment Procedures	8.96	0.20	9.00	0.00	8.52	1.27
Skills Development and Support	5.96	0.26	5.94	0.35	5.74	0.73
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	11.90	0.53	11.85	0.62	10.90	1.79

Table 25

*Results of One-way Analysis of Variance: Need & Ethnicity*

Source	Variable	SS	Df	MS	F	P	$\eta^2$
<i>Between</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	12.23	2	6.11	7.59	.001	.095
	Strengthening School Capacity	33.83	2	16.92	9.88	.000	.121
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.73	2	4.36	8.52	.000	.106
	Collaboration With Family	15.51	2	7.76	10.21	.000	.124
	Assessment Procedures	6.05	2	3.03	6.28	.002	.080
	Skills Development and Support	1.39	2	0.69	3.23	.042	.043
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	28.94	2	14.47	12.69	.000	.150
<i>Error</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	115.95	144	.805			
	Strengthening School Capacity	246.53	144	1.712			
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	73.74	144	.512			
	Collaboration With Family	109.32	144	.759			
	Assessment Procedures	69.35	144	.482			
	Skills Development and Support	30.87	144	.214			
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	164.18	144	1.140			
<i>Total</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	128.17	146				
	Strengthening School Capacity	280.37	146				
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	82.46	146				
	Collaboration With Family	124.83	146				
	Assessment Procedures	75.40	146				
	Skills Development and Support	32.26	146				
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	193.12	146				

Table 26

*Summary of Teachers' Perceptions of Need and Years Taught (Pearson)*

Dependent Variables-(Need)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Teaching Experience (years)	2.01	1.05	-	-
Positive Learning Opportunity	14.75	.93	.88	-.01
Strengthening School Capacity	11.45	1.38	.77	.02
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.79	.75	.74	.03
Collaboration With Family	8.70	.92	.95	-.01
Assessment Procedures	8.84	.72	.56	.05
Skills Development and Support	5.89	.47	.31	.08
Comprehensive and Collaborative Systems	11.61	1.14	.65	-.04
Availability General	23.11	2.28	.89	.01

Note.  $n = 149$ .

\*  $p < 0.05$ . \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Table 27

*Need and Level of Education*

Variables	Undergraduate ( $n=60$ )		Graduate ( $n=87$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	14.75	0.95	14.73	0.93
Strengthening School Capacity	11.60	1.14	11.34	1.53
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.83	0.56	8.75	0.86
Collaboration With Family	8.73	0.95	8.68	0.91
Assessment Procedures	8.87	0.65	8.83	0.76
Skills Development and Support	5.95	0.29	5.85	0.56
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	11.67	1.00	11.56	1.24

**Need and gender.** A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and the teachers' gender.

Table 23 shows means and standard deviation for each need variable by gender. Means for male appear to be slightly higher than for female. However, the result of the one-way multivariate analysis indicated that there were no gender differences on the need variables when they were considered as a set (Pilla's Trace=0.017,  $F_{(7, 139)}=0.017$ ,

$p=0.932$ ). Assumption for equality of population variance-covariance appears to have met at the 0.01 level (Box's  $M=262.46$ ,  $F_{(28,12482.60)}=8.59$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

**Need and ethnicity.** A MANOVA was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and teachers' ethnicity. Table 24 shows means and standard deviation for each need variable by ethnicity. Means for African Americans and Caribbean Americans appear to be slightly higher than for Whites/Caucasians. As a set (linear combination) of support variables, there are statistically significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) among the ethnic groups (Pillai's Trace=0.271,  $F_{(16, 276)}=2.70$ ,  $p=0.001$ ). Assumption for equality of population variance-covariance appears to have been violated at the 0.01 level (Box's  $M=882.10$ ,  $F_{(36,25357.6)}=22.44$ ,  $p=0.00$ ).

The results of the follow-up analysis using one-way analysis of variance are shown in Table 25. Assumptions for the equality of population variances (Levene's Test) were upheld at the 0.05 level. To control for the inflation of Type I error, because there are multiple dependent variables, the Bonferroni procedure was used (see Warner, 2013). Thus, for this particular analysis, the level of significance was set at  $0.005/7=0.007$ . As shown in Table 25, it appears that there are significant group differences for all needs variables ( $p=0.000$ ) except for skills development and support ( $p=0.042$ ). To further analyze the nature of the group differences for positive learning opportunity, a Tukey HSD post hoc test was done which revealed statistically significant differences among African Americans ( $M=14.93$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ), Caribbean Americans ( $M=14.90$ ,  $SD=0.38$ ) and Whites/Caucasians ( $M=14.29$ ,  $SD= 1.45$ ).

Whites/Caucasians differed significantly from African Americans and Caribbean Americans. They had lower needs scores. For "strengthening school capacity,"

Whites/Caucasians ( $M=10.69$ ,  $SD=2.00$ ) had significantly lower scores than did African Americans ( $M=11.75$ ,  $SD=0.85$ ) or Caribbean Americans ( $M=11.76$ ,  $SD=0.97$ ). For “collaboration with family” Whites/Caucasians ( $M=8.19$ ,  $SD= 1.37$ ) had significantly lower scores than did African Americans ( $M=8.88$ ,  $SD=0.67$ ) and Caribbean Americans ( $M=8.97$ ,  $SD=0.17$ ). For “assessment procedures,” Whites/Caucasians ( $M=8.52$ ,  $SD= 1.27$ ) had significantly lower scores than did African Americans ( $M=8.96$ ,  $SD=0.20$ ) and Caribbean Americans ( $M=9.00$ ,  $SD=0.00$ ). For “comprehensive and collaborative systems,” Whites/Caucasians ( $M=10.90$ ,  $SD= 1.79$ ) had significantly lower scores than did African Americans ( $M=11.90$ ,  $SD=0.53$ ) and Caribbean Americans ( $M=11.85$ ,  $SD=0.62$ ).

**Need and years taught.** A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of need and the teachers’ years of teaching experience. As reported in Table 26, the correlation between years of teaching experience and the need variables ranges from -0.01 to 0.08. None of these coefficients are statistically significant. Thus, it appears teachers’ perception of the need variables is uncorrelated with years of teaching experience.

**Need and level of education.** A MANOVA was computed to assess the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of need and the teachers’ level of education. Table 27 shows means and standard deviation for each need variable by level of education. Means for undergraduate students appear to be slightly higher than for graduate students. However, as a set (linear combination) of support variables, there were

no significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the level of education (Pillai's Trace=0.026,  $F_{(7, 139)}=0.530, p=0.81$ ) and teachers' perceptions of need.

### Need and Employment-Related Variables

The employment-related variables included current school position, employment status, and conference where the teachers work. For this category MANOVAs were used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and employment-related variables. The results are reflected in the following tables.

Table 28

#### *Need and Current School Position (MANOVA)*

Variables	Teacher ( $n=131$ )		Principal ( $n=16$ )	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	14.79	0.82	14.31	1.58
Strengthening School Capacity	11.48	1.33	11.19	1.83
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.77	0.79	8.94	0.25
Collaboration With Family	8.69	0.96	8.75	0.58
Assessment Procedures	8.84	0.74	8.87	0.50
Skills Development and Support	5.90	0.46	5.81	0.54
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	11.65	1.10	11.25	1.48

**Need and current school position.** A MANOVA was used to analyze the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and teachers' current position. Table 28 shows means and standard deviation for each support variable by current school position. Means for teachers appear to be slightly higher than for principals. However, the result of the one-way multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there are no current school position differences on the availability variables when they are considered as a set (Hotelling's Trace =0.097,  $F_{(7, 139)}=1.93, p=0.07$ ).

Table 29

*Need and Employment Status (MANOVA)*

Variables	Full-time (n=139)		Part-time (n=8)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	14.74	0.95	14.75	0.71
Strengthening School Capacity	11.50	1.29	10.62	2.50
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.81	0.72	8.37	1.19
Collaboration With Family	8.71	0.93	8.50	0.92
Assessment Procedures	8.86	0.69	8.50	1.07
Skills Development and Support	5.89	0.48	5.87	0.35
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	11.65	1.07	10.75	2.05

Table 30

*Results of One-way Analysis of Variance: Need and Employment Status*

Source	Variable	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta^2$
<i>Between</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	.001	1	.001	0.00	0.979	0.000
	Strengthening School Capacity	5.74	1	5.74	3.03	0.084	0.020
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	1.45	1	1.45	2.60	0.109	0.018
	Collaboration With Family	0.34	1	0.34	0.40	0.530	0.003
	Assessment Procedures	1.00	1	1.00	1.95	0.165	0.013
	Skills Development and Support	0.00	1	0.00	0.01	0.921	0.000
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	6.19	1	6.19	4.80	0.030	0.032
<i>Error</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	128.18	145	0.88			
	Strengthening School Capacity	274.62	145	1.89			
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	81.01	145	0.56			
	Collaboration With Family	124.49	145	0.86			
	Assessment Procedures	74.40	145	0.51			
	Skills Development and Support	32.26	145	0.22			
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	186.92	145	1.29			
<i>Total</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	32073.00	147				
	Strengthening School Capacity	19549.00	147				
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	11438.00	147				
	Collaboration With Family	11253.00	147				
	Assessment Procedures	11572.00	147				
	Skills Development and Support	5134.00	147				
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	19992.00	147				

Table 31

*Need and Confernces (MANOVA)*

Variables	New York (n=26)		New England (n=34)		Northeastern (n=87)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Learning Opportunities	14.73	1.00	14.47	1.81	14.85	0.78
Strengthening School Capacity	10.92	1.69	11.18	0.78	11.71	1.01
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.96	0.20	8.38	1.39	8.90	0.46
Collaboration With Family	8.42	0.99	8.44	1.35	8.88	0.62
Assessment Procedures	8.93	0.27	8.41	1.30	8.99	0.11
Skills Development and Support	5.85	0.46	5.76	1.78	5.95	0.26
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	11.35	1.23	11.12	1.19	11.87	0.60

*Note.* New York=New York & Greater New York; New England=Southern and Northern New England.

**Need and employment status.** A MANOVA was used to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and teachers' employment status. Table 29 shows means and standard deviation for each support program variable by employment status. Means for full-time employees appear to be slightly higher than for part-time employees. As a set (linear combination) of support variables, there are significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) between the employment statuses (Hotelling's Trace=0.129,  $F_{(8, 138)}=2.220$ ,  $p=0.029$ ).

The result of the follow-up analysis using one-way analysis of variance is shown in Table 30. Assumptions for the equality of population variances (Levene's Test) were upheld at the 0.05 level. To control for the inflation of Type I error because there are multiple dependent variables, the Bonferroni procedure was used (see Warner, 2013).

Thus, for this particular analysis, the level of significance was set at  $0.005/7=0.007$ . As shown in Table 30, it appears that, at  $\alpha=0.007$ , there are no significant differences between full-time and part-time employees on any of the need subscales. Although there was significant difference between full-time and part-time employees on

a linear combination of the need variables, there were no individual need variables on which full-time and part-time employees were different.

