

Communication in Support of Students with Disabilities Attending Career Technical Education

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates information sharing practices between comprehensive high schools and an offsite Career Technical School with a focus on Students With Disabilities (SWD). The case study approach examined how student information is communicated in support of new federal and state policies related to college and career preparedness. Bolman and Deal's Four Frame Model for Organizational Change serves as the theoretical framework. The study participants included Special Education teachers, Career Technical Teachers and Administrators of Curriculum and Instruction. Findings included organizations operate separately, resulting in minimal CTE teacher input in IEP development and implementation; lack of targeted professional development for teachers at both organizations; and lowered expectations of SWD. Implications and suggestions for education leadership to align structures and promote collaboration to facilitate SWD learning are examined.

Keywords: Students with Disabilities, Career Technical Education, CTE, Communication, IEP, Information Sharing, Organization Leadership, Bolman and Deals Leadership Change Model

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Current education reform policies are responding to labor market needs by accentuating support for academic and vocational training that prepares public school graduates for both college and workplace opportunities (White House Report, 2015; Ravitch & Mathis, 2010). Schools collectively must address all students' needs, especially students with disabilities who will require additional support as new legislation frames how schools will address learning expectations. Educational organizations that share students, particularly Students With Disabilities (SWD), must form an intentional, collaborative relationship between agencies to meet the needs of students and provide accountability to achieve the intentions of legislation.

Two pieces of contemporary legislation, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (White House Report, 2015), and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (Meeder & Suddreth, 2012), include language strongly in support of college and career readiness objectives. These policies are in place to provide educational organizations with a framework to structure their programs to meet the dual objectives of college and career preparedness for their students.

The first policy, ESSA, requires states to align their academic standards with college entrance requirements and to address career technical education in public schools

(Darling-Hammond, Bae, Cook-Harvey, Mercer, Podolsky, & Stosich, 2016). ESSA is an educational plan to ensure students graduating high school are college and career ready and emphasizes high-quality academic standards (White House Report, 2015). ESSA has the support of the Alliance for Excellent Education, a national policy organization working to advocate for high-risk, marginalized students, who are at greater peril of not completing school due to disengagement and lack of achievement (Achieve Inc., 2012). The second initiative, adopted at the state level, is the Common Core State Standards. These standards offer a clear set of academic goals and expectations for students in grades K-12. The standards align with ESSA, "so that many more students than at present can meet requirements of college and career readiness" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Forty-two states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the CCSS with the goal of ensuring high school graduates have the skills to succeed in a competitive labor market and are prepared for the global workforce (Mathis, 2010).

Accordingly, education organizations are working to align programs to address the shift in focus to career and college readiness. CTE is delivered through various educational organizations, to include comprehensive high schools, regional career centers, statewide technology institutions, and community colleges (Brand, B., Valent, A., & Browning, 2013), and at each organization where direct teaching and student learning are taking place there is a responsibility and accountability related to student achievement (Elmore, 2000). Understanding how communication between agencies is taking place is needed to address alignment with the intention of informing student needs.

Statement of the Problem

The current shift towards an integrated educational approach focused on college and career readiness requires schools to analyze how they are meeting the needs of students with disabilities (SWD). The current reform agenda means secondary schools still face the challenge of providing SWD access to general education opportunities in both curricula and experiential learning opportunities (Harvey & Koch, 2004). Often CTE is delivered through various educational organizations, so more than one organization is involved in ensuring student achievement. Understanding how comprehensive high schools and career technical schools communicate and share information in support of students with disabilities is a crucial component in assisting and promoting student achievement. With CTE serving a key role in the success of SWD, there is a need to explore current information sharing and communication between sites serving this group of students. Limited research currently addresses how comprehensive high schools and career technical schools communicate to meet the needs of SWD enrolled in CTE. To address this gap in the literature, a multi-case study inclusive of three school sites explored the themes of communication, information sharing, and current practices.

