



**NEBRASKA CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON  
CHILDREN, YOUTH, FAMILIES & SCHOOLS**

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**Assessing Special Education Teacher  
Pre-Service Programs and In-Service Supports**

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# Special Education Teacher Shortages

- Special education teacher shortages are a growing problem in Nebraska
- OSEP's recommendations focus on
  - Attracting, Preparing, Retaining
- Information on Nebraska's ability to attract, prepare, and retain teachers to the field is needed

# Study Goals

- The **long-term goal** of this study is to reduce special education teacher shortages in Nebraska
- The **immediate purpose** of this study is to provide information to Nebraska special education stakeholders about factors that may alleviate teacher shortages, including:
  - Access to training
  - Availability of supports
  - Utility of supports
  - Job satisfaction
  - Teacher stress

# Specific Aims

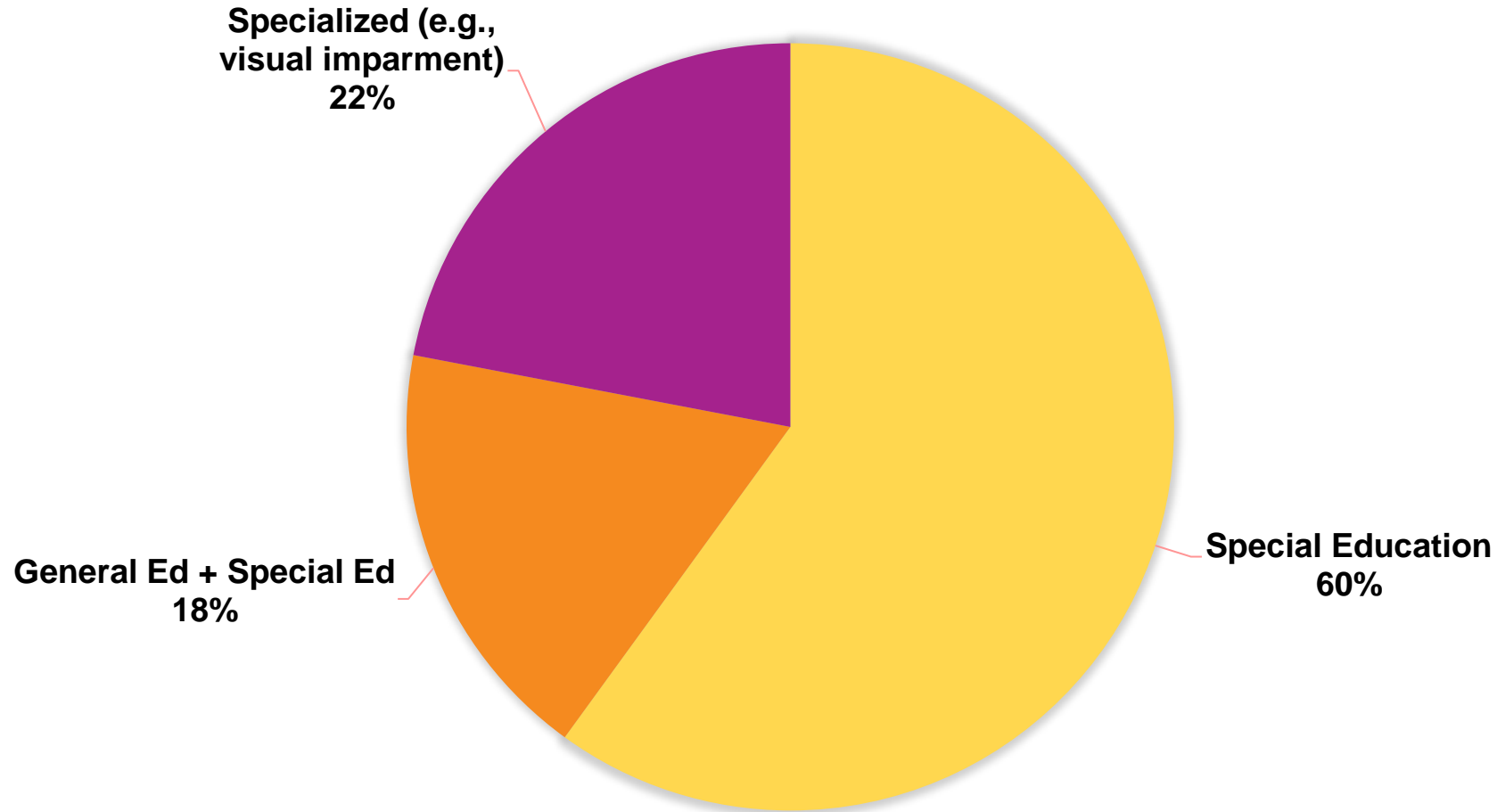
1. Identify the higher education programs available to potential Nebraska educators
2. Determine the availability and perceived utility of supports to special education teachers
3. Ascertain special education teacher job satisfaction & stress
4. Determine the relationship between available supports and job satisfaction