**Need and conference.** A MANOVA was used to determine if the conference in which teachers work make a difference in their perceptions of the need of a support program for students with learning difficulties. For this process, the five conferences were put into groups of three based on geographical location and response size (New York represents New York Conference & Greater New York Conference, New England represents Southern New England Conference and Northern New England Conference, and Northeastern remains as Northeastern Conference). Means and standard deviations for each need variable by conference are shown in Table 31. Means for Northeastern appear to be higher than for New York and the New England conferences. As a set (linear combination) of support variables, there are statistically significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) among the three conferences (Pillai's Trace=0.320,  $F_{(14, 278)}=3.78$ ,  $p=0.00$ ). Assumption for equality of population variance-covariance appears to have been violated at the 0.01 level (Box's  $M=856.67$ ,  $F_{(56, 17966.78)}=13.84$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Thus, Pillai's Trace was used to test the multivariate group differences.

The results of the follow-up analysis using one-way analysis of variance are shown in Table 32. Assumptions for the equality of population variances (Levene's Test) were upheld at the 0.05 level. To control for the inflation of Type I error because there are multiple dependent variables, the Bonferroni procedure was used (see Warner, 2013).

Thus, for this particular analysis, the level of significance was set at  $0.05/7=0.007$ . From Table 32, it appears that there are significant group differences for valuing and

addressing diversity ( $p=0.001$ ), assessment procedures ( $p=0.000$ ), and comprehensive and collaborative systems ( $p=0.002$ ).

Table 32

*Results of One-way Analysis of Variance: Need & Conference*

Source	Variable	SS	df	MS	F	P	$\eta^2$
<i>Between</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	3.53	2	1.77	2.04	0.134	.028
	Strengthening School Capacity	15.76	2	7.88	4.29	0.016	.056
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	7.40	2	3.70	7.10	0.001	.090
	Collaboration With Family	7.25	2	3.63	4.44	0.013	.058
	Assessment Procedures	8.33	2	4.17	8.94	0.000	.110
	Skills Development and Support	0.94	2	0.47	2.16	0.119	.029
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	16.09	2	8.05	6.54	0.002	.083
<i>Error</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	124.64	144	.866			
	Strengthening School Capacity	264.60	144	1.838			
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	75.06	144	.521			
	Collaboration With Family	117.58	144	.817			
	Assessment Procedures	67.07	144	.466			
	Skills Development and Support	31.32	144	.217			
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	177.02	144	1.229			
<i>Total</i>	Positive Learning Opportunities	128.18	146				
	Strengthening School Capacity	280.38	146				
	Valuing and Addressing Diversity	82.46	146				
	Collaboration With Family	124.83	146				
	Assessment Procedures	75.40	146				
	Skills Development and Support	32.26	146				
	Comprehensive and Collaboration System	193.12	146				

To further analyze the nature of the group differences for these three variables, a Tukey HSD post hoc test was done which revealed statistically significant differences between New York ( $M=8.96$ ,  $SD=0.20$ ), Northeastern ( $M=8.90$ ,  $SD=0.46$ ), and New England ( $M=8.38$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ). Northeastern and New England reported significantly higher need for “valuing and addressing diversity” compared with New York. Analysis revealed statistically significant differences between New York ( $M=8.93$ ,  $SD=0.27$ ), Northeastern ( $M=8.99$ ,  $SD=0.11$ ), and New England ( $M=8.41$ ,  $SD=1.30$ ). Northeastern

reported significantly higher need for “assessment procedures” compared with New York and New England. Also, analysis revealed statistically significant differences between New York ( $M=11.35$ ,  $SD=1.23$ ), Northeastern ( $M=11.87$ ,  $SD=0.60$ ), and New England ( $M=11.12$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ). Northeastern reported significantly higher need for “comprehensive and collaborative systems” compared with New York and New England.

### **Need and Experience With Special Education**

The teachers’ experience with special education variables included degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion classes, knowledge of special education/inclusion rating, and hours of staff development attended. For this category the Pearson correlation coefficient and the MANOVA were used to assess the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of need and their experience with special education. The results are reflected in Tables 33 and 34.

**Need and degree.** A MANOVA was used to assess the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of need and the type of degree the teachers hold. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to assess the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of need and the teachers’ degree/licensure. Table 33 shows means and standard deviations for each support program variable by degree/licensure. Means for special education appear to be slightly higher than for general education and Other degree. However, the result of the one-way multivariate analysis of variance indicated that there are no degree differences on the support program variables when they are considered as a set (Wilks’s  $\Lambda=0.057$ ,  $F_{(16, 276)}=0.509$ ,  $p=0.942$ ).

**Need and courses taken.** A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and special education courses taken. As reported in Table 34, correlation coefficients between measures of need and special education courses taken were -0.007 to 0.072, which were all negative and non-significant.

**Need and staff development attended.** A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and special education staff development attended. As reported in Table 34, correlation coefficients between measures of need and special education staff development attended were -0.081 to 0.072, which were all negative and non-significant.

Table 33

*Need and Degree (MANOVA)*

Variables	GenEd (n=100)		SPED (n=7)		Other (n=40)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Positive Learning Opportunities	14.68	1.01	15.00	0.00	14.85	0.80
Strengthening School Capacity	11.32	1.54	12.00	0.00	11.67	1.02
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	8.73	0.86	9.00	0.00	8.90	0.44
Collaboration With Family	8.60	1.07	8.71	0.75	8.95	0.32
Assessment Procedures	8.78	0.86	9.00	0.00	8.97	0.16
Skills Development and Support	5.86	0.55	6.00	0.00	5.95	0.22
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	11.49	1.30	11.86	0.38	11.85	0.70

*Note.* GenEd=General Education; SPED=Special Education.

Table 34

*Need and Course Taken, Staff Development, and Knowledge*

Variables	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Course	Knowledge	Staff Dev
Positive Learning Opportunities	149	14.74	0.93	-0.007	-0.047	0.031
Strengthening School Capacity	148	11.45	1.38	0.052	0.039	-0.081
Valuing and Addressing Diversity	149	8.79	0.75	0.063	0.011	0.032
Collaboration With Family	149	8.70	0.92	0.016	-0.027	-0.016
Assessment Procedures	148	8.84	0.72	0.055	0.064	0.072
Skills Development and Support	149	5.89	0.47	0.001	0.000	0.034
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	149	11.61	1.14	0.072	0.107	0.050
Course Taken	149	2.19	1.59	1.000	0.514 **	0.153
Staff Development	149	3.32	4.71	0.153	0.048	1.000
Knowledge	149	5.81	1.71	0.514 **	1.000	0.048

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

**Need and knowledge of special education.** A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need and special education staff development attended. As reported in Table 34, correlation coefficients between measures of need and knowledge of special education were -0.047 to 0.107, which were all negative and non-significant.

#### Research Question 5

The fifth research question sought to measure the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need with regard to a support program for students with learning difficulties. Table 35 gives a summary of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need as it relates to support programs for students with learning difficulties in AU Conference elementary schools.

Table 35

*Perceptions of Availability and Need (Paired Sample t Test)*

Variables	Area	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Positive Learning Opportunity	Availability	11.05	3.66	-12.61	148	.00	-1.39
	Need	14.75	0.93				
Strengthening School Capacity	Availability	6.37	2.27	-24.48	147	.00	-2.70
	Need	11.45	1.38				
Valuing Diversity	Availability	6.40	2.34	-12.66	148	.00	-1.38
	Need	8.79	0.75				
Collaboration With Family	Availability	6.29	2.22	-12.57	148	.00	-1.42
	Need	8.70	0.92				
Assessment	Availability	7.13	2.29	-8.91	147	.00	-1.01
	Need	8.84	0.72				
Skills Development and Support	Availability	4.23	1.68	-12.08	148	.00	-1.35
	Need	5.89	0.47				
Comprehensive and Collaboration System	Availability	7.07	2;60	-20.23	148	.00	-2.26
	Need	11.61	1.14				
Total	Availability	13.84	4.63	-23.23	148	.00	-2.54
	Need	23.11	2.28				

## Teachers' Perceptions of Availability and Need

A paired sample *t* test was computed to assess the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need. As reported in Table 35, differences in scores for perceived availability and perceived need were identified. For all eight subscales, need was significantly higher than availability ( $p < 0.001$ ). For example, Need positive learning opportunities ( $M = 14.75$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) was significantly higher ( $p < 0.001$ ) than Availability of positive learning opportunities ( $M = 11.05$ ,  $SD = 3.66$ ). Effect sizes for all these differences were high (Cohen's  $d > 1.00$ ). Thus, the differences between need and availability of support programs for learning difficulties are large.

## Research Question 6

The sixth research question sought to measure teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a support program for students with learning difficulties. Statements 46-48 of the survey questionnaire contained three open-ended questions of teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a support program as well as challenges experienced while working with students with learning difficulties. Many surveys were returned with no response to these items. Figures 1-3 give a graphic summary of the frequency of the responses.

### Challenges Teachers Face With Students Experiencing Learning Difficulties

Respondents were asked to give three responses for this question. The total number of respondents for this category was 112, and the total amount of responses was 267. As is reported in Figure 1, the most frequent responses were lack of resources, lack

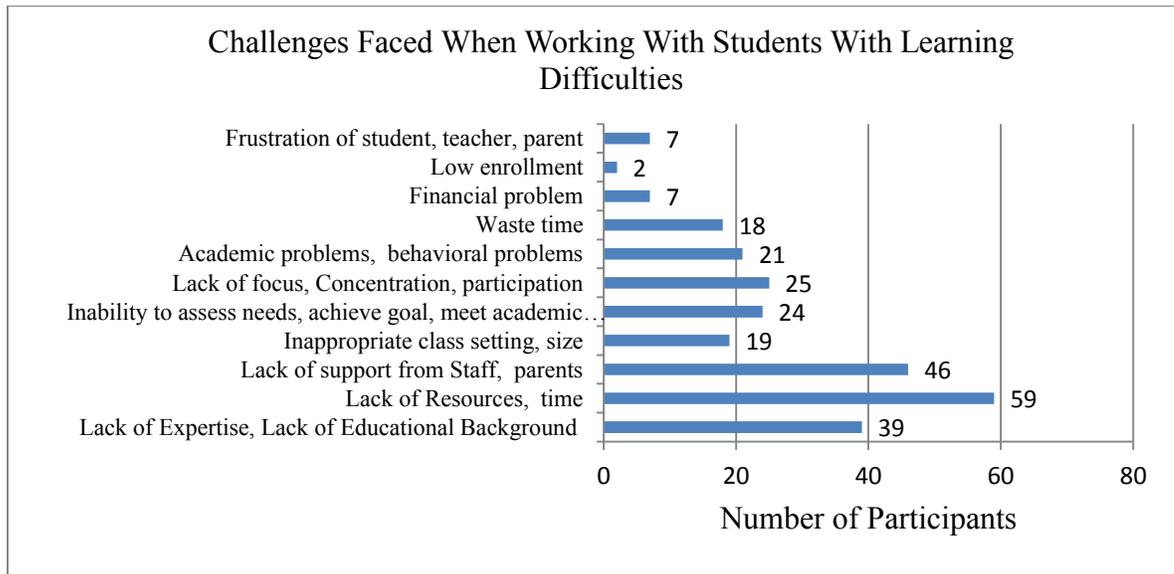


Figure 1. Perceived challenges of teaching students with learning difficulties.

of time ( $n=59$ ), lack of support from staff and parents ( $n=46$ ), and lack of expertise, lack of educational background ( $n=39$ ). The secondary responses were lack of focus, lack of concentration, lack of participation ( $n=25$ ), inability to assess needs, inability to achieve goal, inability to meet academic expectations ( $n=24$ ), and academic problems, behavioral problems ( $n=21$ ). The least common responses to this question were financial problems ( $n=7$ ), frustration of students, teachers, and parents ( $n=7$ ), and low enrollment ( $n=2$ ).