Overview of the Literature

The benefits of special education and general education teacher communication and collaboration are abundant in the literature (Brownell, Ross, Colón, & McCallum, 2005;

Ripley, 1997; Sharpe & Hawes, 2003; Van Garderen, Stormont, & Goel, 2012; Winn & Blanton, 2005). The models typically presented include collaborative consultation, co-teaching, and cooperative teaching; they offer examples of special education teachers and general education teachers working together to meet the needs of SWD in the same educational setting (Van Garderen et al., 2012). However, there exists a lack of confirmation about how communication is occurring between special education teachers at comprehensive high schools and CTE teachers located at off-site career technical schools working with SWD.

In a survey study by Schmalzried (2010), current practices related to communication and dissemination of information concerning SWD between stand-alone CTE centers and high schools participating at these CTE centers. The study found that there was no standard protocol utilized to share information related to SWD, and there was a general lack of understanding of whose obligation it was to share and provide data associated with SWD. A high rate of respondents reported having limited knowledge of how student data was shared. Additionally, many respondents did not hold the belief that regular correspondence occurred between standalone career technical schools and high schools to support SWD.

In another study, Cotton (2000) addressed the nature of the interaction between 527 CTE teachers and various support personnel, including special educators. While the results indicated that interaction among the different groups of support persons was occurring, there was an identified need by CTE teachers that "indicated a strong desire for additional training for working with students with special needs" (p. 37). The highest area of need was in understanding their role and involvement in the special education IEP process for their students.

Furthermore, challenges to the communication process were examined in a study by Casale-Giannola (2011). The qualitative research examined CTE instructors teaching in over ten career path classrooms. The findings indicated that many CTE teachers did not understand who to communicate with for information associated with working with SWD. Over half of the respondents did not fully understand the labels associated with special education classifications, and many of the CTE teachers lacked the knowledge of the useful application of support strategies for inclusion of SWD.

Legislative Underpinnings

Several federal mandates underpin the full inclusion of SWD in CTE by explicitly addressing equal access to education. Three legal directives bolster the presence of SWD in career technical education. First, ESSA, supports critical safeguards for students characterized as high-need, as well as underscores, increased academic rigor in line with college and career readiness standards. Second, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), seeks to provide the needed services and accommodations to SWD to offer an appropriate educational setting. A third act, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act (IV), affords SWD equal access to a full range of career and vocational education opportunities (Kornhaber, Griffith & Tyler, 2014). All three federal mandates require a free, appropriate, public education for SWD and appropriate accommodations and modifications to access the curriculum.

Benefits of Career Technical Education Participation

Participation in a CTE program by SWD has shown to have multiple positive outcomes associated with school engagement: (1) the enrollment and successful completion of a career technical education course has proven to be an efficient way of engaging SWD in occupational skill development; (2) enrollment in a CTE program by SWD leads to a decrease in the high school dropout rate for this subgroup; and (3) there is an increase in high school graduation rates when participation in CTE is a factor (Harvey, 2003; Harvey, Cotton & Koch, 2007; Wagner, Newman & Javitz, 2015). Involvement in CTE also has a positive impact on student's post-graduation. The research indicates that SWD who participate in a career technical education (CTE) program significantly increase their opportunities for postsecondary achievement in both academia and employment (Harvey, Cotton, Koch, 2007). Additionally, these students also showed an increased tendency to vie for competitive wage jobs and to work full time after high school (Wagner, Newman & Javitz, 2015; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Roles and Responsibilities

The Special education teacher. Teacher perceived stress and heavy workload appear to be recurring refrains in studies of special education teachers (Brownell et al., 1999; Mastropieri, 2001). One can speculate that adding any more tasks to this existing workload would be resisted, particularly ones that require spending time to figure out a process, or that are not a requirement of the organization. This information contributed to an understanding of possible teacher attitudes that influenced the overall findings.

