ABSTRACT

IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRINCIPALS ON REFERRALS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION EVALUATION AND PLACEMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

by
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The referral and placement process can be highly subjective and biased for many students in public schools, resulting in inappropriate referrals for special education evaluation, and inappropriate placements in special education programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has established guidelines and procedures that are mandated by federal law when considering referring or placing a student in special education. Prereferral intervention can reduce the numbers of students the end up in special education. Instructional Consultation Team (ICT) a prereferral intervention model is used in this study. Many school principals do not have adequate knowledge of special education, of students with disabilities, or of the IDEA.

This research question inquired: Can professional development in IDEA and ICT for principals make a difference in the number of students referred for special education evaluation or in the placement of students in special education programs? The study was a posttest only with control group. The entire population of elementary school principals from a large urban school district was used. The researcher developed a questionnaire to collect information from the treatment groups.

The findings showed the intervention of professional development did not
identify any statistically significant differences in the number of observed referrals for special education evaluation or placements in special education programs between the groups. It also was found that the treatment group did not refer fewer students to be evaluated for special education or place fewer students in special education programs. Recommendation a “one-shot” only professional development activity designed to elicit change in this content area is discouraged. Recommendations for future research: training be embedded in research-based principles and practices of professional development as documented in the historical research literature.