



MASE FALL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

# Stressed and Struggling: How School Settings and Experience Shape Special Educator Burnout

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## *Education and Licensure*

- Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, **University of Colorado, Boulder**
- Masters of Social Work, **University of Southern California**
- Doctor of Education, **Bethel University**
- **Licensure**
  - Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW)
  - Licensed School Social Worker
  - Director of Special Education



## *Professional Experience*

- Outpatient Psychotherapist, **University of Southern California Counseling Center**
- Outpatient Psychotherapist, **Northeast Youth and Family Services**
- School Social Worker (Federal Setting IV), **Minneapolis Public Schools**
- School Social Worker (Federal Setting IV), **Intermediate District 287**
- 5+ years of school administrative leadership, serving as District Special Education Coordinator for the **Westonka Public School District**

## *Higher Education Experience*

- Adjunct Instructor & Dissertation Advisor/Reader, **Bethel University**
- Adjunct Faculty: Dissertation Chair, **UMASS Global**
- Dissertation Advisor/Reader, **Concordia University**
- Former Program Director, M.A. in Special Education; Adjunct Instructor, Field Specialist & University Supervisor, **Saint Mary's University**



## *Administrative, Teaching & Board Experience*

- 23+ years of administrative leadership, serving as Director, Principal, Assistant Principal, Program Supervisor Level IV, and District Supervisor across Pre K through higher education
- 20 years of teaching experience spanning K–12 and higher education, plus paraprofessional roles
- 8 years of service on three governing boards

## *Education and Licensure*

- Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, **University of Minnesota-Duluth**
- Masters of Science in Special Education/EBD, **Minnesota State University**
- Doctor of Education Leadership, Policy & Administration, **University of St. Thomas**
- **Licensure:** EBD and SLD, Director of Special Education, K-12 Principal, and Superintendent

## *Identify*

key findings from a statewide study on special education teacher burnout in Minnesota.

## *Explore*

teacher-reported experiences of burnout in relation to both their educational setting and the challenges of meeting diverse student needs.

## *Recognize*

how systematic factors such as administrative support and workload influence teacher well-being more than instructional setting or experience.

## *Apply*

research-based insights to develop strategies that support teacher retention and improve outcomes for students receiving special education services.

*Identify* key findings from a  
statewide study on special education  
teacher burnout in Minnesota.

# Historical Context of Study

- Students with disabilities historically excluded from mainstream education and denied FAPE.
- Specialized programs were often unavailable.

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

- The EHA (1975) provided federal funding for FAPE and services for students with disabilities.
- Renamed IDEA in 1990, reauthorized in 2004, introducing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to outline personalized goals and services.

## Historical Context of Study

# Historical Context of Study

- In 2022-23, 7.5 million students received special education services (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).
- Persistent shortage of fully certified special education teachers, threatening IDEA and FAPE (Dewey et al., 2017; Peyton et al., 2022).
- In 2023-24, more than 40,000 unfilled special education teacher positions (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2024).



- Special education teacher attrition major cause, with 17.1% leaving their positions in 2012-13 (Goldring et al., 2014).
- High-poverty areas and new teachers higher attrition rates (Levin et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2017).



# Background of the Study

## *Teacher Vacancies*

# Background of the Study

## *Retention vs. Attrition*



- New special education teachers often leave within three years before developing key teaching practices  
(Madigan et al., 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).
- 67% of attrition voluntary and unrelated to retirement (Adnot et al., 2016).
- Detrimental effects on students with disabilities.


# Burnout



Leading cause of special education teachers' attrition (Dikes et al., 2015)



Prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors (Maslach et al., 1997)



Overwhelming exhaustion, cynicism, detachment from the job, sense of failure and personal efficacy (Maslach et al., 1997)

# Special Education Teacher Burnout

## **Burnout of qualified special education teachers leads to**

- Inconsistent instruction
- Lack of proper specialized services
- Hindered academic and social-emotional growth
- Hiring of less qualified and experienced special education teachers, increasing negative consequences and outcomes for students with disabilities
- Perpetuation of cycle of special education teachers' shortages.



(Billingsley et al., 2019)

# Research Questions

## *Research Question 1*

Is there a significant difference between special education teachers' perceived burnout who provide special education services in federal setting four programs and special education teachers' perceived burnout who provide special education services in federal settings one, two, and three?

## *Research Question 2*

Is there a significant relationship between special education teachers' perceived burnout and the number of years they have been teaching?

# Reflection

## *Current Beliefs*



### **REFLECT**

What's your first reaction to these questions? What do you believe to be true?

### **CONNECT**

Turn to a partner and share your reflections. Notice where your ideas align or differ.

### **TIME**

1 minute for discussion.

**01:00**

# Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the results of the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) to determine whether there is a:

- Significant difference between special education teachers' perceived burnout who provide special education in federal setting four programs and special education teachers' perceived burnout who provide special education in schools that provide federal settings one, two, and three.
- Significant relationship between between special education teachers' perceived burnout and the number of years they have been teaching.



# Hypothesis 1

## *Federal Setting Four Programs*

- There is an absence of data regarding special education teachers' perceived
- Evidence suggests that teachers in programs for students with multiple disabilities, emotional disturbances, and high-intensity behaviors experience high stress (Brunsting et al., 2023).



*Special education teachers in federal setting four programs likely experience higher rates of perceived burnout.*

# Hypothesis 2

## *Number of Years*

- Unclear relationship between burnout and years of teaching (Benigno et al., 2024)
- Burnout is a result of prolonged exposure to stress (Maslach, 2003)
- Special education teachers leave at twice the rate of general education teachers due to stress and burnout (Fox et al., 2020).



*There is a significant relationship between special education teachers' perceived burnout and the number of years they have been teaching.*

# Context of the Study

## *Special Education and Educational Placements*

### *Range of placements*

- Inclusive to more restrictive

### *Influenced by*

- Severity of disability
- Institutional factors
- Available resources

### *Minnesota*

- Federal setting classification
- Based on amount of time spent outside of the general education setting and receiving special education services.



# Federal Settings One Two and Three

- In general education environments, aligning with the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) principle
- Vary from full to partial inclusion, with the success of inclusion dependent on teacher collaboration and differentiated instruction

*Setting 1*

< 20%  
of the day

*Setting 2*

21-60%  
of the day

*Setting 3*

>60%  
of the day

# Federal Setting Four

## Setting 4

> 50%  
of the day

### *Significant Disabilities*

Students with significant disabilities more likely to be placed in separate settings explicitly designed for them.