The role of the CTE teacher. The role of the CTE teacher is critically important in this study because he/she is providing practical experience that would facilitate employment for individual students who take these classes. Wonacott (2001) identified two key job responsibilities. First, CTE teachers must provide direct instruction to SWD in the classroom. CTE teachers are unique as they instruct students in work-based activities as part of the instructional component of the course. Secondly, CTE teachers provide unique information on student progress toward IEP goals, information on the needed supports to increase access in a vocational curriculum, and can serve as the career component in the IEP transition process (Wonacott, 2001). Accordingly, bringing the two teachers together in a timely manner to discuss the collective interest and subsequent accountability of a student they have in common is best practice and in agreement with the law of IDEA 1997 (Menlove, Hudson, & Suter, 1999). The law calls for at least one of the student's general education teachers to be present at the IEP meeting if the student participates in a general education class.

Teacher Perceptions

A quantitative study conducted in Utah by Menlove et al. (1999) surveyed 123 teachers in both general education and special education in grades K-12 to rate their level of satisfaction with the IEP process. The results show general education teachers were least likely to be satisfied with the IEP process overall. General education teachers also reported feeling it was a misuse of time associated with additional work. Surprisingly,

results showed that most teachers felt additional training in the IEP process would not be helpful. This finding is meaningful as it may be the result of existing stress associated with working with SWD, and the general education teachers' input not being valued in the IEP process. In another study, Liu (2015) also investigated teacher perceptions of the IEP. The findings show a commonality of each teacher expressing concern associated with the implementation of accommodations and modifications in agreement with the IEP into their classroom. The themes of time and increased workload were consistent in both studies, with general education teachers having a mostly negative perception of the IEP and its implementation. Also notable is the negative perception of the secondary school general education teachers regarding the IEP.

Leadership Challenges

The current leadership in the form of program directors, stakeholders, and policymakers in CTE programs face challenges related to a variety of issues and difficulties. Studies by Watba and Farmer (2006) and later by Clark, Farmer, and Welch (2010) utilized program reports to distinguish and classify career technical education issues as understood by the CTE leadership in Pennsylvania. These studies explored what CTE leadership views as current major leadership problems to inform decision-making. The more recent study by Clark et al. (2010) queried 60 CTE administrators. Twelve significant issues emerged, which researchers then grouped into four categories: professional development, leadership, curriculum and instruction, and image and perception. The highest rated issue was that of professional development to provide training for CTE teachers to engage learners and to increase success for SWD. Professional development, direct instruction, as well as CTE image and perception, are current areas of focus for CTE leadership (Schmalzried, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to discover the current practices of communication and information sharing occurring between two comprehensive high schools in one Southern California district that send students, including SWD, to one offsite career technical school. The study concentrates on the perceived strengths, problems, and gaps in meeting the needs of SWD at these sites with the intention of providing the necessary support and resources to address their issues and challenges. The following questions facilitated further understanding of communication and information sharing between sites:

Research Question 1: What are the current policies and practices occurring at two comprehensive high schools and an offsite Career Technical School concerning information sharing for students with disabilities who attend both sites?

Research Question 2: How is communication currently taking place between comprehensive high schools and an offsite Career Technical School and who are the participants involved?

Research Question 3: What are the strengths, problems, and gaps identified by staff at comprehensive high schools and an offsite Career Technical School about the needs of students with disabilities and their Individual Education Plans?

Theoretical Framework

Bolman and Deal's Organization Change Model (2002) was the theoretical framework of the study. Using the four frames: political frame, symbolic frame, structural frame, and human resource frame, this model delineates a structured approach to exploring organizational structure, mission statements, and learning objectives. The model permitted scaffolding for understanding and interpreting organizational structures, ideas, and processes that make them dynamic (Knights & McCabe, 2003).