# Aim 1: Higher Education Programs

- 24 institutes of higher education (IHE) in 4 states (NE, KS, IA, MO) investigated
- Information gathered from IHE websites and follow-up emails to department chairs

# Available Programs

## 81 SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER PROGRAMS



# Degrees Offered

- 8 different degrees are offered
  - Bachelor's, master's, doctoral, endorsement, certificate
  - Bachelor's with endorsement, master's with endorsement, bachelors with certificate & endorsement
- Programs target K-12, early childhood, or elementary
  - A few offer combinations



# Program Specifics

- Program lengths
  - Mean Credit Hours = 54.8 (SD = 37.5, Min = 10, Max = 137, Median = 36)
- Online option
  - 22% offer online or combination of online and in-person
  - 74% do not offer an online option



# Aim 1: Summary

- Several special education programs are available to Nebraska students
- Online options are limited
- 22% of degrees focus on specialized student groups (e.g., visual impairment, hard of hearing/deaf, autism spectrum disorder)
  - Located in 10 universities
    - Iowa: Northwestern College, University of Iowa
    - Missouri: Northwest Missouri State, University of Missouri
    - Kansas: Rockhurst University, University of Kansas
    - Nebraska: Union College, University of Nebraska-Kearney, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Omaha



# Aims 2 through 4 Sample

- Representative sample of Nebraska special education teachers
  - 86 districts and 231 schools represented
- Schools

NeMTSS Region	Sample %	Nebraska %
1	29%	22%
2	17%	29%
3	18%	17%
4	16%	17%
5	19%	15%

Locale	Sample %	Nebraska %
Urban	31%	28%
Town	26%	20%
Rural	43%	50%



# Teacher Demographics

- 456 Special Education Teachers

Demographics	Sample %	Nebraska %
<b>Gender: female</b>	86%	86%
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White/non-Hispanic	97%	97%
<b>Degree</b>		
Bachelor's	16%	44.5%
Some Graduate	19%	0.03%
Master's	54%	54.8%
Specialist/Doctorate	11%	0.3%
<b>Average Years Teaching SPED</b>	14.17 (SD 9.82)	13.15 (SD 10.11)



# Teacher Demographics

<b>Current Position</b>	
Special education teacher	89%
Other	8%
Dual appointment (sp & gen)	2%
<b>Grade Level</b>	
Early childhood	7%
Elementary	35%
Middle	27%
High	27%
Other	5%
<b>Assignment</b>	
Regular full-time teacher	92%
Itinerant teacher	4%
Other	4%



# Aim 2: Availability and Utility of Supports

## First-Year Experiences of Early Career Teachers (n=95)

- Most (74%) participated in a teacher induction program
- Most (60%) worked closely with a master or mentor teacher
  - Of these 52% met with master/mentor at least once a week
  - Of these 72% reported the master/mentor improved their teaching to a moderate or great extent

# Professional Development for All Teachers

Topic	Received	“Useful/Very Useful”
Special Education	84%	50%
Technology (non-adaptive)	65%	42%
Student Behavior	64%	60%
Teaching Students with Disabilities	53%	62%
Use of Student Assessments	53%	44%
Reading Instruction	49%	60%
People from Different Cultures	19%	61%
Teacher-Parent Partnership	15%	47%
Teaching ELL	8%	49%
Other	23%	N/A



# Support for Professional Development

Question	Yes
Release time (i.e., your regular school responsibilities were temporarily assigned to someone else)	32.56%
Scheduled time in the contract year for professional learning	67.91%
Stipend for professional learning activities that took place outside regular work hours	41.49%
Full or partial reimbursement of college tuition	6.06%
Reimbursement for conference or workshop fees	39.02%
Reimbursement for travel and/or daily expenses	28.34%

# Other Supports

- Other supports
  - Regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers (74%)
  - Observe, or be observed by, other teachers (59%)
  - Engage in research on a topic of interest to you professionally (34%)