### Advantages of Having a Support Program

For this question, identifying the advantages of a support program, 94 respondents gave 189 responses. As identified in Figure 2, the three most popular responses to this question were to meet needs of students, to satisfy parents ( $n=59$ ), academic success, better prepared, improved performance ( $n=47$ ), and available support ( $n=33$ ). The secondary responses were available expertise ( $n=24$ ), less stress and frustration of classroom teacher, and student ( $n=23$ ), and proper analysis of needs ( $n=22$ ). The fewest

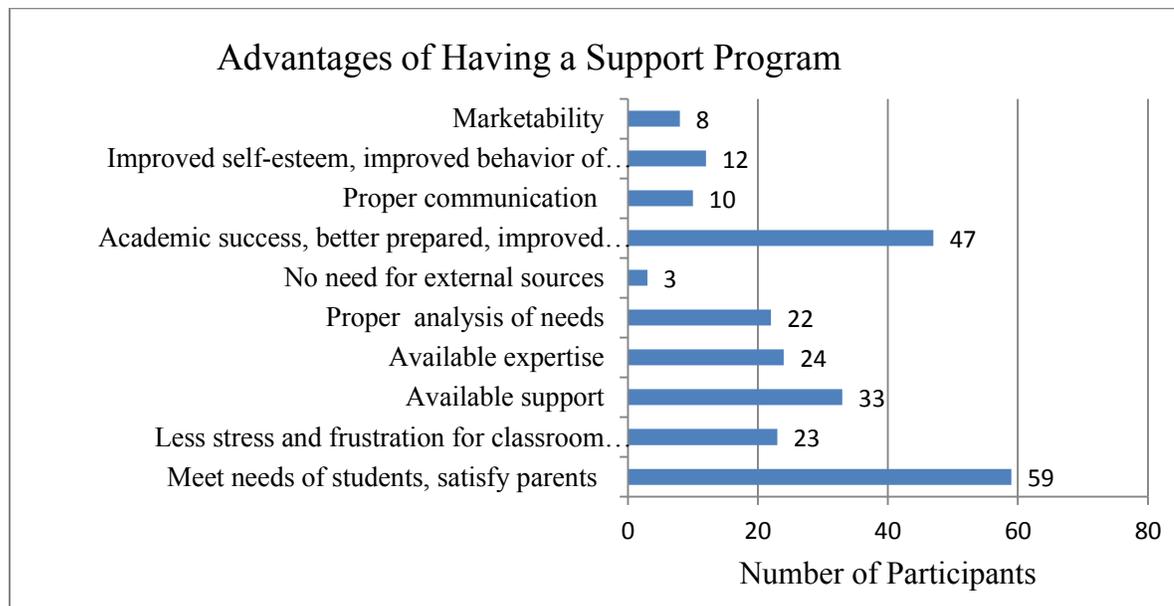


Figure 2. Perceived advantages of having a support program.

responses to this question were proper communication ( $n=10$ ), marketable ( $n=8$ ), and no need for external sources ( $n=3$ ).

### Disadvantages of Not Having a Support Program

This question identified teachers' perceptions of the disadvantages of not having a support program. As reported in Figure 3, the most frequent responses were that there will be lack of student success, lack of help ( $n=49$ ), inability to identify students' needs ( $n=26$ ), unable to enroll special needs students, students leave the school, unable to receive Adventist education ( $n=26$ ), lack of professional and parental support ( $n=25$ ). The fewest responses were: school not competitive, creates partiality in our mission ( $n=6$ ), dissatisfied parents, dissatisfied students ( $n=5$ ), and lack of information ( $n=4$ ).

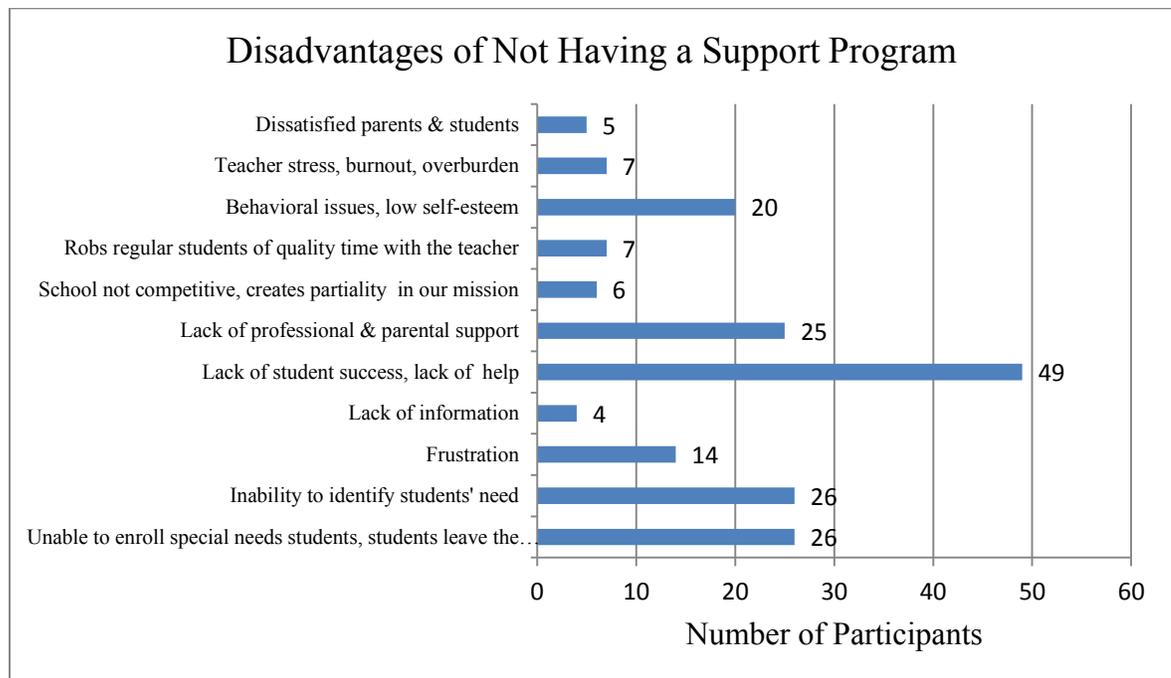


Figure 3. Perceived disadvantages of not having a support program.

## Summary of Major Findings

### Major Findings of Research Question 1

Forty-three percent of the respondents reported that support programs for special education are available in their schools. Though there were scale means from a low of 1.88 ( $SD=0.58$ ) to a high of 2.61 ( $SD=0.62$ ) for assessment procedures, it appears, however, that teachers are generally unsure about the availability of specific features of their special education support program.

### Major Findings of Research Question 2

Research Question 2 investigated teachers' perceptions of the need for a support program in AU Conference elementary schools for students with learning difficulties. With scale means ranging from a low of 2.86 ( $SD=0.34$ ) for strengthening school capacity, to a high of 2.95 for positive learning opportunity ( $SD=0.19$ ), assessment procedures ( $SD=0.24$ ) and skills development and support ( $SD=0.23$ ), teachers are clearly indicating that there is need for special education support programs in their schools.

### Major Findings of Research Question 3

The third research question investigated the relationship between teachers' perceptions of *availability* for a support program and that of their demographic variables, their employment-related variables, and their experience with special education. Tables 10-18 give a summary of the responses of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of *availability* for a support program and that of their demographic variables, their employment-related variables, and their experience with special education. The findings suggest that perceived availability for special education programs is not related to demographic characteristics, or experience with special education. However the findings

reflect differences among employment-related variables, particularly among the conferences where the teachers work.

#### Major Findings of Research Question 4

The fourth research question investigated the relationship between teachers' perceptions of need for a support program and that of their demographic variables, their employment-related variables, and their experience with special education. Tables 19-27 give a summary of the responses of the teachers' perceptions of the need of a support program as it relates to learning difficulties in AU Conference elementary schools. The findings suggest that perceived need for special education programs is not related to experience with special education. However, the findings reflect differences between need and demographic characteristics, particularly ethnicity, as well as differences between need and employment-related variables, particularly among the conferences where the teachers work.

#### Major Findings of Research Question 5

Research question 5 investigated the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need with regard to a support program for students with learning difficulties. Table 28 gives a summary of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need. The report indicated that there were greater mean scores for measures of need than measures of availability. Accordingly, there were significant differences between reported availability and perceived need.

## Major Findings of Research Question 6

Research question 6 sought to measure teachers' perceptions of the challenges, advantages, and disadvantages of a support program for students with learning difficulties. Figures 1-3 give a graph summary of the frequency of the responses.

### **Challenges**

As reported in Figure 1, the perceived challenges experienced by teachers in working with students with learning difficulties were:

1. Lack of resources and time
2. Lack of support from staff and parents
3. Lack of expertise, lack of educational background
4. Lack of focus, concentration, participation
5. Inability to assess needs, achieve academic goal, meet academic standards
6. Academic problem, behavior problem
7. Inappropriate class setting, size.

### **Disadvantages**

As shown in Figure 2, the perceived disadvantages in not having a support program in working with students with learning difficulties were:

1. Lack of student success, lack of help
2. Inability to identify students' needs
3. Unable to enroll special needs students, students leave the school, unable to receive Adventist education
4. Lack of professional and parental support
5. Behavior issues, low self-esteem

6. School not competitive, creates partiality in our mission
7. Dissatisfied parents, dissatisfied students.

### **Advantages**

As reported in Figure 3 the perceived advantages in having a support program in working with students with learning difficulties were:

1. Meet needs of students, to satisfy parents
2. Academic success, better prepared, improved performance
3. Available support
4. Available expertise, less stress and frustration of classroom teacher and student
5. Proper analysis of needs
6. Improved self-esteem, improved behavior of students.

### **Summary of Results**

This survey was divided into three distinct categories: demographics of the respondents, statements about teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program, and questions about the advantages and disadvantages of having a support program as well as challenges teachers experience in teaching students with learning difficulties. Overall, the responses revealed a positive perception of AU Conference teachers for the need of a support program for students with learning difficulties. The teachers certainly seem to understand what is necessary to meet the needs of students who are experiencing learning difficulties, and they believe that a support program is necessary to address the challenges experienced by these students.