Methodology

This study intended to develop meaning of the constructs involved in organization information sharing and collaboration through qualitative interviews with the participants (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). A qualitative research design provided an in-depth description, analysis, and explanation of the context and participants (Lee, 1999). A purposive sampling scheme was chosen based on information from Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) to make this multi-case study more explicit and to make the "data and explanatory schemes as public and replicable as possible" (Denzin, 1978). The researcher recruited a homogenous group of "information rich" participants whose job responsibilities included working with special education students attending two sites. (Patton, 2002). Participant pool size was based on recommendations from Morse (1994), who suggests interviewing six or more participants when exploring a shared experience. Participants included six special education teachers, three CTE teachers, and three vice principals. The two comprehensive high school sites were in the same Southern California school district, and each school averaged 2,500 full-time equivalent students. This researcher interviewed three special education teachers at each site, and the assistant principal responsible for Curriculum and Instruction. Participants at the career technical school included three teachers, as well as the assistant principal responsible for Curriculum and Instruction. The career technical school served students from both comprehensive high schools. Pseudonyms are used for the schools throughout the study.

Organization of Study

The researcher explored three organizational units in Southern California to include: two comprehensive high schools in the same district and one career technical school. The career technical school offers career technical classes for high school students during the day, and enrollment was available to all students attending both high schools in the study. Structurally, all three organizations functioned as separate systems (Figure 1). They had a similar bureaucratic hierarchy, their mission statements aligned, and there was a common charge of educating some of the same students. All three locations functioned as traditional campuses with students attending classes during the day, and all following similar school calendars. At each of the three educational sites, the overall mission

statements were analogous and had the goal of empowering and preparing students for academic endeavors, and to succeed in the 21st century's competitive global economy by promoting quality instructional opportunities and partnerships. This idea falls squarely in Bolman and Deal's human resource frame in that it examines how the organization's mission is in alignment with human needs.

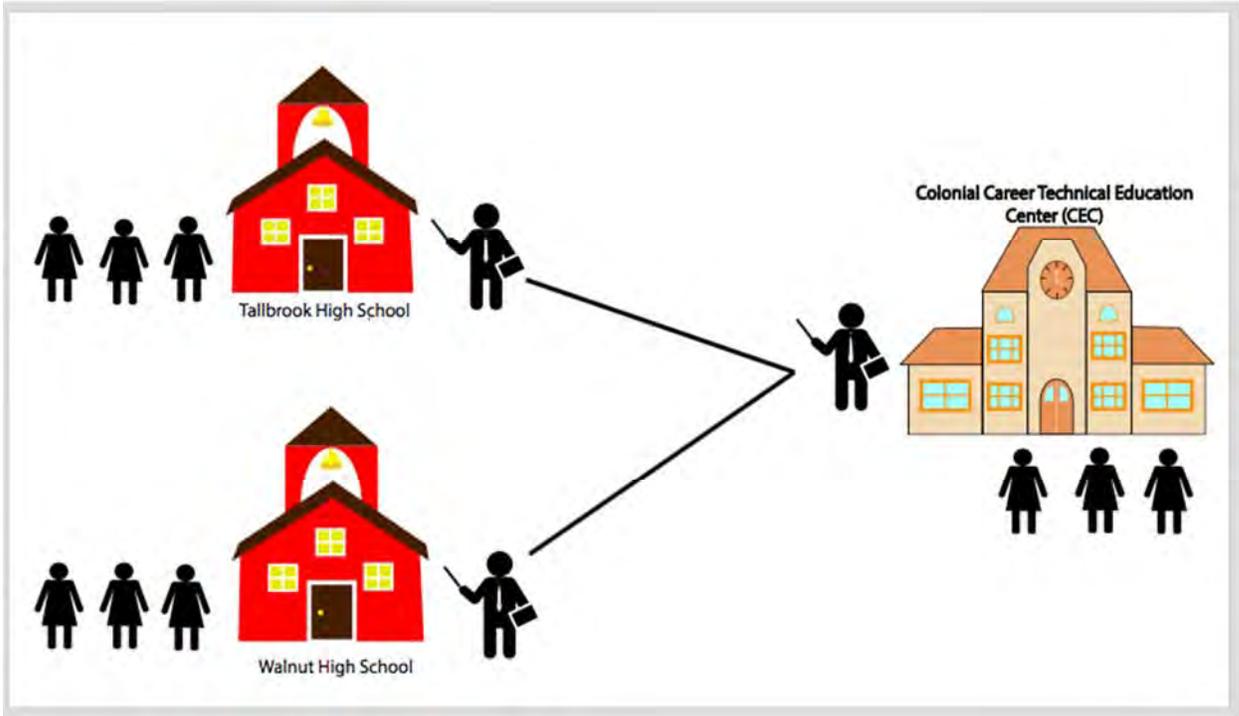


Figure 1. Communication and information sharing related to students with disabilities attending a comprehensive high school, while concurrently attending the Career Technical School.