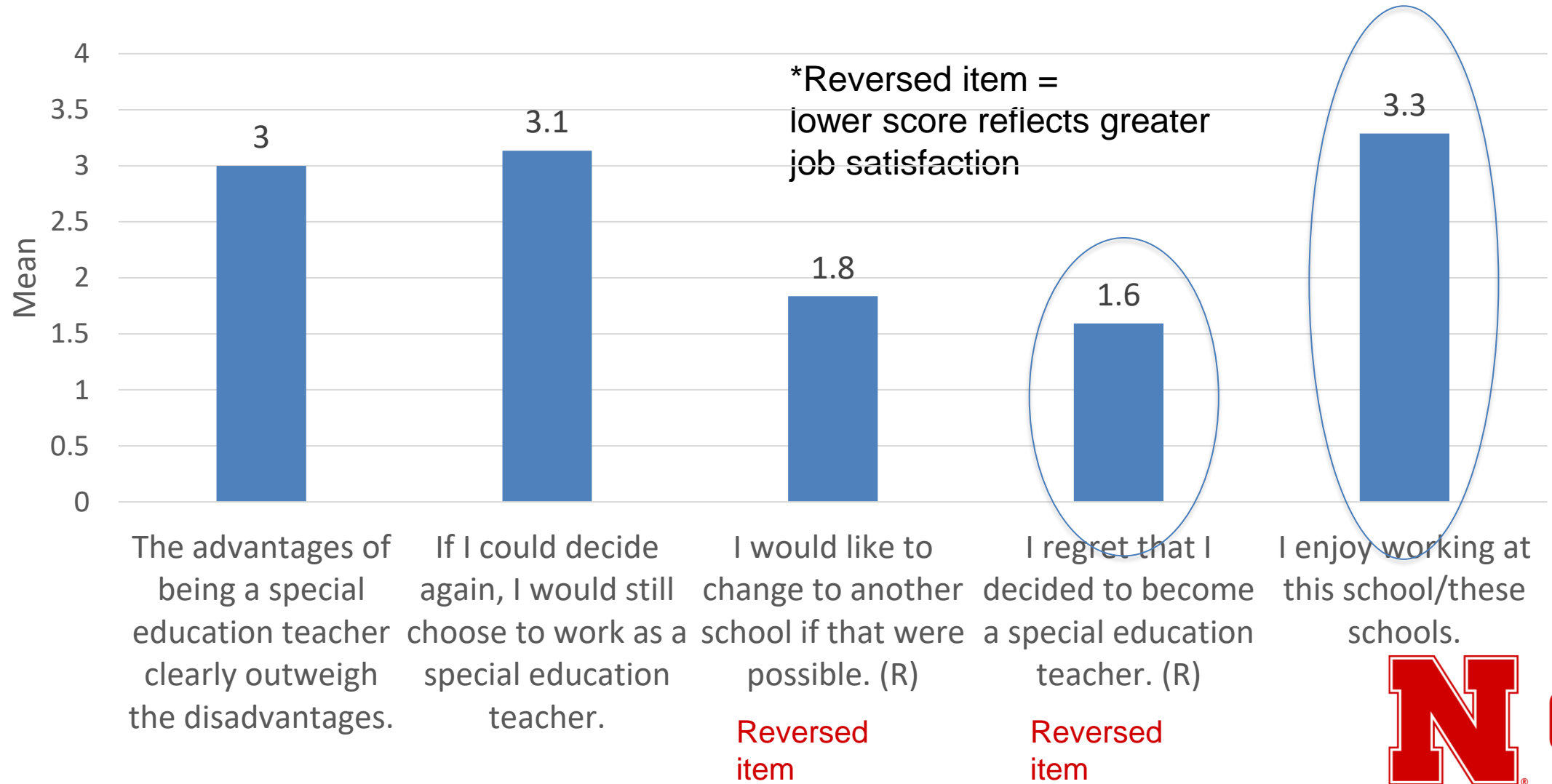
## Aim 2: Summary

- Teachers received a variety of professional development
  - Perceived utility varied
- Teachers received additional in-school supports