### *Challenges with Emotional Regulation*

Heightened agitation and difficulty regulating emotions leading to elopement, self-injury, or aggression

### *Restrictive Environments*

Require more restrictive environments for specialized behavior intervention

### *Intensive Services*

Intensive special education and related services

### *High Staff-Student Ratio*

Can receive support from one or more paraprofessionals to ensure adequate attention and care

### *Smaller Class Sizes*

Provide personalized, individualized attention to each student

# Federal Settings; Effectiveness of Separate Placements

## *Benefits*

- Individualized instruction and interventions leading to better outcomes
- Staff trained to meet students' needs
- Sense of safety and support due to structured and controlled setting
- Smaller class sizes and staff-to-student ratios leading to more focused instruction and personalized instruction

## *Drawbacks*

- Segregated placements due to misconceptions about skills and need for support
- Fewer opportunities for social interaction and engagement with typically developing peers
- Potential for increased aggression due to modeling

(Agran et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2019; Kurth et al., 2014b)

# Definition of High Quality Special Education Services

- Individualized, evidence-based instruction tailored to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2017)
- Collaborative approach to meet measurable goals
- High leverage practices
- Delivered by highly qualified special education teachers



(Bohanon et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2018a; U.S. Department of Education, 2017)

# Highly Qualified Special Education Teacher; Non-Linear

- Special education teacher experience and instructional quality aren't always directly correlated
- Initial years often show significant improvement in teaching quality
- After 5-10 years, effectiveness may plateau or even decline



(Brunsting et al., 2023a; Guarino et al., 2018;  
Rock et al., 2017; Sullivan et al., 2020)



# Experience and Perceived Burnout

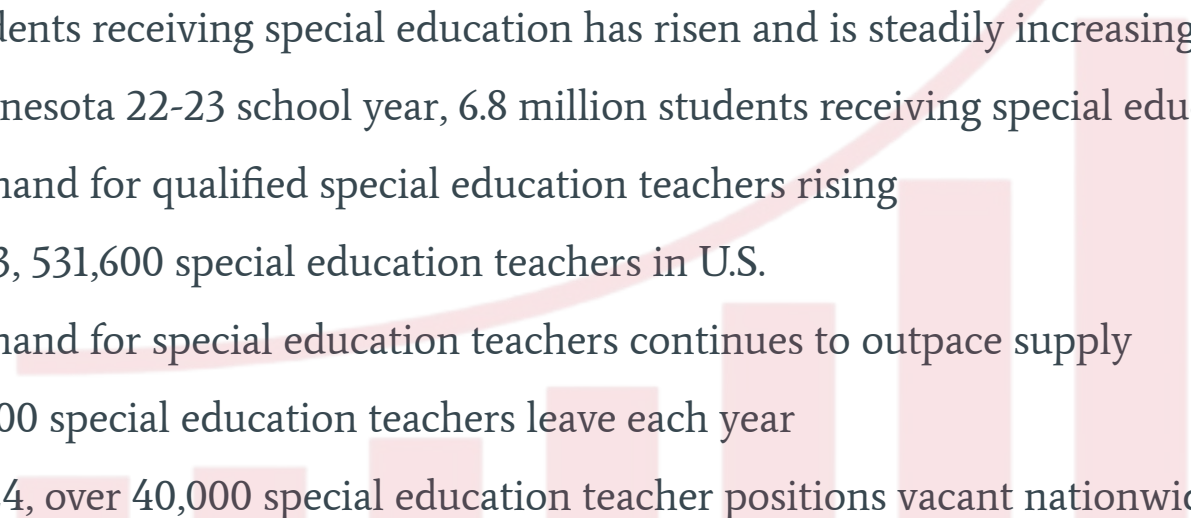
## *Positive Impact of Experience*

- Teachers develop better coping strategies and classroom management skills (Sullivan et al., 2020).
- Increased confidence and efficacy reduce burnout (Brunsting et al., 2023a).
- Greater sense of purpose and fulfillment protects against burnout (Agran et al., 2020).

## *Negative Impact of Experience*

- After 5-10 years, cumulative stress from managing students with severe disabilities can lead to burnout (Sullivan et al., 2020).
- Lack of adequate support (professional development, resources) exacerbates burnout (Agran et al., 2020).
- High student-to-teacher ratios, limited resources increase stress (Agran et al., 2020).
- Lack of recognition and support can contribute to disillusionment and burnout (Agran et al., 2020).

# Current Landscape

- 
- Students receiving special education has risen and is steadily increasing
  - Minnesota 22-23 school year, 6.8 million students receiving special education
  - Demand for qualified special education teachers rising
  - 2023, 531,600 special education teachers in U.S.
  - Demand for special education teachers continues to outpace supply
  - 16,000 special education teachers leave each year
  - 23-24, over 40,000 special education teacher positions vacant nationwide

(Dikes et al., 2015; Minnesota House of Representatives, n.d.; Sutchter et al., 2016)

# Special Education Teacher Shortage

## *Declining Candidate Pool*

- Perception of
  - Unfavorable working conditions
  - Cost of education
  - Preparation time
  - Working conditions
  - Salaries

## *Attrition*

- Primary cause of shortage
- Overall dissatisfaction
  - Primarily with salaries
- Likelier to leave than general education teachers
- 25-30% leave within first two years
  - Only 2% due to retirement

(Kelly et al., 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023b).

# Disproportionality



(Espinoza et al., 2018; Dikes et al., 2015).

# Tiered Licensure

## EDUCATOR LICENSURE

Effective July 1, 2024

**TIER 1**

Bachelor's Degree  
or falls under exemption from Bachelor's Degree

**Special Education:**  
A teacher is limited to a total of 3 years on a Tier 1 license in any special education licensure field

1 YEAR  
JOB OFFER  
3 RENEWALS

**TIER 2**

Bachelor's Degree  
or falls under exemption from Bachelor's Degree

and

**ONE of the following:**

- Enrolled in a teacher preparation program in Minnesota\*
- Master's Degree\*
- Completed a teacher preparation program\* but does not yet meet requirements for a Tier 3 or Tier 4 license

2 YEARS  
JOB OFFER  
3 RENEWALS

**TIER 3**

Bachelor's Degree  
or falls under exemption from Bachelor's Degree

and

Pass applicable licensure exams  
or falls under exemption from licensure exams

and

**ONE of the following:**

- Completed a teacher preparation program in Minnesota\*
- Completed a teacher preparation program in another state\* and either:  
(A) Equivalent student teaching or  
(B) Two years of teaching experience
- Licensure via Portfolio\*
- 3 years of teaching experience in licensure field with a Tier 2 license
- Professional teaching license from another state\* and two years of teaching experience\*

3 YEARS  
TEACHER APPLIES  
UNLIMITED RENEWALS

**TIER 4**

Bachelor's Degree  
or falls under exemption from Bachelor's Degree

and

Pass applicable licensure exams  
or falls under exemption from licensure exams

and

3 years of teaching experience\*

and

**ONE of the following:**

- Completed a teacher preparation program in Minnesota\*
- Completed a teacher preparation program in another state\* and either:  
(A) Equivalent student teaching or  
(B) Two years of teaching experience
- Licensure via Portfolio\*
- National Board Certification\*

5 YEARS  
TEACHER APPLIES  
UNLIMITED RENEWALS

### EXEMPTIONS FROM BACHELOR'S DEGREE:

- CTE & Career Pathways: Hold an AA degree\*, professional certification\*, or 5 years of relevant work experience\*
- Dance, Theater, Visual Arts, & Music: 5 years of relevant work experience\*
- World Language & Culture: Native speaker of language

### EXEMPTIONS FROM LICENSURE EXAMS:

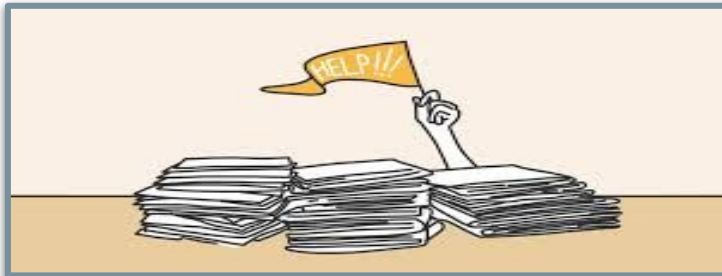
- Completed a teacher preparation program in Minnesota
- Completed a teacher preparation program in another state and passed applicable exams
- Recommended for licensure via portfolio
- Holds National Board Certification

**Note:** \* indicates that experience must be aligned to licensure field sought

Last updated June 11, 2024

# Special Education Teacher Perceived Burnout

- 51% of special education teachers reported feeling “extremely stressed.”
- Primary reason for special education teachers’ attrition
- Directly impacts teachers’ well-being, job satisfaction and retention
- Experiences of burnout lead to decline in job satisfaction → attrition
- Burnout is symptom and cause of teacher attrition



(Agyapong et al., 2022; Brunsting et al., 2023; Skaalvik et al., 2017).