Differences in perceptions were found among some of the demographic groups but those results, though statistically significant, were not meaningful enough to cause much change in the overall findings. These differences in means that identified statistical differences may provide the awareness for the implementation of professional development for those groups where it becomes necessary. Chapter 5 provides the discussion of the results, the implications of the study, and recommendations for areas of further research based on these findings.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### **Introduction**

Increasing numbers of children experiencing learning difficulties in schools across the United States almost guarantee that every school year teachers in both public and parochial school systems will identify students in their classes who present with a learning difficulty. Whereas federal laws (e.g., IDEA, 2004) mandate that special education services be provided for children with learning needs who attend public schools, children enrolled in parochial school systems (such as AU Conference elementary schools) often lack needed support for coping with their difficulties.

In general, when students face academic or behavioral challenges the teacher is expected to either manage the problem in the context of the classroom, seek help from other professionals to solve the problem, or in the most challenging situations seek support services for the students. There is limited research, if any, that indicates which services are needed and available to teachers who work in parochial schools, such as the AU Conference elementary school system. It is highly possible that teachers' perceptions of the availability and necessity of support options may influence administrative decision-making regarding whether or not students in parochial schools have access to a support program that addresses their learning difficulties.

This chapter presents (a) an introduction and background of the study, (b) the purpose of the study, (c) an overview of the literature related to the study, (d) the methods used in the study, (e) the results of the study, (f) a discussion of the results, (g) the limitations of the study, (h) conclusions based on the results, and (i) recommendations for future practice and research.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend elementary schools operated by the Atlantic Union (AU) Conference. The study also identified elements of a support program that teachers perceived as necessary for the academic growth and development of the students.

### **Research Questions**

Six research questions guided the study and they are as follows:

*Research Question 1.* What are teachers' perceptions regarding the *availability* of a support program for students with learning difficulties with regard to (a) positive learning opportunities, (b) strengthening of school capacity, (c) valuing and addressing diversity, (d) collaborating with family, (e) using assessment procedures, (f) promoting skills development and support, and (g) providing comprehensive and collaborative systems?

*Research Question 2.* What are teachers' perceptions regarding the *need* of a support program for students with learning difficulties with regard to (a) positive learning opportunities, (b) strengthening of school capacity, (c) valuing and addressing diversity,

(d) collaborating with family, (e) using assessment procedures, (f) promoting skills development and support, and (g) providing comprehensive and collaborative systems?

*Research Question 3.* To what extent is perceived *availability* of a support program for students with learning difficulties related to (a) demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, years of experience, educational level), (b) employment-related variables (conference, employment position, status, class size), and (c) experience with special education (degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion classes, knowledge of special education/inclusion rating, hours of staff development attended)?

*Research Question 4.* Is perceived *need* of a support program for students with learning difficulties related to (a) demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, years of experience, educational level) (b) employment-related variables (conference, employment position, status, class size), and (c) experience with special education (degree/licensure, number of special education/inclusion classes, knowledge of special education/inclusion rating, hours of staff development attended)?

*Research Question 5.* Is there a relationship between teachers' perceptions of *availability* and teachers' perceptions of *need* with regard to a support program for students with learning difficulties?

*Research Question 6.* What are teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of a support program for students with learning difficulties?

### **Overview of the Literature**

From the review of literature, it is quite evident that several factors play a primary role in determining a child's educational outcome. Some factors are socioeconomic status (Sirin, 2005), home environment (Dotterer, Hoffman, Crouter, & McHale, 2008), race

and ethnicity (Smith & Lalonde, 2003; Stinson, 2006; Worrell, 2007), school environment (Sanders, 1984), family environment (Seginer & Vermulst, 2002), the child's physical health (Joe, Joe, & Rowley, 2009), the child's personal experience (Kifer, 1975), community environment (Long, Monoi, Harper, Knoblauch, & Murphy, 2007), teachers' experience (Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Marks & Louis, 1997), and others. In the process of a child's educational experience, these factors are intertwined in a complex web of forces, events, and relationships and can have a great effect in limiting his or her potential to learn (Legters & Slavin, 1992). Accordingly, the interplay of these circumstantial factors has a lasting effect on the child's academic success and more so its future.

Students with learning difficulties need a supportive environment to function successfully in school. This type of environment enables them to capitalize on their strength and cope effectively with their weaknesses (Larkin, 2001). The use of a support program as a teaching strategy to address the needs of students with learning difficulties is supported by Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and his concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). He identified the zone of proximal development as "the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" (Raymond, 2000, p. 176). According to Vygotsky's theory, children can do more with the help and guidance of an adult or a more experienced person than they can do by themselves (Maccarelli, 2006). As such, it should be no surprise that federal laws, such as the IDEA, support the provision of support services designed to meet the unique needs of students who are experiencing learning difficulties (IDEA, 2004).

## Method

### Population and Sample

This study used a survey questionnaire to collect data from the AU Conference elementary school teachers. The population included all 286 elementary school teachers employed by the Atlantic Union Conference. However, only those teachers who work in schools located in the United States were invited to participate in the study, hence the survey questionnaires were distributed to the 265 elementary school teachers in the Greater New York, Northeastern New York, New England, and Southern New England conferences. The survey instruments were mailed to the principals of each participating school who distributed them to all the teachers in the 55 elementary schools.

### Instrumentation

A survey questionnaire (Appendix D, DSPS) was used to collect data from elementary school teachers. Through a careful analysis of the literature on support programs (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Special Education, 1994; Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003; IDEA, 1990) elements of an effective support program were shown to assist students with learning difficulties. These essential elements were used as the basis for the development of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was divided into 3-parts; the first part consisted of 13 items which measured demographic variables of the respondents. Part two consisted of 32 questions measuring teachers' perceptions. A 3-point Likert scale was used with a range of No =1, Not Sure =2, and Yes =3, the statements were arranged in two different formats: Present–there is (measuring availability) and Future–there should be (measuring need).

Part three consisted of three open-ended questions designed to measure teachers' perceptions of challenges that they may experience in teaching students with learning difficulties and also their perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of having a support program in the school. The survey questionnaire consisted of 48 questions, with 32 questions formatted on a 3-point Likert-type scale, 13 questions requiring circle responses, and 3 short-answer questions.

### Procedures

During the data collection process, the Dillman's Total Design Method (1978) was used to increase the quality and quantity of responses. Dillman states that an effective method of increasing response rate in the collection of mail or telephone surveys includes: use of cover letter, detailed instructions, the use of tracking numbers for each questionnaire, reminder letter sent after 2 weeks, and the use of a reminder postcard after 3 weeks.

Permission for conducting the research was first requested from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Andrews University (Appendix B) and the Educational Department of the Atlantic Union (AU) Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Appendix C). Having received the approval from these institutions, the following procedures were followed. First, a list of all the elementary schools and their addresses was secured. This list of participating schools was selected using the following criteria: (a) that the elementary school was located in the United States and (b) that the elementary school operated K-8 classes. Second, the names of all the elementary school principals of the selected schools were secured as well as the names of all the Superintendents for each school in the AU Conference along with the Conference address.

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, a letter was sent via email to the AU Conference educational director (see Appendix C) informing her of the date when the surveys would be distributed, and requesting that she inform the superintendents of the participating schools. In addition, I sent a letter to the principals of the selected schools informing them of the date the surveys should be distributed. A copy of the letter of permission granted by the AU Conference Education Department was included in the letter to the principals.

On November 28, 2011, a package including survey instruments, cover letter (containing detailed instructions for the completion and returning of the survey instruments), and a postage-paid return envelope was either mailed (43 schools) or hand delivered (12 schools in close proximity to my address) to each of the 55 principals of the participating schools.

As was outlined in the cover letter instructions, the teachers were given 3 to 5 business days to complete the survey questionnaires and return them in the envelopes provided (entitled Completed Survey) to their principal. To assure confidentiality and anonymity, teachers were informed, via cover letter attached to the survey, not to write their names on the survey questionnaire and to return responses in the sealed envelope provided to the principal. The principal collected the completed surveys and placed them in a larger postage-paid self-addressed envelope (addressed with my mailing address) and then mailed them.

In following Dillman's Total Design Method (1978), 2 weeks following the survey distribution I sent a postcard to all the principals of the participating schools as a

reminder to those who did not respond and as a way to say thank-you to those who completed the survey questionnaires.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution), Pearson correlation, multivariate, and univariate analysis of variance were used to analyze data associated with each of the research questions. A summary of the results is presented below.

## Results

### Respondents' Demographic and Statistical Information

The first section of the survey questionnaire allowed respondents to give some basic demographic and descriptive statistics.

#### Demographics

The majority (77.9%) of respondents participating in the survey were females. Almost half (49.1%) were African Americans with Caribbean-Americans (22.1%) and Caucasians (20.1%) representing nearly a quarter of the respondents. The years of teaching experience ranged from 0-38 years with 40.9% of respondents working between 0-5 years. More than half of the respondents held a Master's degree (56.4%), while 37.6% held a Bachelor's degree.

#### Employment-Related Variables

The majority of respondents were teachers (85.9%) who were full-time employed (94.6%). The majority of respondents (59.7%) worked at schools located in the Northeastern Conference and 56.4% had a class size between 11-20 students.

## **Experience With Special Education/Inclusion**

As was reported, the majority (68.5 %) of respondents indicated that their certification/degree, whether elementary or secondary, was in general education, with very little, if any, special education training. In responding to the number of special education courses taken, 24.8% reported to have taken two courses. When asked to rate their knowledge of special education, 43.6% reported that they had some degree of knowledge. When asked about the amount of hours spent attending staff development workshops relating to special education/inclusion, 48.3% reported 0 hours of attendance.

## **Research Question 1: Availability of a Support Program**

Research Question 1 investigated teachers' perceptions of the *availability* of a support program in AU elementary schools for students with learning difficulties. A report of the frequency and mean of the Yes responses for the survey items regarding teachers' perceptions of the *availability* of a support program is given in Table 8.

The frequency statistics revealed that 64 respondents (43%) perceived that a support program was available at their school. Mean scores ranged between 1.88 and 2.61. The elements of support programs that received high means were assessment procedures and positive learning opportunity. Elements with low mean scores were strengthening school capacity and comprehensive and collaborative systems. See Table 9.

## **Research Question 2: Need for a Support Program**

Research Question 2 investigated teachers' perceptions of the need for a support program in AU Conference elementary schools for students with learning difficulties. A

report of the frequency and mean of the “yes” responses for the survey items regarding teachers’ perceptions of the need of a support program is given in Table 9.

As reported in the frequency statistics, a very high percentage of respondents (93.3%) perceived that a support program for students with learning difficulties is needed in the AU Conference elementary schools. The data indicated high mean scores for all seven elements of a support program. The mean scores ranged between 2.86 and 2.95, which indicated that all seven elements were perceived as needed.

### **Research Question 3: Teachers’ Perceptions of Availability and Demographics**

The third research question sought to measure the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of the availability for a support program and that of their demographic variables, their employment-related variables, and their experience with special education. Tables 10-18 give a summary of the responses of the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of the availability for a support program and that of their demographic variables, their employment-related variables, and their experience with special education.

Overall, there were no differences on a linear combination of the availability measures of support program for learning difficulties for the following variables: gender, ethnicity, level of education, school position, and employment status. In addition, no significant correlations were found between availability measures and the following variables: teaching experience, number of special education course taken, hours of staff development attended, and knowledge of special education. Availability of a

comprehensive and collaborative system appeared to be higher in the New York Conference than in either the New England or the Northeastern Conference.