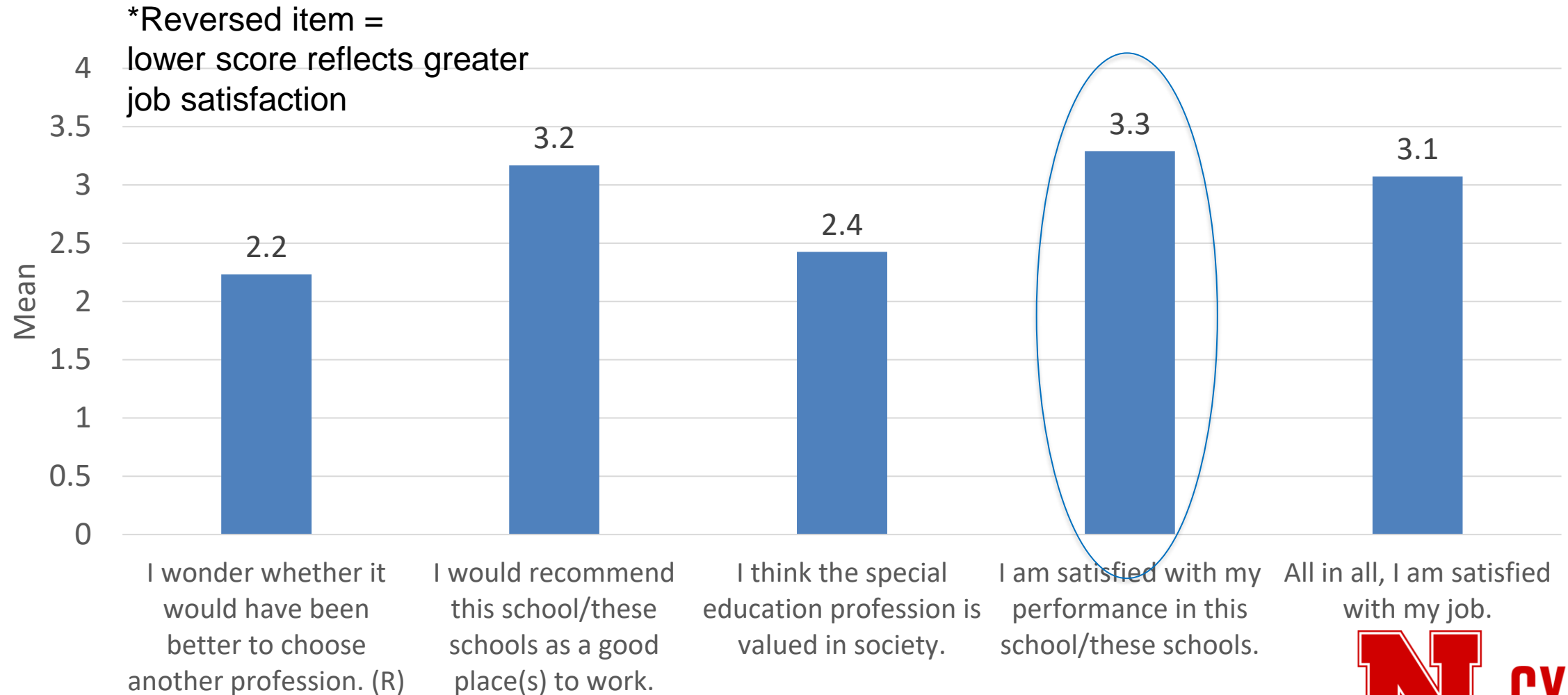
# Aim 3: Job Satisfaction & Teacher Stress

- Overall mean job satisfaction score = 2.85 (SD 0.43)
  - Scale from 1-4; higher score indicates higher job satisfaction
- Individual item scores vary
  - In general teachers are satisfied with their performance but may feel undervalued