# Special Education Teacher Perceived Burnout

**Dissatisfaction  
with salary**

**Long working  
hours**

**Heavy  
workloads**

**Legal  
requirements**

**Lack of  
administrative  
support**

**Strain from  
working with  
students who  
have complex  
needs**

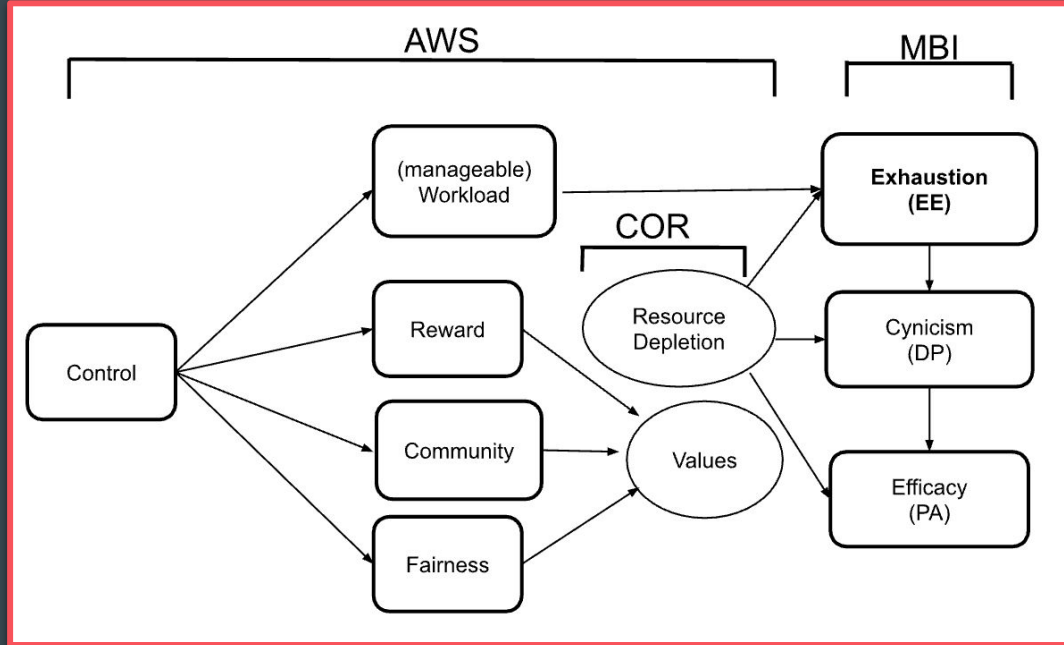
(Baker, 2018; McLeskey et al., 2017).

# Conceptual Framework

*Areas of Worklife Scale*

*Maslach's Burnout Theory*

t



(Leiter, 1993; Maslach et al., 1997)



# Conceptual Framework

## *Copenhagen Burnout Inventory*

- Grounded in AWS, MBI, and COR
- Address limitations of MBI
- Based on two theoretical concepts; burnout as fatigue or exhaustion and theory of causal attribution
- Burnout as the result of chronic emotional strain, primarily due to work-related stress
- Three dimensions; exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy
- Tiredness main sign of condition

(Kristensen et al.'s, 2005; Pines et al., 1988; Schaufeli et al., 2001)

# Participants

## *Special Education Teachers*

- Minnesota
- Taught in at least one FS 1, FS 2, FS 3 or FS 4
- 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024
- Tier 1, 2, 3, 4, or Out of Field Permission
- Students in kindergarten through 12th grade

# Data Collection

## *Demographic Information*

- Tier
- Federal setting
- Federal setting 4
- Total number of years
- Out of Field Permission
- Highest level of education
- Age
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity

# Data Collection Procedures

## *Request for Permission*

- Requested and obtained teacher data from Minnesota's Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB)

## *Survey Participation*

Upon receiving IRB approval, participants will receive a email explaining:

- Purpose of the study
- How data will be used
- Survey link

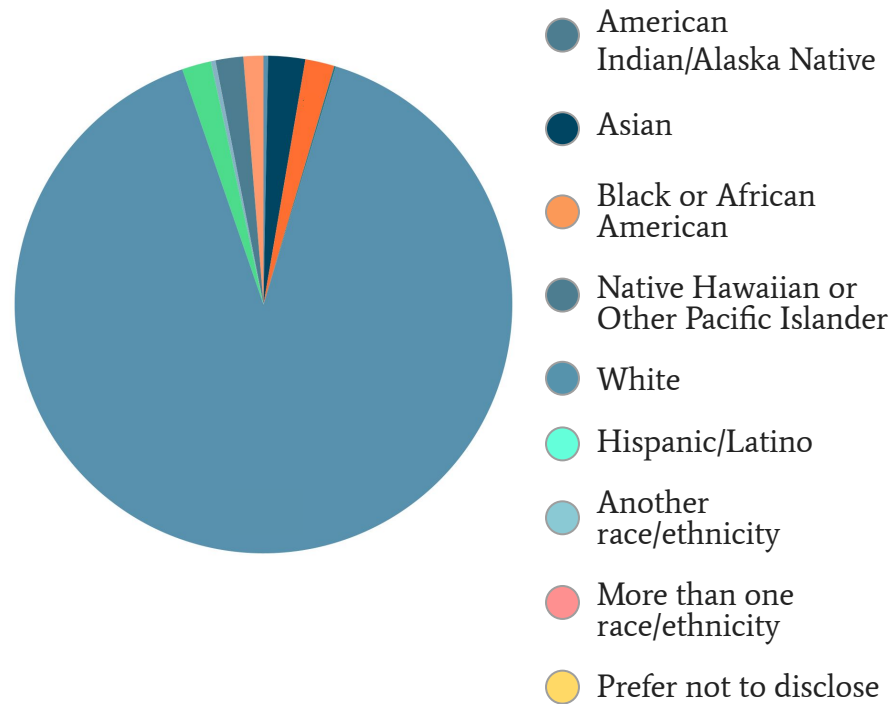
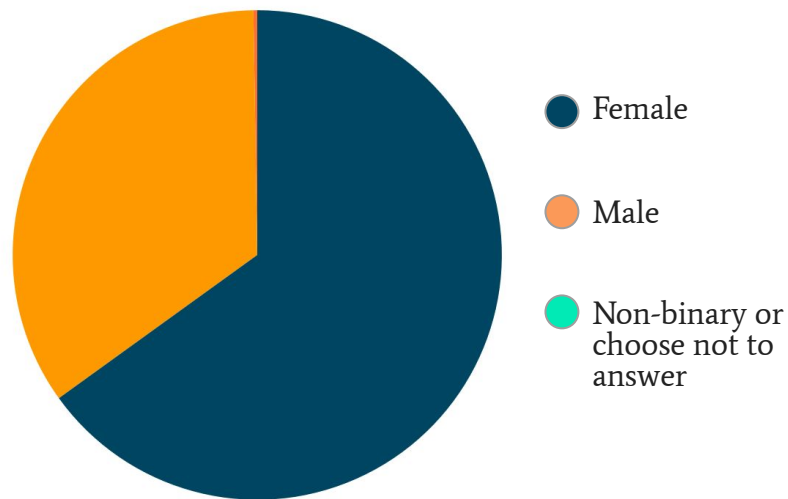
## *Confidentiality & Voluntary Participation*

- Participation is voluntary
- Responses will remain confidential

## *Survey Details*

- Qualtrics will be used to send the survey
- Each participant receives a unique ID number
- This method ensures sensitive information is protected, maintaining participant anonymity (Creswell et al., 2018).