Results

Overall, findings included organizations operate separately, resulting in minimal CTE teacher input in the Special Education Individual Education Plan (IEP) development and implementation; lack of targeted professional development for teachers at both organizations; and lowered career expectations for SWD organizations operate separately, resulting in minimal teacher input in the Special Education Individual Education Plan (IEP) development.

Discussion

Organizations Operating Separately

The theme of organizations operating autonomously impacted how participants at each organization communicated with one another. The study found that despite laws requiring the sharing of information, and the opinion that communication was important, if not "vital," it seldom occurred promptly or did not happen at all due to a lapse in the information sharing process. The cause of this time lag was attributed to a lack of a formalized process or official practice for communication between organizational sites.

The literature supports that teachers of SWD believe that information sharing in support of this population is important, but it can be difficult to maintain (Walcott, 2007). In this study, the lack of information exchange among teachers was underpinned by several contributing factors: (a) the absence of a shared system between organizations impeding the tracking of student attendance, grades, and behavior in real time, (b) there was a lack of published and disseminated teacher contact information; and (c) the current process for obtaining student information was time-consuming and inconvenient for teachers. These issues impact the process a teacher will need to go through to engage in the information sharing process. The literature review confirms that Special Education teachers feel overwhelmed by the increasing demands of working with SWD and special education paperwork (Brownell, Miller & Smith, 1999; Mastropieri, 2001). Although there were a few instances of Special Education teachers and CTE teachers communicating on behalf of a student, "convenience" was mentioned as a reason for communication not occurring more often.

Disjointed Communication

The second research question addressed what communication was currently taking place between comprehensive high schools and one regional Career Technical School and who are the participants involved. The information showed that interaction between sites on behalf of SWD is occurring, although the degree to which it is happening is dependent upon the role of the participant; administrators stated there was more communication occurring than the teacher participants reported. The bulk of information sharing took place between school counselors and CTE registration support staff as part of the enrollment process when SWD were registered in career technical courses. Teacher participants at each organization had uncertainty in knowing the specific student paperwork shared between sites.

Best practices require that the information shared on behalf of SWD attending other organizations be the most up to date and informative documentation. This information serves to notify teachers they are working with SWD, assist them in preparing for any modifications in the curriculum and make them aware of required accommodations needed by SWD per their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The literature supports that it is the responsibility of the CTE teacher to provide direct instruction to SWD in the classroom. Additionally, CTE teachers are responsible for providing information on student progress toward IEP goals, including the needed supports and accommodations utilized by the SWD in CTE, as well as be an educational team member in the IEP process (Wonacott, 2001). These responsibilities are substantial, especially given the study's findings that student information is arriving late to the Career Technical School site, routinely after classes have already started. Missing paperwork is at the core of the communication process. CTE teachers were often left to speculate about students' learning differences when they arrive in a CTE class with no paperwork identifying them as students receiving special education services. A lack of timely information translates into losing valuable time in the learning process.

The weight of the above issue is compounded by the study's findings and supported by the research indicating that CTE teachers lack proper training in educational pedagogy and teaching methodologies (Cotton, 2000; Dortch, 2012; Ruhland & Bremer, 2003). In this study, CTE teachers had positive attitudinal responses related to working with SWD despite operating in an educational capacity without necessary information and proper training.