# Aim 3: Job Satisfaction



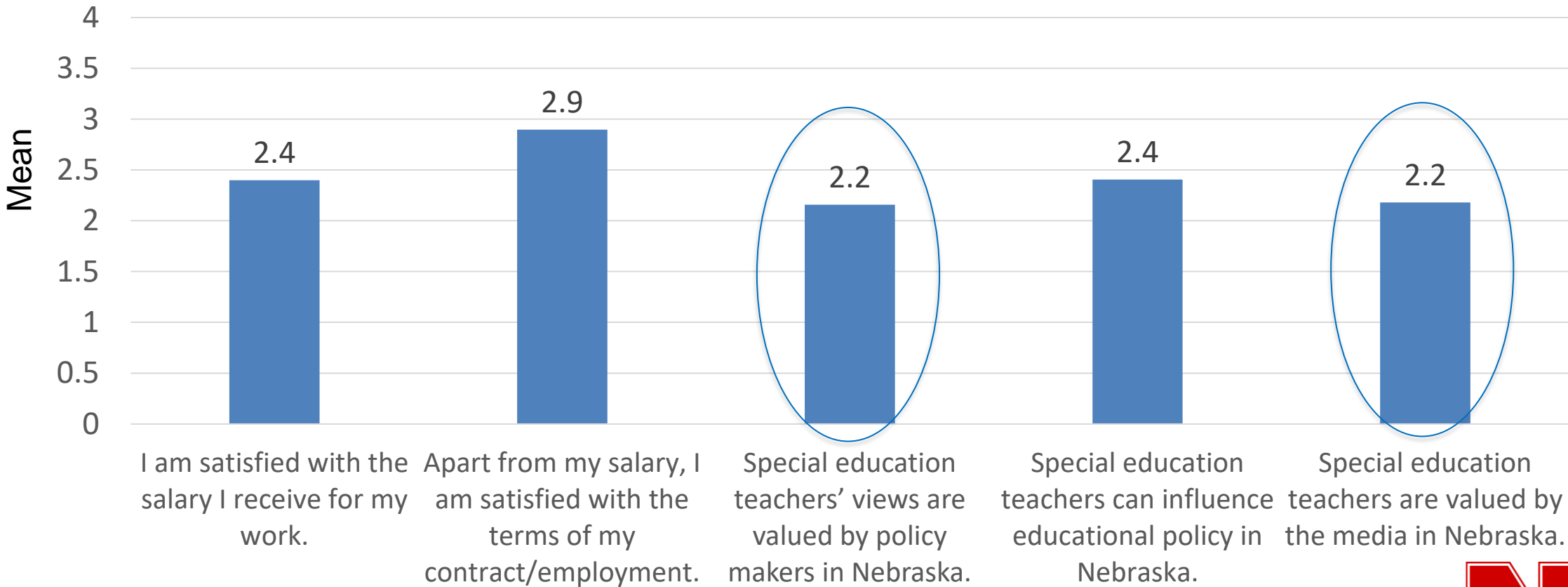
# Aim 3: Job Satisfaction



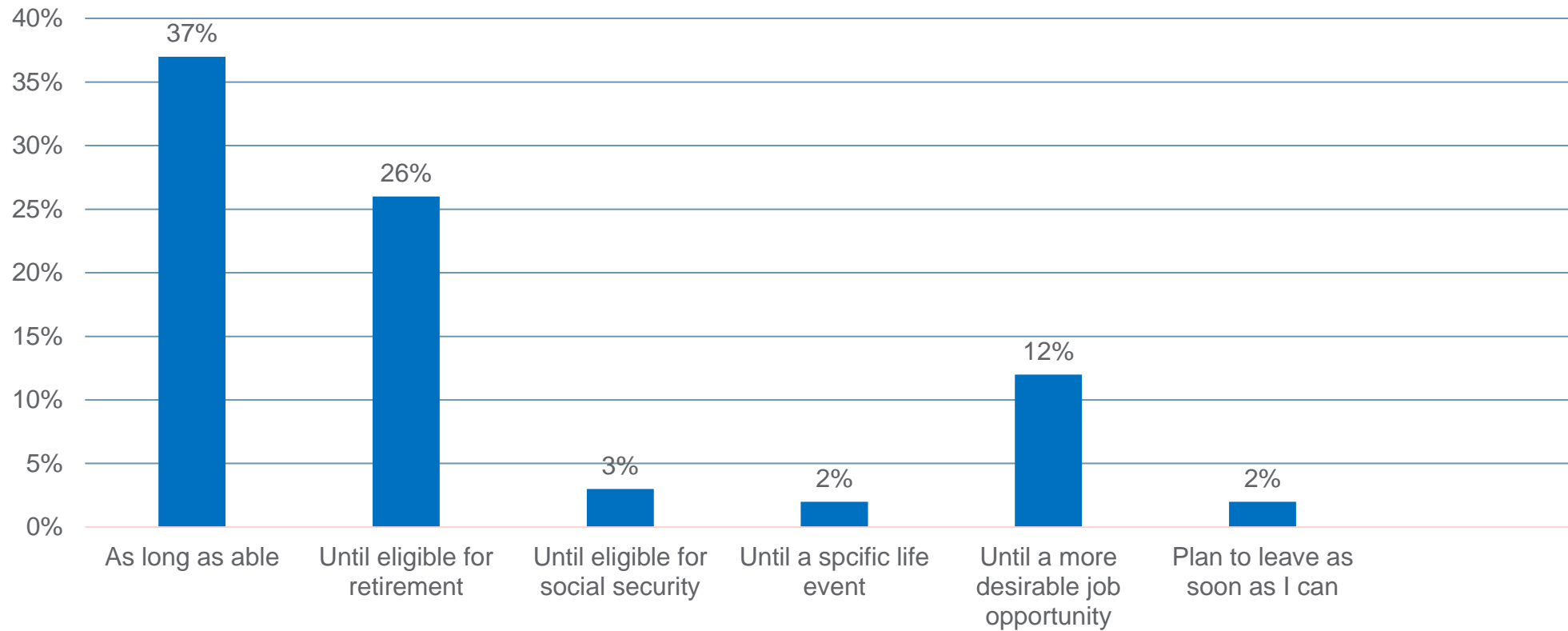
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item