# Participant Demographics; Gender Identity & Race/Ethnicity



# Participant Demographics; Age and Education



## Age Distribution

The largest age group among participants was 35-44 years, followed by those aged 45-54. This reflects a mid-career professional demographic with substantial life experience bringing maturity to their educational practice.



## Education Attainment

The largest age group among participants was 35-44 years, followed by those aged 45-54. This reflects a mid-career professional demographic with substantial life experience bringing maturity to their educational practice.



## Teaching Experience

The largest group of participants reporting more than 15 years in the profession. Other groups ranged from teaching under 1 year to over 10 years.

# Participant Demographics; OFP License

16%

*Out of Field Permission*

# Participant Demographics; Federal Setting Distribution



## *Combined Settings*

The largest group of educators worked across Federal Settings 1, 2, and 3 demonstrating flexibility across different instructional environments

## *Setting 3*

This setting, where students spend more than 60% of their day receiving special education services, was the most common single setting.

## *Setting 4*

Fewer teachers reported working exclusively in Setting 4, which serves students with more significant behavioral needs in separate facilities.



# Burnout Overview

57.4%

Suggests moderate level of burnout and a prevalent issue for many special education teachers.



# Other Factors Influencing Burnout...

- Individual resilience
- Access to administrative support
- Collegial collaboration
- Self-selection into high-need roles



# Peak Burnout Years

*Burnout  
4-6 years*

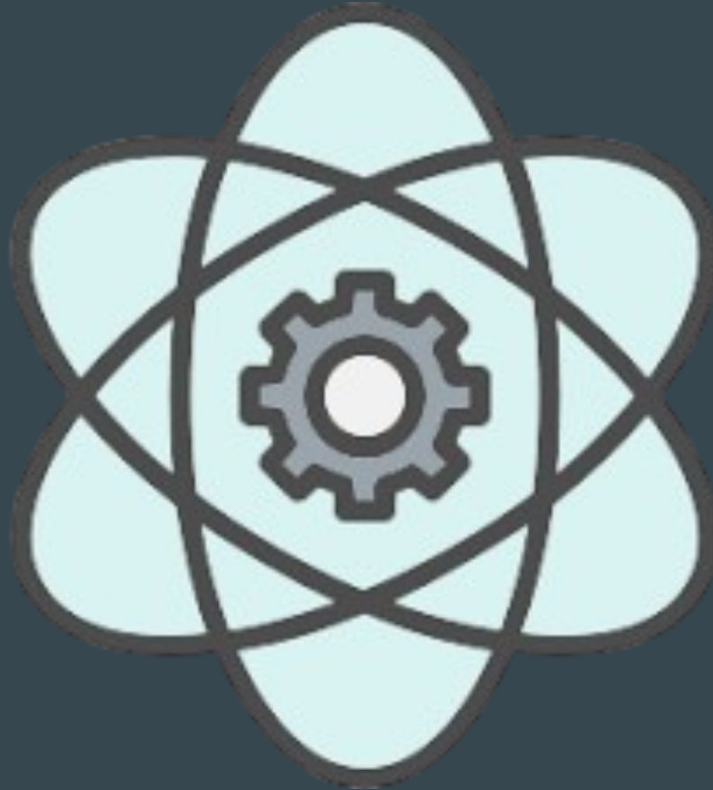


*Enthusiasm  
1-2 years*

# Burnout Consistency Across the Field

Moderate  
across settings

Widespread  
and persistent



Consistent  
with some  
prior studies

Transcends  
school type,  
district, or  
career stage

# Burnout Consistency Across the Field; The CBI

## Copenhagen Burnout Inventory

*Personal*

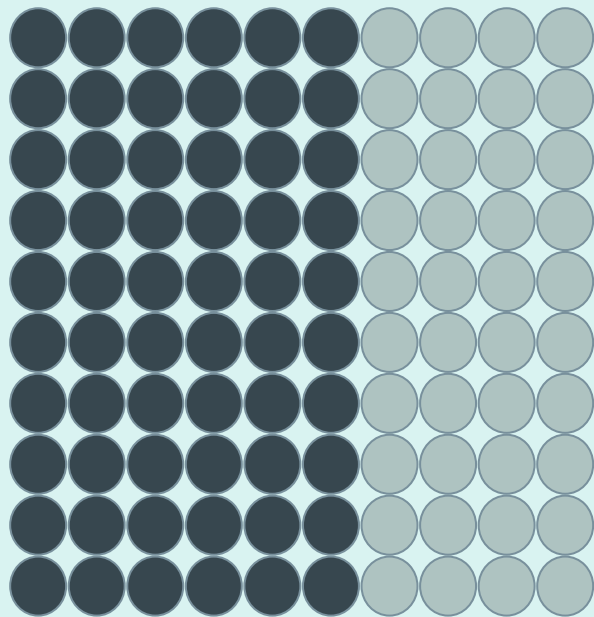


*Work-related*



*Student-related*





# 60%

Of **Special Education Teachers**  
frequently experiencing **physical**  
**exhaustion**

# Work-Related Burnout



# Student-Related Burnout

- Student-related burnout less prominent
- 28% of respondents reported high levels of student-related burnout
- Most teachers did not find students to be the main source of stress.
- Perception: “Give more than receive” from students



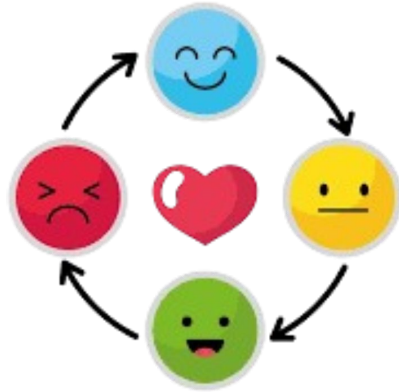


# Emotional Labor in Special Education

*Teachers serve multiple roles*



*Emotional demands high*



*Students not primary stressor*



*Burnout: workload & lack of support*



# Systemic Causes and Solutions



- Systemic inefficiencies, compliance burdens and administrative disconnects interfere with instruction
- Chronic stress leads to disengagement and attrition



- Teachers need balanced workloads and wellness support
- Interventions must address organizational and emotional demands

# Recommendations for Future Research

1

Expand focus beyond student-related factors to examine organizational factors

2

Prioritize longitudinal research to track burnout over time

3

Incorporate qualitative methods

4

Examine the interaction between personal and systemic factors

# Recommendations for Future Research

5

Evaluate intervention-based strategies

6

Ensure demographic diversity in samples

7

Investigate burnout in varied school settings

8

Use stakeholder input to guide systems-level change

# Shift in Thinking

*"Now I think..."*



## **REFLECT**

Think back to your initial beliefs before this session. What did you assume or believe to be true? How has your thinking shifted after engaging with today's content? Write it down.