#### **Research Question 4: Teachers' Perceptions of Need and Demographics**

The fourth research question sought to measure the relationship between teachers' perceptions of the need for a support program and that of their demographic variables, their employment-related variables, and their experience with special education. Tables 19-27 give a summary of the responses of the teachers' perceptions of the need of a support program relevant to learning difficulties in AU Conference elementary schools.

Overall, there were no differences on a linear combination of the need measures of a support program for learning difficulties for the following variables: gender, level of education, school position, and employment status. In addition, no significant correlations were found between need measures and the following variables: teaching experience, number of special education course taken, hours of staff development attended, and knowledge of special education. Need for all elements of a support program except for skills development and support was higher among African Americans and Caribbean Americans than among White/Caucasians. Also need of valuing and addressing diversity, assessment procedures, and comprehensive and collaborative system appear to be higher in the Northeastern Conference than in either the New York Conference or the New England Conference.

### **Research Question 5: Teachers' Perceptions of Availability and Teachers' Perceptions of Need**

Research Question 5 sought to measure the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need with regard to a support program for students with learning difficulties. Table 28 gives a summary of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and teachers' perceptions of need relevant to a support program for students with learning difficulties in AU Conference elementary schools.

The report showed that there were mean differences between reported availability and perceived need. There were also significant differences between reported availability and perceived need. The effect sizes are all very large (Cohen's  $d > 1.0$ ).

### **Research Question 6: Advantages and Disadvantages of a Support Program**

Research Question 6 sought to measure teachers' perceptions of the challenges, advantages, and disadvantages of a support program for students with learning difficulties. Statements 46-48 of the survey questionnaire contained three open-ended questions of teachers' perceptions of the challenges, advantages, and disadvantages of a support program as experienced while working with students with learning difficulties. Many surveys were returned with no response to these items. Figures 1-3 give a graph summary of the frequency of the responses.

#### **Challenges**

As reported, the perceived challenges experienced by teachers in working with students with learning difficulties were:

1. Lack of resources and time
2. Lack of support from staff and parents
3. Lack of expertise, lack of educational background
4. Lack of focus, concentration, participation
5. Inability to assess needs, achieve academic goal, meet academic standards
6. Academic problem, behavior problem
7. Inappropriate class setting, size.

### **Disadvantages**

As reported, the perceived disadvantages in not having a support program in working with students with learning difficulties were:

1. Lack of student success, lack of help
2. Inability to identify students' needs
3. Unable to enroll special needs students, students leave the school, unable to receive Adventist education
4. Lack of professional and parental support
5. Behavior issues, low self-esteem
6. School not competitive, creates partiality in our mission
7. Dissatisfied parents, dissatisfied students.

### **Advantages**

As reported, the perceived advantages in having a support program in working with students with learning difficulties were:

1. Meet needs of students, to satisfy parents
2. Academic success, better prepared, improved performance

3. Available support
4. Available expertise
5. Less stress and frustration of classroom teacher and student
6. Proper analysis of needs
7. Improve self-esteem, improve behavior of students.

## **Discussion of Major Findings**

### Demographic and Background Implications

#### **Demographics**

The demographic variables used for analysis in this study were gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, and level of education. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were females. This profile of a female-dominated workforce reflects the reality of an ongoing male personnel shortage in the United States K-12 education system. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2007), the 2011 population survey indicates that men teachers represent a very small percentage (2.3%) of teachers in preschool and kindergarten and a similarly small percentage (18.3%) in elementary and secondary schools. From a racial/ethnic perspective, the majority of the workforce was of African American (49.1%) and Caribbean American (22.1%) background. These data indicate that the majority of the teachers in the study were from minority backgrounds (71.2%), and therefore perhaps more suitably matched to the student population of the AU Conference schools. Having a workforce of a similar ethnic/cultural background can provide the opportunity for the teachers to better connect with their students and enhance understanding, acceptance, and better relationships. One of the benefits of a race-matched teacher-student demographics profile is that it may also provide opportunities for vital

role modeling for students at risk for academic failure. Research indicates that minority teachers help minority students make connections between their own background and school systems (Howard, 2010) and may help to counteract the many obstacles that some minority students face, including problems with educational achievement, home and family relationships, low income background, and racial identity (Ballard, Gilmore, Keith, & Ore, 2008).

It must also be noted that the results of this study indicated that far more African-American and Caribbean-American teachers perceived that a support program was needed than did their non-minority counterparts. This greater perception of the need for student support among minority teachers may indicate either a greater level of awareness of students' needs or stronger convictions regarding the possible benefits that can be derived from such a support program.

An analysis of the teachers' level of education indicated that more than half of the teachers had a Master's degree. This profile reflects a stable, seasoned, qualified, and experienced workforce. It also reflects Burton, Gittens-St. Juste, McGarrell, and Nwosu's (2005) *Profile 2004* data that "a large majority of North American Division (NAD) educators are well educated, properly certified, and committed to employment within the Adventist educational system" (p.16). Therefore it is quite possible that teachers in this category may have used their experience to find ways of addressing the challenges that students with learning difficulties experience. This profile may also have influenced teachers' perceptions of the need for a support program in that teachers who are more knowledgeable, experienced, and qualified may give a more optimistic response of the actual availability and/or need of support for students experiencing learning difficulties.

According to Montoro (2012) school teachers professionally learn and develop (a) through school-sponsored professional development programs and activities, (b) by teacher self-directed learning experiences, and (c) by informal job-related learning experiences. Accordingly, demographics do affect teachers' perceptions of school culture. Hence it is possible that the more experienced teachers are, the more knowledgeable they would be in detecting and addressing their students' needs. Bailey (2010) would support this type of inquiry because teachers' perceptions of support programs are critical to their successful implementation for improved student achievement.

### **Employment-Related Variables**

For the purpose of this study, employment-related variables consisted of conference of employment, employment position, employment status, and class size. In terms of employment status, the majority of respondents were teachers who were employed full time with their years of teaching experience ranging from 0-38 years. This profile, along with their educational accomplishments, reflects stability of the workforce, enables consistency, and is beneficial to the growth, development, and success of the students—attributes suggestive of teachers whose perceptions of need and availability would be both credible and valid.

### **Experience With Special Education/Inclusion**

The majority of teachers in this study had very little training or experience with special education. This was not surprising, given the fact that most parochial schools in the SDA school system do not directly provide special education services. The majority (68.5%) of respondents reported having certification/degrees in general education, either

at the elementary (51.0%) or at the secondary level (17.4%). In responding to the number of special education courses taken, only 24.8% of respondents reported to have taken two courses. However, when asked to rate their knowledge of special education, 43.6% reported that they had some degree of knowledge. When asked about the number of hours of staff development workshops relating to special education/inclusion attended, 48.3% reported 0 hours. These data indicate that the teachers seem to have limited knowledge to address the needs of students who experience learning challenges. In addition, the data also suggest that there may be a lack of continuing education opportunities in this area given that a high percentage of teachers indicated that there is a need for skills development and support for providing opportunities to increase teaching capacity. Also, when given the opportunity to voice their opinion on the challenges they face in teaching students who experience learning difficulties, some of the teachers' responses indicated lack of expertise and lack of educational background. One respondent (A7) wrote, "Sometimes I become overburdened with challenges and I experience feelings of inadequacy as I try to reach these students." Another wrote, "Having to devise my own strategies with lack of resources and limited know-how can be very frustrating."

#### Teachers' Perceptions of Availability

Overall findings revealed that 43% of the teachers believed that certain elements of a support program for addressing the needs of students experiencing learning difficulties were available in AU Conference elementary schools. However, given an overall mean score of 2.3 (No=1, Not Sure=2, and Yes=3) it seems likely that while they may be sure there are support programs available, they are unsure about the existence of specific features of these support programs. This indication of possible ambivalence

regarding availability, combined with teachers' self-reports of limited training in the area of special education, could be an indicator that a support program is not available, because, had the program been available then there would be a more definite level of awareness. It is possible that teachers' perceptions of availability might be the result of inadequate knowledge of the established elements of a support program. In terms of employing organization, the majority of responding teachers were from the Northeastern Conference.

In addition to the fact that the Northeastern Conference has a significantly larger workforce than the other conferences, it may also be important to note that the Northeastern Conference has recently begun to address the need of support for students experiencing learning difficulties (Coke, 2012). It is interesting to note that this experience did not significantly affect the outcome of this study because the results indicated that New York Conference teachers reported a higher level of availability than did the New England and Northeastern conferences. Possibilities for the difference in response to this perception may be related either to the New York Conference having a greater number of small schools (one classroom) that may make the need for support less apparent or it may be that the initiatives of the Northeastern Conference to provide a support program are still in their early stages and have not yet filtered down to teachers.

This study indicated that teachers' perceptions of availability were neither related to their specific school position nor to their employment status. However, an analysis to determine the relationship between teachers' perceptions of availability and the conference where the teachers work revealed that there were significant differences in that teachers in the different conferences had mixed feelings regarding the availability of

measures of a support program. The results indicated that the variable “comprehensive and collaborative system,” which provides individualized attention through coherent services, was significantly higher in the New York (New York and Greater New York) conferences than in the Northeastern Conference and the New England (Southern and Northern New England) conferences.

Although only a small percentage of teachers perceived that a support program for students experiencing learning difficulties was available in the AU elementary schools, results of the study indicated that teachers perceived that some of the elements of a support program were definitely present, whereas other elements were perceived as definitely lacking. The mean scores for the seven elements ranged between 1.88 and 2.61. The elements with the highest mean scores were “assessment procedures,” which includes strategies for the analysis of needs and “positive learning opportunities.” It is not surprising that the teachers perceive assessment procedures and positive learning opportunities to be highest on their availability list. The Seventh-day Adventist education system has a philosophy that fosters a balanced development of the whole person—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially (NAD, 2003), therefore it is not surprising that the teachers perceive the system as providing positive learning opportunities to students. Also, Adventist teachers seem to go the extra mile to help their students to succeed. One respondent (D11) wrote, “I have a small school and cannot afford a support staff. My students do receive individualized attention; we sometimes have volunteers to help.” Additionally, teachers may have been exposed to contents within the AU Conference educational system that can be considered as supportive,

which may not necessarily be identified as a support program that caters to learning difficulties.

Elements having the lowest mean scores and perceived as the least available by the teachers were “strengthening school capacity” and “comprehensive and collaborative systems.” Strengthening school capacity includes strategies to address learning difficulties such as early intervention, provision of support staff, team teaching, and teacher collaboration. It is also understandable that teachers employed in a school system without structured special education programming would see this as a significant deficit. According to the tenets of the *IDEA* (2004) and other federal mandates, it is necessary to provide support to students who experience learning difficulties. Also according to Vygotsky (Maccarelli, 2006), these supports are like scaffolds helping them through their challenges to reach the place where they can manage independently. Bryant et al. (2008) indicate that for an educational program to be considered appropriate for students experiencing learning difficulties, it must meet the needs of each student adequately and be individualized because there is no one single answer to the educational needs of students experiencing learning difficulties.