Interestingly, communication between special education teachers and CTE teachers was negligible after the enrollment process of students at the Career Technical School. There existed a lack of understanding regarding whose duty it was to share and provide data related to students with disabilities, revealing a structural breakdown. If a problem occurred or information was needed, most teachers at the sites sought out counselors or administrative office staff to assist in tracking down the information or responsible party. When teachers did try to make contact to find out student information, participant responses illuminated an additional limiting factor in communication; the narrow funnel of transference of information through the high school counseling offices. Gaps were identified in the overall communication process being centered on counselors at the comprehensive high schools as they currently serve as the conduits between organizational sites. This shortcoming means the established communication process was not inclusive and left out key individuals who can assist in addressing student needs. The counselors were the nexus for information sharing between sites almost out of necessity, as there was also a lack of shared information in the form of a teacher contact list at any site to facilitate open communication between teachers. Most teachers at the different organizations had never met face to face, and in many instances, had never talked on the phone or corresponded through email. Research by Schmalzried, 2010, supports the need for concern if communication and information sharing is not taking place in support of SWD. This concern is even greater for students attending an educational organization

outside their high school setting, as communication and information sharing is a way of addressing student's educational needs and informing the IEP (Schmalzried, 2010).

Meeting the Needs of SWD

The third research question explored the strengths, problems, and gaps in the communication process identified by staff at comprehensive high schools and a regional career technical school to inform the education process. Findings included a lack of understanding among participants what information is shared between sites to inform the teachers of a student's needs. Additionally, the student information that is shared by the comprehensive school sites is not making it to the Career Technical School promptly, and this was a chief complaint echoed by all Career Technical School participants in the study. Additionally, a lack of CTE teacher involvement in the IEP process was a problem area noted by study members at each organization. Bringing teachers together to discuss the collective interest and subsequent accountability of a student they have in common is best practice and in agreement with the law of IDEA '97 (Menlove, 1999).

Furthermore, a lack of professional training was a critical issue for teachers in the study. Preparing CTE teachers to work with SWD and understand their diverse learning needs should be a component in all CTE certification programs (Harvey, 1999), yet it was not happening to a satisfactory degree. CTE teachers in the study stated classroom behavior was one of the reasons they sought out special education teacher input. Special education teachers indicated a lack of knowledge on CTE course requirements, rigor, and curriculum. An interesting finding was that no special education teacher participant noted that additional training or professional development was needed for him/her to understand what was required of SWD in these courses. This response contradicted what several special education participants said about not knowing the rigor and requirements of many CTE courses. The Human Resource Frame of Bolman and Deal's Model (2002), emphasizes human involvement as a primary catalyst for organizational effectiveness.

Key Recommendations

The following three steps are suggested for leadership to begin to address the communication chasm. The lack of formalized policy and practices in the information sharing process is a current educational leadership challenge (Clark et al., 2010). To address this issue, organizational alignment between education systems will take purposeful and determined leadership. Educational leadership from both organizations should work towards supporting SWD across systems in line with current legislation; compare organizational policies and practices with current capabilities; combine available resources; structure and promote best practices in information sharing, and work towards their shared educational mission.

First, the recommendation for school leadership to take in increasing communication in support of SWD is to work collaboratively with other organizations to align current policies and practices. Per Bolman and Deal, this step concentrates on a strategy; a plan that sets measurable goals for increasing communication between organizations by creating and putting into place systems and procedures needed to align organizational

structures. The Bolman and Deal's Organizational Change Model from the orientation of the structural frame assumes that "schools work best when goals and roles are clear and when diverse efforts are tightly coordinated through authority, policies, and rules" (Bolman & Deal, 2010, p. 4). The plan will need to outline a clear structure of functional relationships or connections through which teachers, administrators, and counselors can solicit teacher guidance, input on IEP's, and receive professional development on best teaching practices. Leadership also needs to address responsibilities and provide a framework of rules and regulations that have a tiered level of responsibility to ensure system checks.