## **CONNECT**

Pair up and share one change or insight you've experienced. What influenced your shift in perspective?

## **TIME**

1 minute for discussion.

**01:00**

*Explore* teacher-reported experiences of burnout in relation to both their educational setting and the challenges of meeting diverse student needs.

# Qualitative Data

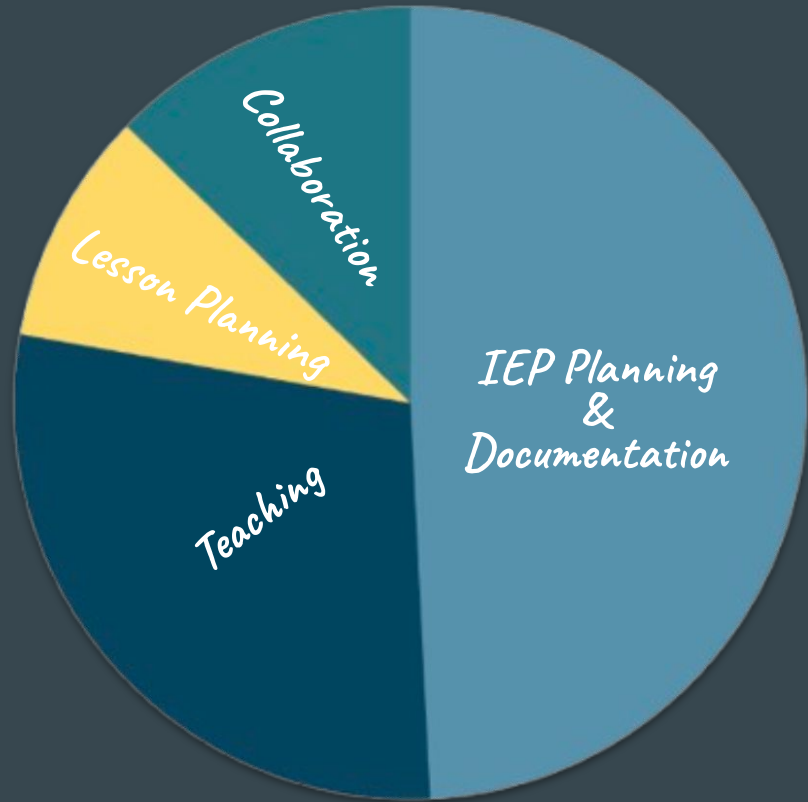


- 161 participants voluntarily shared personal feedback.
- Working with challenging students was not main source of burnout.
- Consistent with mixed findings in previous research.
- Identified two primary contributors
  - Workload related to paperwork
  - Lack of support and understanding from administrators.



# Documentation and Legal Demands Fuel Burnout

- Time spent on IEPs, data tracking, compliance
- Reduced time for instruction & planning
- Emotional exhaustion & reduced efficacy



# Lack of Administrator Understanding

- Disconnect on IEP/time demands required for paperwork, holding IEP meetings, and case management responsibilities
- Teachers feel undervalued and isolated
- Supportive leadership reduces burnout



# Student-Related Burnout Insights

Student challenges contribute to fatigue  
but are not main cause

Emotional commitment to students  
remains strong

Lack of teacher support intensifies  
strain



# Work-Related Burnout Findings



Paperwork, compliance and scheduling  
are major stressors

Work demands often felt overwhelming  
and bureaucratic

Administrative disconnect exacerbates  
burnout

# Personal Burnout Impact

Emotional and physical exhaustion  
extends beyond work

Difficulty separating work and personal  
life

Chronic fatigue and emotional  
weariness reported



*Recognize* how systematic factors such as administrative support and workload influence teacher well-being more than instructional setting or experience.