#### Teachers’ Perceptions of Need

Results indicated that 93.2% of teachers perceived that there is a need for a support program in AU Conference elementary schools. However, given an overall mean score of 2.9 (No=1, Not Sure=2, and Yes=3), it seems likely that the teachers perceived that a support program was needed in the schools. Overall results of this study strongly suggest that the teachers perceived the need for all elements of a support program. The mean scores for the seven elements ranged between 2.86 and 2.95, which indicated that

teachers perceived the need for each element of a support program. Additionally, the qualitative reports support the data that there is a need for a support program for students experiencing learning challenges. Some of the challenges perceived by the teachers were: lack of resources and time to effectively meet the needs, lack of support from parents, lack of expertise, lack of educational background, academic problem of students, behavior problem of students, and inappropriate class setting or size. The challenges also include lack of focus, concentration, and participation; inability to assess help for the difficulties; lack of support from staff; inability to achieve academic goal; and inability to meet academic standards. Some of the disadvantages of not having a support program as perceived by teachers were: inability to identify students' needs, lack of student success, lack of professional and parental support, and behavior issues.

Responding teachers were not equal in their perceptions of the need for a support program. However, findings indicated that there were significant differences between teachers' perceptions of need and the conference where they work. Mean scores for Northeastern Conference appeared to be higher for three of the seven elements than were the mean scores for the New York or New England conferences. This difference may suggest that teachers of the Northeastern Conference perceived a greater need for the elements of "valuing and addressing diversity," "assessment procedures," and "comprehensive and collaborative system" than did the teachers in the other conferences. Despite the statistical differences that were identified in terms of the specific elements needed, findings indicated that teachers overwhelmingly perceived that there is a strong need for support services among students experiencing learning difficulties in the AU Conference schools.

In addition, teachers' responses indicated that having a support program may foster collaboration between educators, parents, and other professionals in creating a supportive learning environment that strengthens connections between home, school, and the community for all students. This finding meets the specification of federal laws such as the NCLB Act (2001) and changes in the IDEA (2004), which state that students who are experiencing learning difficulties should be provided with the necessary support services for addressing their learning needs.

The teachers' perceived need for a support program for students experiencing learning difficulties is supported by Bryant et al. (2008) who argued that although evidence-based instruction and differentiated instructions are important components of general education curriculum, students who are experiencing learning difficulties generally need more intensive interventions and support in order to succeed (p. 168). Also, according to Vygotsky's theory, children can do more with the help and guidance of an adult or a more experienced person than they can do by themselves (Maccarelli, 2006). Hardman et al. (2002) further state that a support program is of vital importance for enhancing cognitive and/or information-processing skills of an individual since it is designed to specifically address the education of individuals with disabilities and other special needs (EAHCA, 1975; FERPA, 1974; IDEA, 1990; Osher et al., 2002) who do not perform as well as normal children on some memory tasks (Hardman et al., 2002).

#### Teachers' Perceptions of Advantages and Disadvantages of a Support Program

This research question sought to measure teachers' perceptions of the challenges, advantages, and disadvantages of a support program for students with learning difficulties. Statements 46-48 of the survey questionnaire contained three open-ended

questions of teachers' perceptions of the challenges, advantages, and disadvantages of a support program as experienced while working with students with learning difficulties.

Many surveys were returned with no response to these items.

The perceived challenges experienced by teachers in working with students with learning difficulties can be categorized into two main areas: challenges to the teachers and challenges to the students. The challenges that teachers perceive in teaching students with learning difficulties were: lack of resources and time to effectively meet the needs, lack of support from parents, lack of expertise, lack of educational background, academic problem of students, behavior problem of students, and inappropriate class setting or size. The challenges also include lack of focus, concentration, and participation; inability to assess help for the difficulties; lack of support from staff; inability to achieve academic goal; and inability to meet academic standards. These seem to match closely issues experienced by students with learning difficulties as mentioned by Dobbins et al. (2007), Ingalls (2003), Matthews (2003), McMillan (1992), and Swanson (2001).

The perceived disadvantages in not having a support program when working with students with learning difficulties were categorized according to three main themes: disadvantages to the teachers, disadvantages to the students, and disadvantages to the school. The disadvantages that teachers perceive in teaching students experiencing learning challenges are: inability to identify students' needs, lack of student success, lack of professional and parental support, and behavior issues. The disadvantages that teachers perceive that students with learning challenges experience are: lack of help, students with special needs are unable to be enrolled into Adventist schools, low self-esteem, dissatisfied students, and unable to receive Adventist education. The disadvantages that

teachers perceive that the schools experience as it relates to learning challenges are: students leave the school to attend those that meet their needs; hence, enrollment would be affected. Schools, not competition, create partiality in the schools' mission and dissatisfied parents. The results are supported by Reynolds and Fletcher-Janzen's (2007) concept that when students with learning difficulties are placed in a general classroom without available academic support, appropriately meeting their different learning needs, then learning is actually non-effective and the students are at a disadvantage.

The perceived advantages in having a support program when working with students with learning difficulties can be put into three main categories: advantages to the students, teachers, and school. The advantages that teachers perceive in having a support program are: being able to meet needs of students, better prepared, improved performance of the class, available support, available expertise, less stress and frustration of classroom teacher, proper analysis of students' needs, and improved behavior of students. The advantages of having a support program in the schools as perceived by the teachers are: being able to meet needs of students, better prepared, improved performance of the class, available support and resources to students, available expertise, less stress and frustration of classroom teacher, proper analysis of students' needs, improved behavior of students, and improved enrollment. The advantages to students in having a support program in the schools as perceived by the teachers are: academic success, improved performance, available support, less stress and frustration, improved self-esteem, and improved behavior.

The results of this study support concepts mentioned by Eide and Eide (2006), Grigorenko (2008), Hardman et al. (2002), Johnson (1999), Klemek (2010), Raquette and

Tuttle (2003), and others that having a support program providing educational opportunities, resources, and academic enrichment for students who face learning difficulties will help them achieve academic and personal goals.

Although the survey did not provide any space for respondents' open-ended comments, some teachers sought ways to voice their personal concerns about the need for a support program. For example, several respondents wrote notes in the margins of the returned surveys. Due to the fact that the comments reflected what the teachers believed and that they gave a human voice to the perceptions being investigated, information is included in this discussion.

These statements reflect teachers' experiences in trying to go beyond their capability to help students who struggle to learn. Respondent A8 wrote, "Sometimes I become overburdened with challenges and I experience feelings of inadequacy as I try to reach these students." Another respondent (A7) wrote, "Having to devise my own strategies with lack of resources and limited know-how can be very frustrating." Also respondent A6 stated, "Students may leave my class at a disadvantage because I spend all of my time with those who need help while those who do not need extra help may suffer."

Other personal statements reflected a more positive outlook. One respondent (D11) wrote, "I have a small school and cannot afford a support staff. My students do receive individualized attention and we sometimes have volunteers to help." According to Bailey (2010), an effective teacher seeks ways to meet individual students' needs through best practices like small-group differentiated instruction or response to intervention. Supporting all learners with research-based instructional methods should be part of every

school day and should come more naturally to those teachers who are familiar with best practices (p. 122).

### **Limitations**

This study had several limitations. Limitations of a study consist of factors or conditions that are not within the researcher's control. It is that which can restrict the scope of the study or may even affect its outcome (Cline & Clark, 2000). The limiting factors of this study included:

1. Some respondents taught in multi-grade schools where they were not exclusively elementary school teachers, but also taught junior high or even high school students.
2. Some respondents functioned as administrators (principals, vice principals, etc.) where they were not exclusively teachers or administrators.
3. The study measured perceptions of teachers which assumed that perceived need and availability were actual indicators of need and availability, which may not actually be the case. However, since an individual's perception reflects his or her life experience, it therefore holds that the teachers' perceptions are a result of their experience.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend elementary schools operated by Atlantic Union (AU) Conference. The study also identified elements of a support program that teachers perceived as necessary for the

academic growth and development of the students. In summary, this study had the following findings:

1. AU Conference elementary school teachers perceive that there is a need for a support program to assist students experiencing learning difficulties.
2. AU Conference elementary school teachers desire that all elements of a support program be implemented in the schools.
3. AU Conference elementary school teachers perceive that a level of support is available to assist students experiencing learning difficulties.

### **Recommendations for Future Practice**

The development of a support program for students attending AU Conference elementary schools and experiencing learning difficulties would require a change in the educational system. According to the literature and the findings of this research, it is recommended that teachers, educational administrators, and policy makers consider the following:

1. Provide an opportunity for educators to share their perceptions of existing support programs and their impact on student success.
2. Implement a support program to address the needs of students experiencing learning difficulties.
3. Offer in-service/staff development on a regular basis to staff members who feel under-qualified in meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This survey of teachers' perceptions may be a mere starting point in investigating the availability/need for a support program to address the needs of students experiencing

learning difficulties. This research was limited to elementary schools located in a limited geographic area and operated by a single parochial organization. Extending this research to teachers at the middle and high school levels in a wider geographic area may be one means of gaining more information regarding the need of support programs for students who attend private/parochial schools and are experiencing learning difficulties.

There are other topics within this area worth further investigation. Topics include parents' perceptions of the need, administrators' perceptions of the need, and documentation of students' actual need through analysis of test scores, grade reports, and standardized tests. Exploring these topics would not only give educators more information on how to improve, promote, and establish support programs within their school setting, but would add to the literature that exists and provide more opportunities to create social changes in the community.

## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY QUESTIONS REFLECTING ELEMENTS OF A SUPPORT PROGRAM

## Survey Questions Reflecting Elements of a Support Program

Instruction Variable	Primary Variables	Survey Items	References
<p>The goal of having all students achieving high standards as reflected in performance standards, school curriculum, instructional method, assessment and evaluation</p>	<p>Element 1-Expand positive learning opportunities and results Objectives: 1. To engage students in culturally responsive and student centered opportunities to learn 2. To engage students in activities tailored to their individual needs 3. To engage students in extra-curricular activities that build academic and social skills</p>	<p>My students participate in support programs that: 1. Provide opportunities whereby they can be engaged in culturally responsive activities (Item 22) 2. Provide the help that they need to enhance their learning style (Item 23) 3. Provide activities tailored to meet their individual learning needs (Item 24) 4. Provide extra-curricular activities that build academic and social skills (Item 25) 5. Provide a functional curriculum to meet their individual cognitive, social, vocational, and behavioral needs (Item 26)</p>	<p>Adelman &amp; Taylor, 1994, p. 25 Adelman, &amp; Taylor, 2007, p. 71 Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6 U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, pp. 6-8 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3 Georgia Department of Education, 2008, p. 5 IDEA, 2004</p>
	<p>Element 2-Strengthening school and community capacity Objectives: 1-To foster initiatives that strengthens the capacity of schools and communities in serving students with learning difficulties in the least restrictive environment</p>	<p>My school: 1. Supports early intervention, prevention and pre-referral initiatives (Item 27) 2. Provides adequate support staff, like special education/inclusion teacher, guidance counselor, speech and language therapist, social worker, and educational psychologist to help the students (Item 28) 3. Supports active collaborations among regular and special educators, service providers and families (Item 29) 4. Teams special education teachers with regular educators in the classroom (Item 30)</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 9 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3</p>
	<p>Element 3-Value and addressing diversity Objective: To encourage positive collaborations among families, professionals, students, and communities in order to foster equitable outcomes for all students and result in the identification and provision of services that are responsive to issues.</p>	<p>My school provides opportunities that: 1. Cater to active collaborations among families, professionals, students and communities (Item 31) 2. Provide services that are responsive to issues of race, culture and gender (Item 32) 3. Recognize the family and the community as a critical part of the students' life (Item 33) 4. Provide the help that students need to enhance their different learning styles (Item 20)</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 10 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3</p>