The lack of communication currently taking place between organizations is a leadership challenge. Alignment across organizations is not an easy task, but having a similar organizational structure and educational mission makes it less convoluted. The organizations in the study had comparable mission, goals, and objectives that were in harmony with one another and spoke to a shared purpose of preparing students for their futures, yet there was a dearth in communication between sites on behalf of shared SWDs, attending both sites. Remarkably, career technical education leadership has acknowledged gaps in coordinating CTE to meet rigorous scholastic guidelines, staff professional development needs, and providing meaningful educational capacity for all students (Clark, Farmer & Welch, 2010). Participants in the study were candid as to what needed to happen to address the communication disjointedness. Participants' narratives aligned with findings from Schmalzried (2010), indicating a need for additional effort in building up and actualizing more predictable coordination of efforts between CTE and comprehensive high schools. Making communication between sites a priority would require purposeful leadership. In looking at the job descriptions for CTE teachers, and special education teachers there lacked clarity concerning the roles and responsibility for the engagement of these individuals in cooperative and collaborative relationships. By being informed of a communication chasm between organizations, educational administrations can now act on and garner input through strategies that set objectives and coordinate resources.

The second recommendation for leadership to increase communication between organizations serving SWD falls within the Human Resources Frame of Bolman and Deals Four Frame Leadership Model; garnering and promoting the participation of stakeholders. Eliciting the collective knowledge between and amongst CTE teachers, special education teachers, counselors, support personnel, and Vice Principal Administrators at each organization to assist in coordinating efforts in support of SWD is paramount to student success. Research by Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, (2003) identified leadership practices that directly impacted student achievement, which included increasing communication among staff and stakeholders and establishing order in the form of predictable, structured roles and procedures. Communication problems and gaps require CTE leadership to involve the very stakeholders, the individuals that work directly with SWD, in the analysis of the issues. This supposition is underpinned by Bolman and Deal's (2002) assertion that educators and principals preferred the human resource frame as it accentuates a cooperative 'family' image; one in which individuals function best in a caring, supportive environment; and one that requires buy-in from

teachers in connecting the communication gap. Utilizing this frame emphasizes individuals within an organization, and sees human buy-in and involvement as the needed factor for effective organizational change. When people are provided opportunities to participate in decision-making actively, this promotes commitment. Conversely, when individuals have no voice in the decision-making process, and their input is not valued, organizations are less likely to have committed and engaged employees.

Professional development was a highlighted area of need in career technical education, specifically in working with SWD (Clark et al., 2010). CTE teachers have stated they need and want to have access to information and to understand special education law to support working with SWD. There are challenges in establishing autonomy and interdependence; in this case, CTE teachers have too much independence, which manifests itself as a perceived lack of support. By providing training to CTE teachers in working with SWD, teachers will have the resources to meet an expressed need.

Under the direction of leadership, school sites need to adopt a team approach to the goal of supporting SWD attending two organizations with the intent of having a positive impact on student achievement. The team should consist of stakeholders previously mentioned who are involved in the planning, scheduling, enrolling, monitoring and success of SWD. The recommendation for forming a team would include administration from both organizations, the comprehensive school site guidance counselor, administrative support from the career technical school, the special education teacher, the CTE teacher, parents, community liaisons responsible for job placement and students. The recommendation is made that a "teacher on special assignment" (TOSA), head up the team and serve as the liaison between organizations to facilitate open communication amongst stakeholders and optimize organizational alignment.

Bolman and Deal discuss the challenges of moving separate organizational structures in tandem by identifying the common viewpoints of numerous stakeholders as a term known as "conceptual pluralism: a jangling discord of multiple voices" (Bolman and Deal, 1997, p. 11). Under the direction of leadership, school sites need to adopt the team approach mentioned above as a way of supporting SWD attending two organizations. The diversity of group stakeholders provides multiple viewpoints that address "conceptual pluralism," offering a variety of perspectives. The TOSA will be responsible for establishing lines of communication which foster rapport between education professionals working with shared students. This forged partnership, in turn, will increase the opportunity for teacher feedback centered on student achievement. Finding time for participants from both organizations to come together when an IEP is held may still present issues regarding convenience, but this problem can be creatively addressed through teleconferencing, video input or group email. The critical focus is on creating dialog on behalf of the students and centered on meeting their needs, and an increase in communication would be a significant improvement.