# Overall Findings

*Factors NOT significantly linked  
to burnout*



Federal Setting



Years of teaching  
experience

*Factors significantly linked  
to burnout*

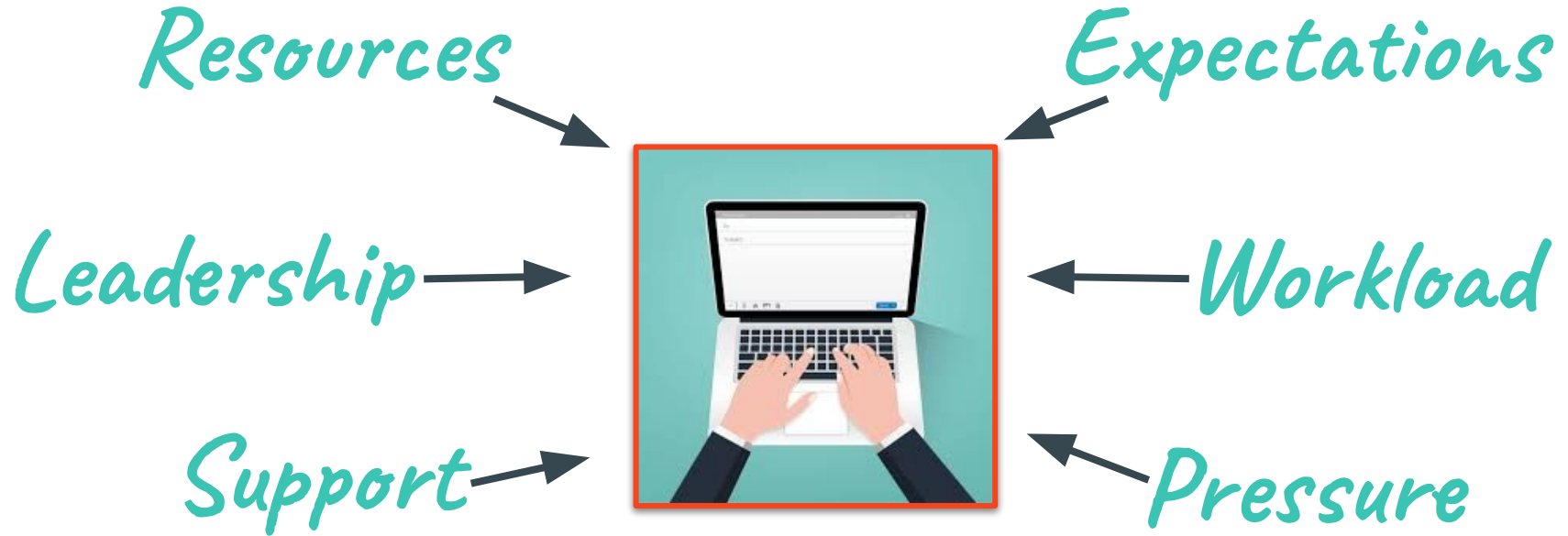


Administrative  
leadership



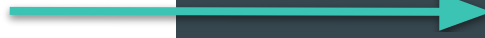
Compliance  
paperwork

# Qualitative Data

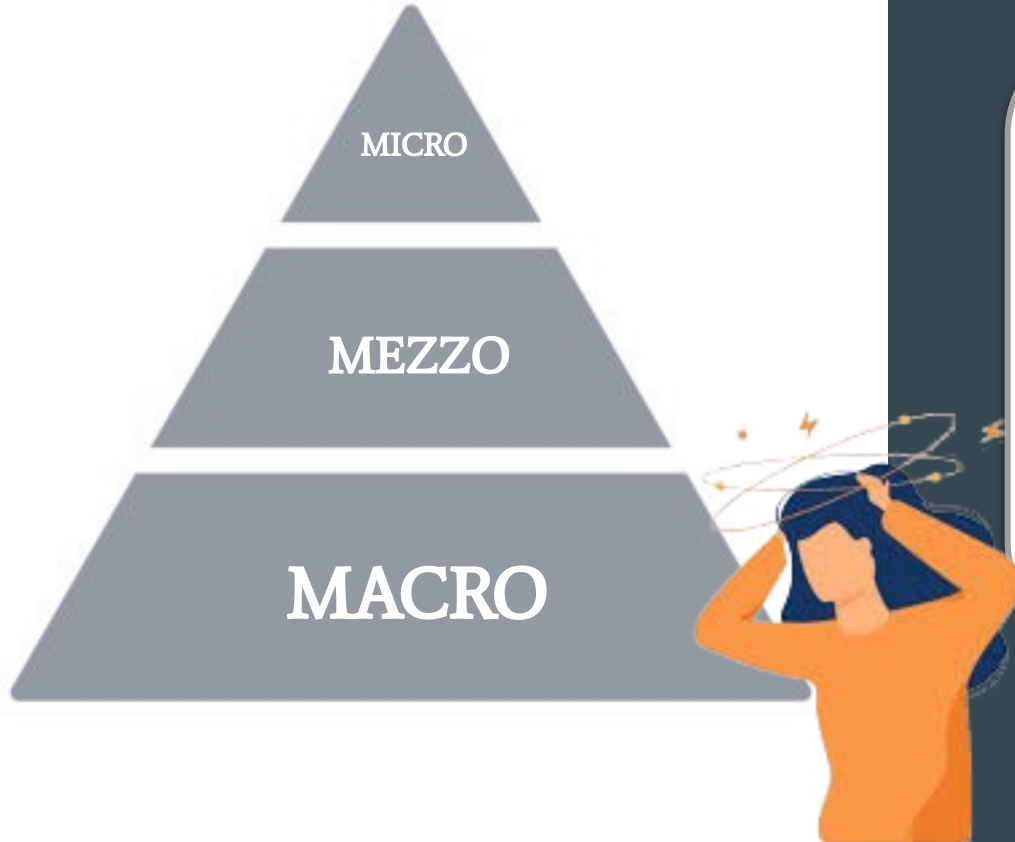




*Neglected Needs*



*Leads To*

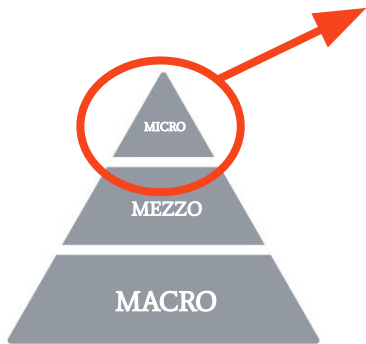


- Frustration
- Isolation
- Emotional Exhaustion

# Micro Level Contributors to Burnout

## *Administrator's Lack of*

- Empathy
- Authenticity
- Support
- Validation
- Acknowledgment



# Mezzo Level Contributors to Burnout

## *Inconsistent, Limited or Absence of*

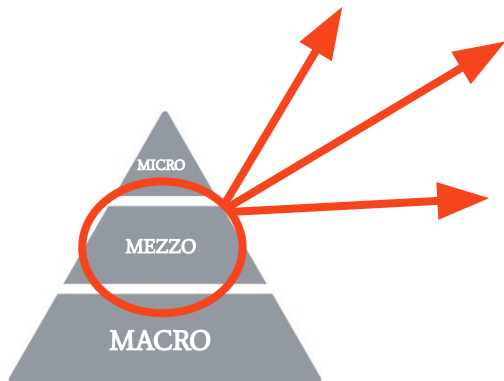
- Positive school culture
- Collaborative teams
- Communication

## *Administrators Ignore*

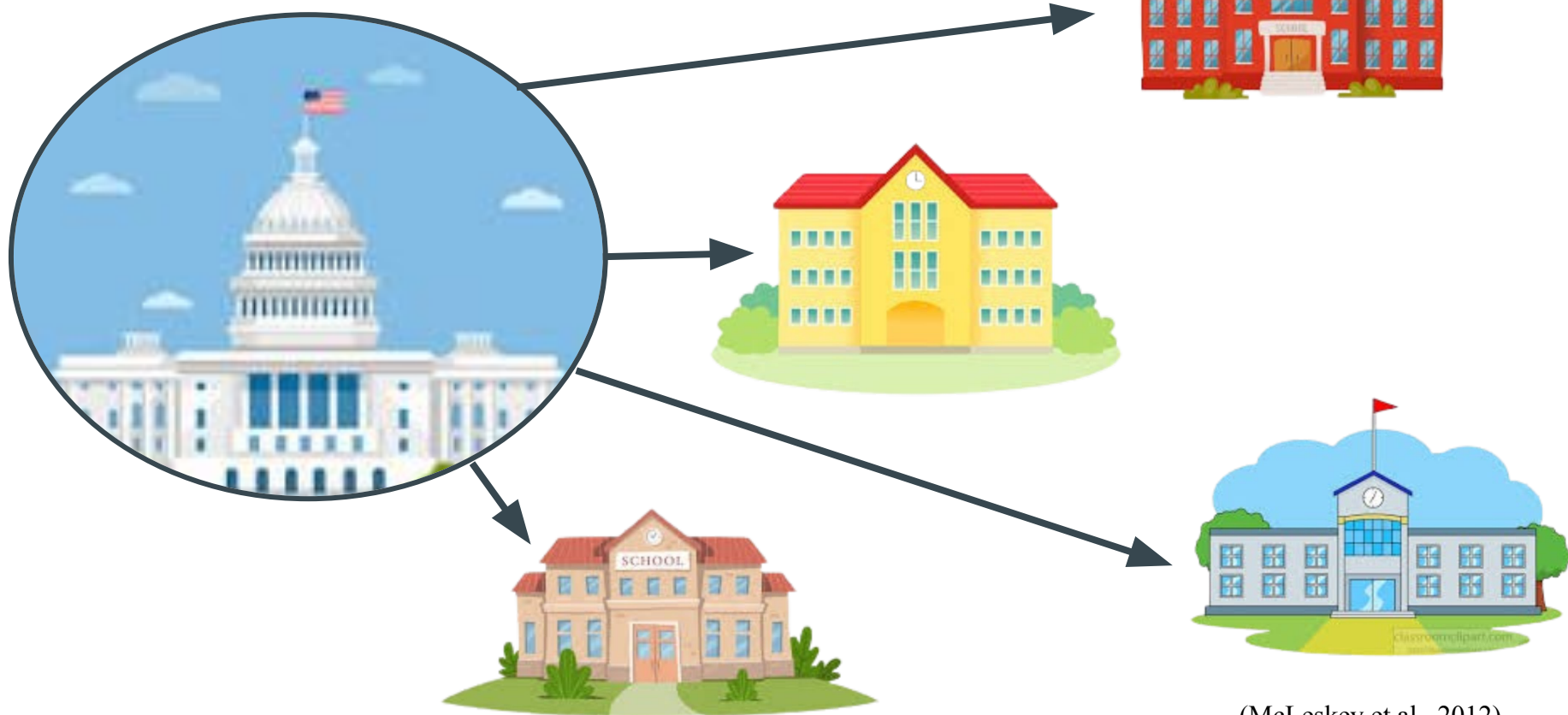
- Large caseloads
- Excessive workloads

## *Failure to Address*

- Insufficient staffing
- Unclear roles
- Clear procedures for managing compliance demands



# Macro Level Contributors to Burnout



(McLeskey et al., 2012)

# Leading Through Uncertainty



(Billingsley, 2010; Smith et al., 2020)

# Takeaway

## *Non-Negotiable Idea*



### **REFLECT**

If you were forced to choose just one key takeaway to remember from this session for the rest of your career, what would it be? In your mind, decide on that single, non-negotiable idea

### **CONNECT**

Turn to a partner and share your takeaway in one complete sentence.  
Based on what you heard today, discuss why that takeaway matters for a your practice


### **TIME**

1 minute for discussion.