## Survey Questions Reflecting Management/Governance Components

Management Variable	Primary Variables	Survey Items	References
<p>This component builds capacity in the system by organizing the instructional and student support components at all levels through planning, budgeting, staffing, directing, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting so that maximum use is made of available resources</p>	<p>Element 5-Promote appropriate assessment Objectives: 1. To promote practices ensuring that assessment is integral to the identification, design, and delivery of services for children with learning difficulties. These practices should be culturally appropriate, ethical, functional and ongoing.</p>	<p>My school: 1. Supports practical, timely and regular assessment in order to keep track of students' academic progress (Item 37) 2. Supports the use of assessment data in determining services for students' needs (Item 38) 3. Supports the use of assessment data in determining appropriate strategies to ensure that interventions are producing desired results (Item 39) 4. Supports early screening and identification of children with learning difficulties (Item 15) 5. Systematically identifies students with learning difficulties and refers such students to a committee for evaluation (Item 16) 6. Has a designated committee that develops an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students with learning difficulties (Item 17)</p>	<p>Adelman &amp; Taylor, 1994, p. 25 Adelman &amp; Taylor, 2007, p. 71 Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6 U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 12 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3 Georgia Department of Education, 2008 Georgia Board of Education Rule, 2000 IDEA, 2004</p>
<p></p>	<p>Element 7-Create comprehensive and collaborative systems Objectives: 1. To promote coherent services built around the individual needs of children with learning difficulties. These services should be family-centered, community-based, and appropriately funded.</p>	<p>My school: 1. Provides coherent services built around the needs of students, families and communities (Item 42) 2. Provides individualized and family-centered services that can respond promptly during any crisis (Item 43) 3. Provides ongoing training and workshops to educators, families, and other service providers in order to sustain networking (Item 44) 4. Provides individualized attention and related services to students with learning difficulties (Item 45)</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 14</p>

## Survey Questions Reflecting Support Component

Support Variable	Primary Variables	Survey Items	References
<p>This component seeks to displace barriers that affect student learning and ensures a smooth, seamless continuum of services catering to the academic and behavioral needs of the individual student</p>	<p>Element 4-Collaborates with family Objectives: 1. To foster active collaboration among family members in order to improve educational outcomes. Services should be open, helpful, culturally competent, accessible to families and schools as well as community-based.</p>	<p>My school: 1. Facilitates active parental involvement when planning assessments or when determining what services to provide the student (Item 34) 2. Provides family focused services in order to improve educational outcomes (Item 35) 3. Supports family-school interactions to build partnership in reflecting families' goals, knowledge and culture (Item 36) 4. Provides a needs coordinator who meets with parents and their children to discuss the plan of action for their child's academic growth (Item 21)</p>	<p>Adelman &amp; Taylor, 1994, p. 25 Adelman &amp; Taylor, 2007, p. 71 Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2003, p. 6 U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 11 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3 Georgia Department of Education, 2008 Georgia Board of Education Rule, 2000 IDEA, 2004</p>
	<p>Element 6-Provide ongoing skill development and support Objectives: 1. To cater to the enhancement of knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity among all who work with children having learning difficulties 2. To provide ongoing support and resources to strengthen the capacity of families, teachers, service providers, and others in order to collaborate, persevere, and improve outcomes of children with learning difficulties</p>	<p>My school: 1. There is a support program at my school to help students with learning difficulties (Item 14) 2. Provides adequate support staff (special education/inclusion teacher, guidance counselor, speech and language therapist, social worker, etc.) to help the students (Item 18) 3. Provides on going staff development that empowers teachers with the know-how to work effectively with children who have learning difficulties (Item 19) 4. Provides professional development that increases their capacity to teach students with learning difficulties (Item 40) 5. Provides opportunity for educators to share information and experiences regarding the diversity, the complexity of needs, and the potential for learning and growth of students with learning difficulties (Item 41) 6. List 3 challenges you face when working with students with learning difficulties (Item 46) 7. List 3 possible advantages of having a support program in your school (Item 47) 8. List 3 possible disadvantages of not having a support program in your school (Item 48)</p>	<p>U.S. Department of Education &amp; Office of Special Education, 1994, p. 13 Osher et al., 2002, p. 3</p>

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL

# Andrews University

Institutional Review Board Tel: (269) 471-6361 Fax: (269) 471-6543 E-mail: [irb@andrews.edu](mailto:irb@andrews.edu)  
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-0355

September 15, 2011

Ms. Lileth Coke

Tel:

Email: [lileth@andrews.edu](mailto:lileth@andrews.edu)

**RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

**IRB Protocol #:** 11-131 **Application Type:** Original **Advisor:** Larry Burton **Dept.:** TLC

**Title:** Teachers' perceptions of the need and availability of a support program for students with learning difficulties in elementary schools for the Atlantic Union Conference.

Your IRB application for research involving human subjects entitled: "Teachers' perceptions of the need and availability of a support program for students with learning difficulties in elementary schools for the Atlantic Union Conference" IRB protocol # 11-131 has been evaluated and determined to be Exempt under category *46.101 (b) (2)*. You may now proceed with your research.

We ask that you reference the protocol number in any future correspondence regarding this study for easy retrieval of information.

Please note that any future changes made to the study design and/or consent form require prior approval from the IRB before such changes can be implemented.

While there appears to be no more than minimum risks with your study, should an incidence occur that results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, this must be reported immediately in writing to the IRB. Any research-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University Physician, Dr. Hamel, by calling (269) 473-2222.

Please feel free to contact our office if you have any questions.

All the best in your research.

Sincerely,

Sarah Kimakwa

IRB, Research & Creative Scholarship

APPENDIX C

LETTERS

Letter to Atlantic Union Conference K-12 Board

From the desk of: **Lileth A. Coke**

4031 De Reimer Avenue Bronx, NY 10466  
Email [lileth@andrews.edu](mailto:lileth@andrews.edu)

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To: The K-12 Board  
Atlantic Union Conference Ed. Dept.  
P. O. Box 1189-400 Main Street  
S. Lancaster, MA 01561

Dear K-12 Board Members,

I am Lileth Coke, an educator of the Northeastern Conference Education Department and a PhD candidate of the Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Currently, I serve as the Director of Pupil Personnel Services at the Northeastern Conference Education Department. I am an ardent supporter of Adventist Education and one with a great passion for the establishment of a support program for students with learning difficulties.

I am presently completing research for my dissertation in the area of special education. The research requires a survey directed to all educators of the elementary schools in the Atlantic Union Conference and I am hereby requesting your permission to collect data from the teachers in the union.

Listed below is a brief summary of the research as well as the data collection process.

Dissertation Topic: Teachers' Perceptions of the Availability and Need of a Support Program for Students with Learning Difficulties in Elementary schools for the Atlantic Union Conference.

Participants: All teachers in the elementary schools, K-8, of the Atlantic Union Conference

Research Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of the availability and need for a support program for students experiencing learning difficulties and who attend elementary schools operated by AU Conference.

Data Collection: The data to be collected will be quantitative and in the form of a survey which will be distributed to all United States elementary schools in the Union.

The Office of Scholarly Research: The *Institutional Review Board (IRB)* of the Andrews University requires me to complete an application for approval to conduct human subject research and to follow preset guidelines as it relates to this type of research.

Please note that:

- The survey is intended **ONLY** for teachers of elementary schools.
- The survey is knowledge base.
- All teachers will be invited to participate in the research.
- The survey is intended **ONLY** for teachers of elementary schools located in the United States.
- The survey is anonymous.
- The only information that I will need is the address of the schools as well as the name of the principals.
- The teachers will receive the surveys via the school principals therefore there will be no need to disclose the teachers personalized addresses.

Thanks in advance for your favorable and immediate response.

Sincerely,

Lileth Coke

## Approval Letter From Atlantic Union Conference



SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST  
CHURCH

Atlantic Union Conference

Headquarters for the  
Northeast States & Bermuda

Post Office Box 1189  
400 Main Street  
South Lancaster, MA  
01561-1189 USA  
Telephone: (978) 368-8333  
Fax: (978) 368-7948  
<http://www.atlantic-union.org>

May 13, 2011

Lileth Coke  
4031 DeReimer Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10466

Dear Lileth:

This is to inform you that on May 11, 2011 the Union Board of Education took the following vote:

**DISSERTATION RESEARCH REQUEST—LILETH COKE** **11:32**  
**VOTED** to approve Lileth Coke's request to conduct a survey throughout the Atlantic Union.

I pray God's continued blessings on you as you proceed with your research. Thank you once more for your untiring efforts to strengthen Seventh-day Adventist Christian education in the Atlantic Union Conference.

Blessings,

Astrid Thomassian  
Director of Education

NAD Request Letter

From the desk of: **Lileth A. Coke**

4031 De Reimer Avenue Bronx, NY 10466

Email [lileth@andrews.edu](mailto:lileth@andrews.edu)

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February 8, 2010

Assoc. Dir. For Elementary/Curriculum  
North American Division  
12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904

Dear Ms. Debra Fryson:

My name is Lileth Coke and I presently work for the Northeastern Conference education Department.

I am currently completing a dissertation on the need of academic support for students attending Elementary Schools in the Atlantic Union Conference and am interested in the survey that was done by your department in 2007 which investigated the special education needs of students. I believe some of your findings will be helpful to this study and I am hereby seeking permission to reference it accordingly.

I appreciate your time in reading this email and look forward to hearing from you. I can be contacted at [lacoke@northeastern.org](mailto:lacoke@northeastern.org).

Thanks again.

Yours truly,  
Lileth Coke

## NAD Approval Letter

From: Debra Fryson [Debra.Fryson@nad.adventist.org](mailto:Debra.Fryson@nad.adventist.org)  
To: Lileth Coke [lileth@andrews.edu](mailto:lileth@andrews.edu)  
Subject: RE: NAD Request  
Tuesday - February 9, 2010 10:03 PM

Hi Lileth,  
The Inclusion Commission granted your request with one condition—that you share the results of your study when you are done.  
Much success,  
Debra

Corresponding Letter to AU Conference Education Director

From the desk of: **Lileth A. Coke**  
4031 De Reimer Avenue Bronx, NY 10466  
Email [lileth@andrews.edu](mailto:lileth@andrews.edu)

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October 10, 2011

Dear Mrs. Thomassian,

Thanks for granting me the permission to conduct a survey among the Atlantic Union Conference Educators. I am happy to inform you that the Andrews University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has now granted me approval to conduct the survey. Consequently this letter serves to inform you that the survey questionnaires will be sent to the schools for distribution on November 18, 2011. I would be very grateful if from an administrative point of view you could inform the Superintendents of the same for me.