The third recommendation for increasing communication is for leadership to work collectively towards coordinating technology and tasks across systems. This task is accomplished by creating district protocols that extend past the walls of the brick and

mortar schools, and that encourage and promote the use of technology to inform and support SWD across organizations. Local control funding and Every Student Success Act (ESSA) is permitting states, and local districts increased autonomy, as well as flexibility in setting goals with a focus on improving student achievement. ESSA provides for measuring student success and progress through other indicators besides standardized test scores in math and Language Arts. With the literature supporting the benefits of attendance in career education for SWD, the emphasis on assuring that communication is productively occurring between organizations will have positive outcomes for not only students but also for school accountability purposes. The lines of communication should be open and fluid, allowing for seamless access to student attendance, grades, counselors, and teacher emails. Open lines of communication would require a combined effort from both organizations to design protocols and align systems in support of the shared communication effort. These issues will need leadership to look carefully at coordinating technology and tasks across systems.

Career technical schools and comprehensive schools currently operating in different silos need to make the technology leap and work towards an integrated system between organizations. Per Yang and Maxwell (2011), "Information sharing is considered an important approach to increasing organizational efficiency and performance. With advances in information and communication technology, sharing information across organizations has become more feasible" (p. 164). An initial step in promoting communication may include making teacher contact information more accessible to staff, teachers, and guidance counselors working at each site; starting with the dissemination of a contact list through a shared online server that is regularly updated to keep pace with changes in student's schedules. This step is a small change, but given current technological advances related to informing individuals across organizations, an aligned data system would be a positive move towards organizational alignment.

Limitations

This study was exploratory and looked at communication between three educational sites working with and on behalf of SWD. With the intended purpose of providing a baseline for other districts and educational sites with a similar structure, this material can be informative; however, any broad suppositions cannot be made beyond the boundaries of this study. A limited number of participants were in the study as only selected teachers and administrators operating in specific organizations were asked to participate. This limitation impacted the breadth and depth of feedback, as the researcher did not query additional CTE instructors, special education teachers, and administrators. Further limitations to this study included a strong regional focus, data collection confined to three educational sites, and the utilization of qualitative methodology in the form of personal interviews, which have the highest chance of interview bias (Merriam, 2014).

Conclusion

This study focused on exploring communication and information sharing on behalf of SWD attending two educational organizations in Southern California and may assist

other agencies with similar organizational models in responding to the needs of SWD. The findings from this study are consistent with other research in this field and provide added understanding and insight into what is occurring to support SWD attending two educational organizations as they work to gain career knowledge and skills. The perspectives of the participants in the study aid in an overall understanding of current information sharing practices between organizations, with the goal of increasing support for SWD attending both sites. Applying what was learned in this study and creating pilot protocols that address communication between educational organizations and speak to participants' concerns would be a valuable exploration to undertake.

This study contributed to the existing body of knowledge in the field of communication and information sharing practices between organizations in support of SWD attending more than one site in an educational context. However, broad generalizations need to be made with caution. The study findings suggest several recommendations for district agencies, comprehensive high schools, and local Career Technical Schools. Additional recommendations are also relevant to state policymakers, the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) office, and school boards responsible for ensuring a free appropriate public education to all students with identified disabilities according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act PL 94-142 (amended by PL 108-446, 2004).

The relevance of and need for increased communication between educational sites sharing SWD has been established in peer-reviewed research and supported by this study's findings, there is communication, but it is limited and fragmented at best. Schools are accountable for student achievement (Elmore, 2000) and there exist a responsibility and liability for addressing student success. New educational policies and statutes are changing the way education leadership needs to address student achievement in CTE programs. Schools should no longer be operating in silos and should instead utilize reform policies to bolster their accountability measures; this can be done by following models of communication practices which increase CTE involvement in individual education planning for SWD. The research illuminates the need for special education and CTE leadership to address the multiple issues impacting a disjointed system to increase student achievement and providing the supports necessary for career attainment in an increasingly specialized labor market.

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