**01:00**

*Apply* research-based insights to develop strategies that mitigate burnout, support teacher retention and improve outcomes for students receiving special education services.





*“Empathy is being  
concerned about the  
human being. Not  
just their output.”*

*~ Simon Sinek*



# Empathic Leadership Matters

- Leadership empathy reduces teacher burnout: Teachers who feel understood are more likely to stay in their roles and feel fulfilled.
- Creates a supportive, emotionally safe culture: Empathy fosters a school climate where staff feel secure and valued.
- Encourages open communication and feedback: Staff are more likely to share concerns and ideas when they trust leadership.
- Builds staff trust and morale: Trust leads to a stronger, more resilient team.
- Promotes teacher resilience and retention: Teachers who feel supported are less likely to experience chronic stress or leave the profession.

# Building an Empathic Leadership Culture



(Collie et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2012).

# Empathy AND Accountability



(Zivkovic, 2022)

# Structural Supports: Communication & Caseload Management

- Strong communication loops and practical supports reduce isolation and help teachers focus on students
  - Regular check-ins & collaboration
  - Redistribution of paperwork
  - Manageable caseloads
  - Shared planning



# Reducing Burnout

## *Wellness*



## *Mental Health*



## *Mentorship*



(Greenberg et al., 2018; von der Embse et al., 2019)

# Staffing Solutions to Support Teachers

- Burnout tied to vacancies & excessive caseloads
- Invest in paraprofessionals & compliance staff
- Strengthen substitute pools



(Billingsley et al., 2019; Sokal et al., 2020)

# Paraprofessionals as Burnout Buffers

## *Teacher Role*

## *Paraprofessional Role*

<b>Classroom Organization</b>	Plans weekly schedule, lessons, room arrangements, learning centers, and activities for individuals and the entire class.	Implements plan as specified by the teacher.
<b>Assessment</b>	Administers and scores formal and informal tests.	Administers informal tests.
<b>Setting Objectives</b>	Determines appropriate objectives for groups and individual children.	Carries out activities to meet objectives.
<b>Teaching</b>	Teaches lessons for the entire class, small groups, and individual children.	Reinforces and supervises practice of skills with individual and small groups.
<b>Behavior Management</b>	Observes behavior, plans and implements behavior management strategies for entire class and for individual children.	Observes behavior, carries out behavior management activities.
<b>Working with Parents</b>	Meets with parents and initiates conferences concerning child's progress.	Participates in parent conferences when appropriate.





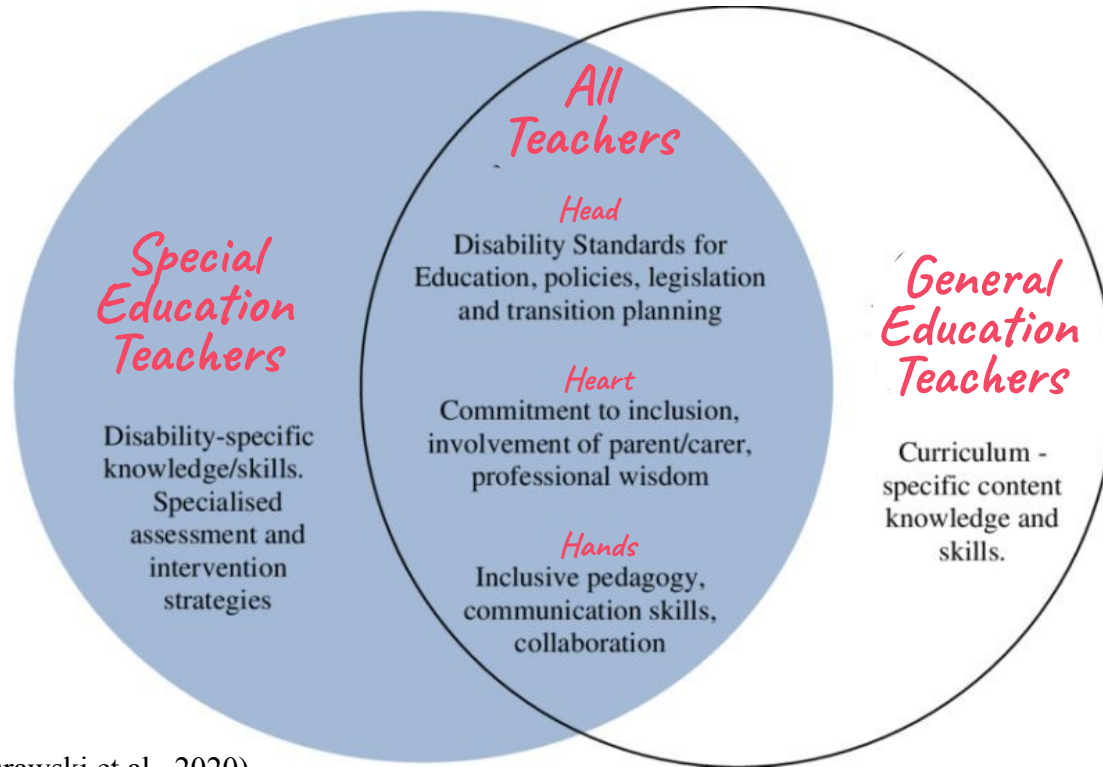
# Keys to Effective Paraprofessional Support

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Regular planning time with teaching teams
- Access to professional development
- Strong communication and collaboration skills:
- Alignment of goals between teachers and support staff



(Parker et al., 2017)

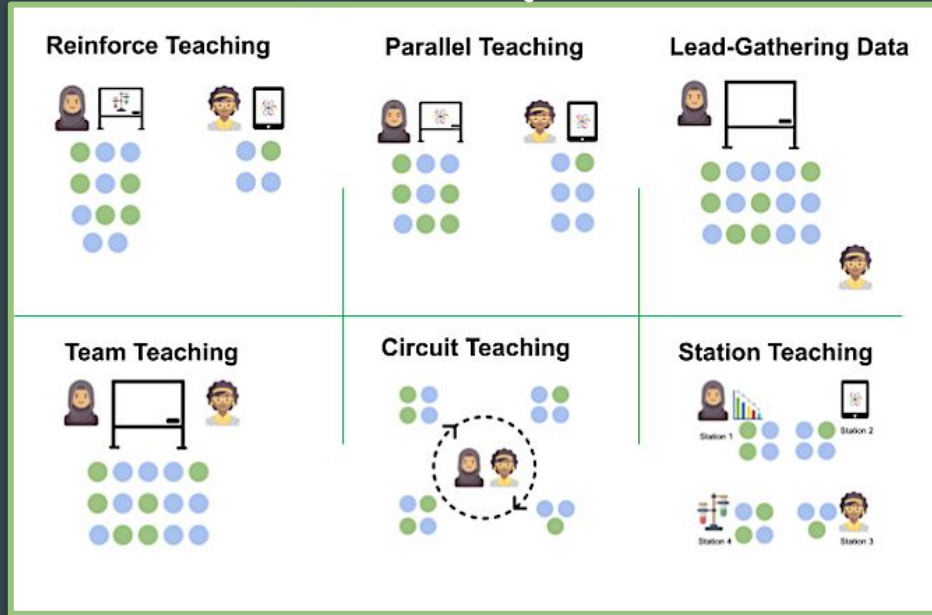
# Co-Teaching to Combat Burnout



(Friend et al., 2019; Murawski et al., 2020)

# Benefits of Effective Co-teaching

## *Co-Teaching Models*



- Shared planning, instruction, and classroom management
- Mutual feedback and peer learning opportunities
- Reduced workload burden on individual teachers
- Enhanced student engagement and support
- Improved problem-solving and reflective practices

# Conditions for Co-Teaching Success

## *Role Definition*

01

Clear role definitions for each teaching partner: Avoiding confusion about responsibilities ensures that both educators know their contributions are valuable and necessary.