Thank you again for your kind support, and we really appreciate your participation in this endeavor.

Yours truly,

Lileth Coke

## Letter to Principals

From the desk of: **Lileth A. Coke**  
4031 De Reimer Avenue Bronx, NY 10466  
Email [lileth@andrews.edu](mailto:lileth@andrews.edu)

---

November 28, 2011

Dear Principals,

Let me thank you for being the contact person at your school to help me conduct my research. Your graciousness is greatly appreciated and the efforts made will never be forgotten. As your fellow educator I work in the days with the Northeastern Conference, by night I am a doctoral student with the Andrews University, a wife and a mother of two daughters. If there is anything that I can do to assist you in your educational endeavors be assured that I will be happy to assist. The surveys included in this package are part of my Ph.D., program at Andrews University. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this study is to investigate educators' perceptions of the availability and need of a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend elementary schools operated by Atlantic Union Conference and to identify elements of a support program that are needed for the academic growth and development of these students. Be reminded that this research is a voluntary one and failure to participate will cause no penalty.

- Please find enclosed the Survey questionnaires for your school. Please distribute to ALL your teachers (if you have a faculty meeting within the week feel free to distribute and collect them within that setting).
- Please request that the surveys be completed and returned to you within three days the most.
- Please collect the completed survey questions from the teachers, ensure that the envelopes are sealed and that the teacher's name is not included (this will ensure anonymity and confidentiality).
- Please mail the surveys back to me in the postage paid envelope before the due date.

If there is any question or concern, please do not hesitate to contact me at [lileth@andrews.edu](mailto:lileth@andrews.edu)

Thank you again for your support, and we really appreciate your participation in this endeavor.

Sincerely,  
Lileth A. Coke, Researcher

Letter to Teachers

From the desk of: **Lileth A. Coke**  
4031 De Reimer Avenue Bronx, NY 10466  
Email Lileth@andrews.edu

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October 10, 2011

Dear Teacher,

This survey is part of my Ph.D. program at Andrews University. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers'/educators' perceptions of the need and availability of a support program for students with learning difficulties who attend elementary schools operated by the AU Conference and to identify elements of a support program that are needed for the academic growth and development of these students. Be reminded that this research is a voluntary one and failure to participate will cause no penalty.

The survey should take about 15 to 20 minutes and requires no name disclosure. Please complete the questionnaire, place it in the envelope provided, seal and return it to your principal within three days.

Thanks for your participation in this project and I wish you success in all your endeavors.

Sincerely,

---

Lileth Coke, Researcher

## APPENDIX D

### DISABILITY SERVICES IN PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS SURVEY (DSPS)

## Disability Services in Parochial Schools Survey (DSPS)

Dear Teacher/Educator: Your school has been selected to participate in a study designed to identify the need for a Support Program to cater to the needs of students with learning difficulties. *For the purpose of this study a child with learning difficulty refers to a student whose academic performance is below average for his or her age or grade level, is considered at-risk for failure or is identified as having special educational needs.* Be reminded that this research is a voluntary one and failure to participate will cause no penalty.

### PART I

These questions are about your background. Please check only one answer for each question.

**1) What position do you hold at your present school?**

- Teacher
- Teacher's Aide
- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**2) What is your employment status?**

- Full time
- Part time

**3) In what conference do you work?**

- Greater New York Conference
- New York Conference
- Northern New England Conference
- Northeastern Conference
- Southern New England Conference

**4) How many years have you been teaching in the AU Conference?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Yrs.

**5) What grade/s do you teach presently? Please check all that apply.**

- PK K Grade
- 1<sup>st</sup> Grade
- 2<sup>rd</sup> Grade
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade
- 4<sup>th</sup> Grade
- 5<sup>th</sup> Grade
- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade
- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**6) What is your highest level of education?**

- High School
- Associates of Arts Degree-A.A.
- Undergraduate Degree-B.S., B.A.
- Graduate Degree-M.A., M.S., M.Ed.
- Postgraduate Degree-PhD., Ed.D.

**7) In what emphasis is your degree/licensure? Please check all that apply.**

- General Education Elementary
- General Education Secondary
- Special Education/Inclusion
- Early Childhood
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**8) How many special education/inclusion classes have you completed at College/University level?**

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five and more

**9) How many hours of staff development workshops, relating to special education/inclusion, have you attended on an annual basis?**

- \_\_\_\_\_Hrs.

**10) On a scale of 1-9 rate your understanding/knowledge of learning difficulties/special education needs?**

- 9: A great deal
- 8:
- 7: Quite a bit
- 6:
- 5: Some degree
- 4:
- 3: Very little
- 2:
- 1: None at all

**11) How many children are enrolled in your class presently?**

- \_\_\_\_\_# in of students

**12) What is your gender?**

- Male
- Female

**13) What is your racial or ethnic background?**

- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Caribbean American
- Latino or Hispanic
- White or Caucasian
- Other \_\_\_\_\_



	<b>PRESENT</b> <i>“There is”</i>			<b>FUTURE</b> <i>“There should be”</i>		
<b>Questions about strengthening school capacity</b>						
The support program at my school:						
27. Supports early intervention, prevention and pre-referral initiatives.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
28. Provides adequate support staff, like special education/inclusion teacher, guidance counselor, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, social worker, and educational psychologist to help the students.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
29. Supports active collaborations among regular and special educators, service providers and families.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
30. Teams special education teachers with regular educators in the classroom.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
<b>Questions about valuing and addressing diversity</b>						
My school provides activities that:						
31. Cater to active collaborations among families, professionals, students and communities.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
32. Provide services that are responsive to issues of race, culture and gender?	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
33. Involve the family and the community as a critical part of the students’ life.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
<b>Collaboration with Family</b>						
The support program at my school:						
34. Facilitates active parental involvement when planning assessments or when determining what services to provide the student?	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
35. Provides family-focused services in order to improve educational outcomes?	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
36. Supports family-school interactions to build partnership in reflecting families’ goals, knowledge and culture.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
<b>Assessment Procedures</b>						
The support program at my school:						
37. Supports practical, timely and regular assessment in order to keep track of students’ academic progress.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
38. Supports the use of assessment data in determining services for students’ need.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
39. Supports the use of assessment data in determining appropriate strategies to ensure that interventions are producing desired results.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N

**Skills Development & Support**

At my school teachers participate in professional development that:

	<b>PRESENT</b> <i>"There is"</i>			<b>FUTURE</b> <i>"There should be"</i>		
40. Increase their capacity in teaching students with learning difficulties.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
41. Provides opportunities for them to share information and experiences regarding the diversity, the complexity of needs, and the potential for learning and growth of students with learning difficulties.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N

**A Comprehensive & Collaborative System**

The support program at my school:

	<b>PRESENT</b> <i>"There is"</i>			<b>FUTURE</b> <i>"There should be"</i>		
42. Provides coherent services built around the needs of students, families and communities.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
43. Provides individualized and family-centered services that can respond promptly during any crisis.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
44. Provides ongoing training and workshops to educators, families, service providers, etc. in order to sustain networking.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N
45. Provides individualized attention and related services to students with learning difficulties.	Y	NS	N	Y	NS	N

**PART III**

**Please share with us your added views about the need for a support program for students with learning difficulties in your School.**

46. List 3 challenges you face when working with students with learning difficulties?

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47. List 3 possible advantages of having a support program in your school?

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48. List 3 possible disadvantages of not having a support program in your school?

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**Thank you** for your response.

Please put your completed survey in the envelope provided and return it to your principal.

APPENDIX E

INSTRUMENT VALIDITY FORM

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND NEED OF A SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS FOR THE ATLANTIC UNION CONFERENCE.**

**INSTRUMENT VALIDITY RESPONSE FORM (Respondent)**

Thank you for testing and critiquing the survey instrument. As you validate each item please indicate your responses below. (You may use additional paper if necessary)

Questions	Yes	No			
Were the items clearly written and easy to read?	*				
Were the instruments concise and straightforward?	*				
Would anyone in your category find it easy to complete the instrument?	*				
Was 30 minutes adequate to complete the instrument?	*				
Was the length of the survey reasonable?	*				
Were there unclear or misunderstood word usages in the instrument?		*			
Comments					
What suggestions would you recommend for improving the survey instrument?					
List Suggestions					
What question on the survey do you consider to be unclear, irrelevant or should be rewritten or deleted? Please identify the item number you recommend to be corrected then check the one(s) that relate.					
Number of Item	Unclear	Irrelevant	Rewrite	Delete	Give your Recommendations
Other comments					

I authorize Lileth A. Coke, the researcher, to reference my comments in her dissertation:

Dr. C. Williams

Name

Dr. C. Williams

Signature

9.11.2010

Date

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND NEED OF A SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS FOR THE ATLANTIC UNION CONFERENCE**

**INSTRUMENT VALIDITY RESPONSE FORM (Respondent)**

Thank you for testing and critiquing the survey instrument. As you validate each item please indicate your responses below. (You may use additional paper if necessary)

Questions	Yes	No			
Were the items clearly written and easy to read?	*				
Were the instruments concise and straightforward?	*				
Would anyone in your category find it easy to complete the instrument?	*				
Was 30 minutes adequate to complete the instrument?	*				
Was the length of the survey reasonable?	*				
Were there unclear or misunderstood word usages in the instrument?		*			
Comments					
What suggestions would you recommend for improving the survey instrument?					
List Suggestions					
What question on the survey do you consider to be unclear, irrelevant or should be rewritten or deleted? Please identify the item number you recommend to be corrected then check the one(s) that relate.					
Number of Item	Unclear	Irrelevant	Rewrite	Delete	Give your Recommendations
Other comments					

I authorize Lileth A. Coke, the researcher, to reference my comments in her dissertation:

Dr. D. Amfo

Name

Dr. D. Amfo

Signature

9. 11. 2010

Date

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND NEED OF A SUPPORT PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS FOR THE ATLANTIC UNION CONFERENCE**

**INSTRUMENT VALIDITY RESPONSE FORM (Respondent)**

Thank you for testing and critiquing the survey instrument. As you validate each item please indicate your responses below. (You may use additional paper if necessary)

Questions	Yes	No			
Were the items clearly written and easy to read?	*				
Were the instruments concise and straightforward?	*				
Would anyone in your category find it easy to complete the instrument?	*				
Was 30 minutes adequate to complete the instrument?	*				
Was the length of the survey reasonable?	*				
Were there unclear or misunderstood word usages in the instrument?		*			
Comments					
What suggestions would you recommend for improving the survey instrument?					
List Suggestions					
What question on the survey do you consider to be unclear, irrelevant or should be rewritten or deleted? Please identify the item number you recommend to be corrected then check the one(s) that relate.					
Number of Item	Unclear	Irrelevant	Rewrite	Delete	Give your Recommendations
Other comments					

I authorize Lileth A. Coke, the researcher, to reference my comments in her dissertation:

Mrs. V. Walker

Name

Mrs. V. Walker

Signature

10.11.2010

Date

## REFERENCE LIST

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