## *Dedicated Time*

02

Dedicated collaboration and planning time: Scheduled time for joint lesson planning and strategy discussions is essential for seamless co-teaching.

## *Ongoing Training*

03

Ongoing training on co-teaching models: Professional development helps teachers implement best practices and refine their collaboration.

## *School Culture*

04

Supportive school culture that values inclusivity: A climate that encourages teamwork and values all learners sets the stage for successful partnerships.

(Scruggs et al., 2013; Solis et al., 2019)

# Structural Factors and Burnout



# Leader Advocacy for Change

*Instruction*



*Student Growth*



*Sustainability*

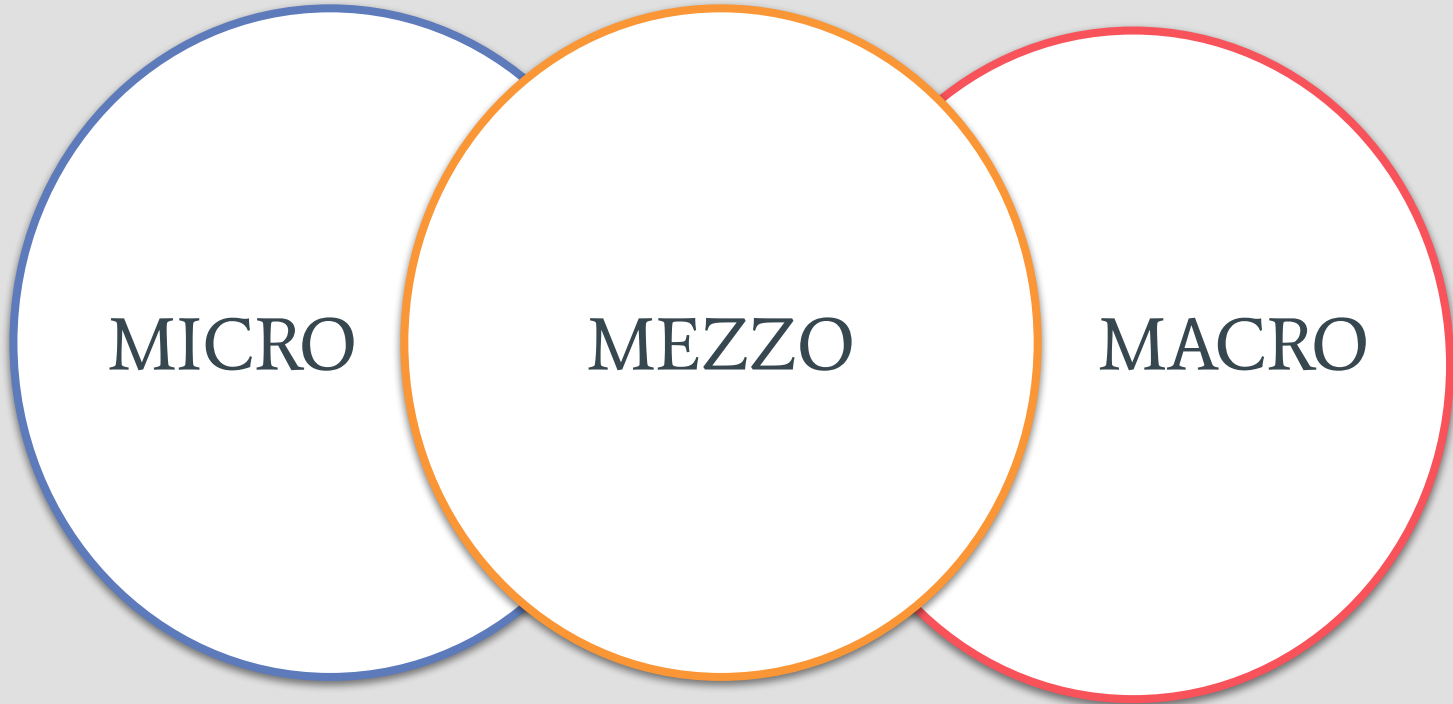


# Transparency, Communication, and Guidance

- Awareness of political climate and impact on special education staff
- Uncertainty about role of federal and state governments in protecting students heightens teacher stress
- Administrator transparency and clear messaging is essential
  - Policy changes
  - Funding decisions
  - Legislative developments



## *Retain Special Education Workforce*





# Application

## *First Small Step*



### **REFLECT**

Think about what we've discussed today. What is the very first, smallest step you can take to apply this idea in your own classroom? Don't plan a big project; focus on one tiny, actionable step you could take as early as tomorrow morning.

### **VISUALIZE**

Mentally picture yourself taking that first step. What would it look like in action? What might change as a result?

### **TIME**

1 minute for discussion.

**01:00**

# Suggestions for Application

## *Practical Tools for Building Connection and Trust*

### Active Listening

**What it means:**

Show genuine interest in others' needs and feelings

**Tool:**

"Listen-Reflect-Respond" template

**Try This:**

Summarize what a staff member shares before responding.

Use: "It sounds like you're feeling \_\_\_ because \_\_\_. That makes sense—let's figure out a solution together."

### Perspective-Taking

**What it means:**

Step into someone else's experience

**Tool:**

Empathy Mapping Worksheet (Say / Do / Think / Feel)

**Try This:**

Shadow a teacher, paraprofessional, or student for 30 minutes.

Ask: "What does their day feel like from their perspective?"

### Emotional Support

**What it means:**

Offer compassion and acknowledge struggles.

**Tool:**

Check-In/Check-Out Protocol

**Try This:**

Start one staff meeting with a 'How are you really?' round.

End with: 'What can I take off your plate today?'

### Open Door Policy

**What it means:**

Create a safe, accessible space for sharing.

**Tool:**

Anonymous Feedback Form or  
Leader Office Hours

**Try This:**

Block 30 minutes on your calendar for drop-in conversations.

Post a 'You can always talk to me about...' note outside your office.

# Conclusion



- Listen to and validate what special education teachers identify as root causes of stress and burnout
- More than empathy; it is advocating for systemic change
- Enhance teachers' sense of efficacy, reduce burnout, and strengthen resilient workforce, ultimately improving outcomes for students with disabilities

A top-down view of a yellow envelope with its flap open, revealing a white card with the handwritten text 'Thank you!'. A black pen lies diagonally across the bottom right of the envelope. The entire scene is set against a solid yellow background.

Thank you!