# Aim 3: Job Satisfaction

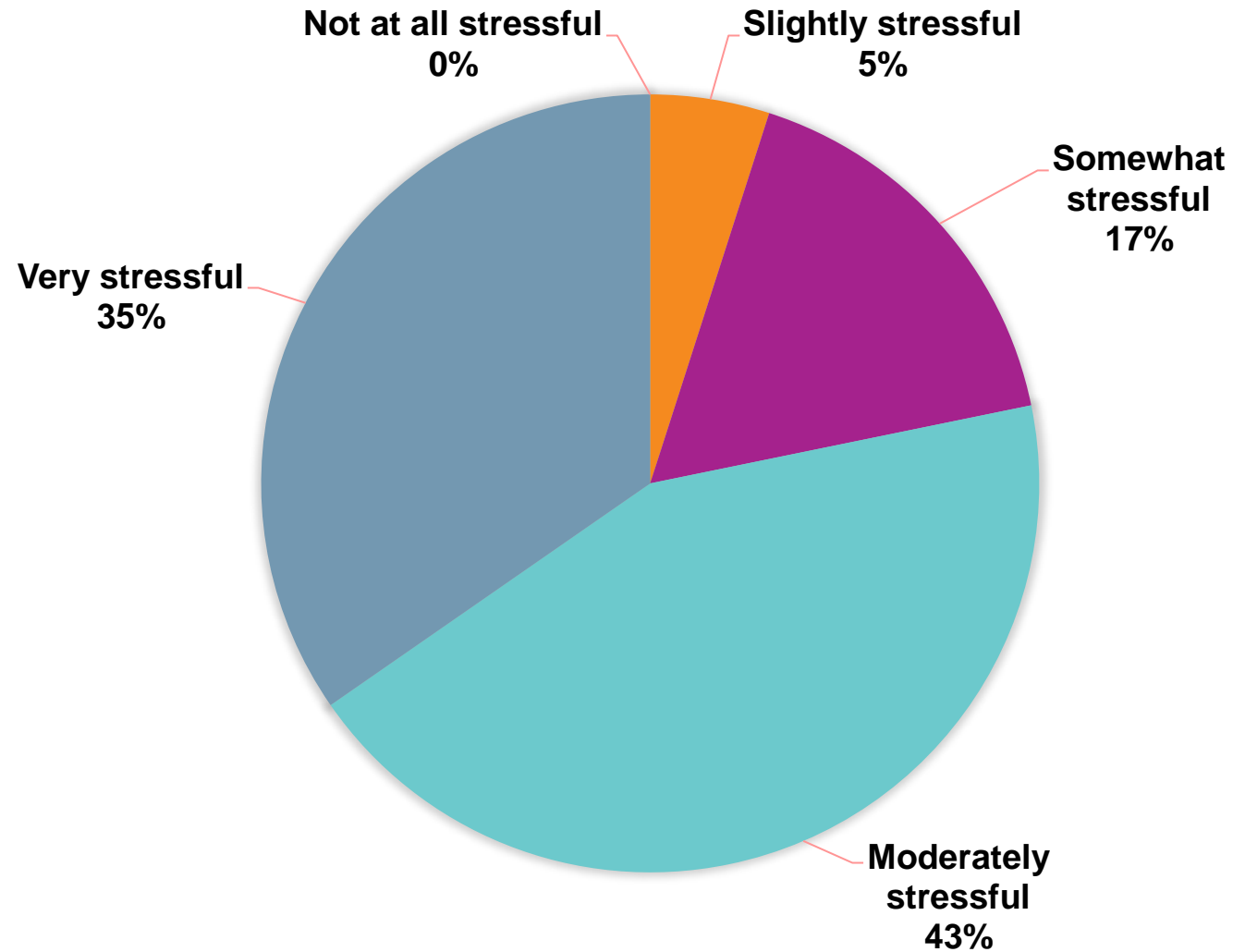


# How long do you plan to remain in special education?

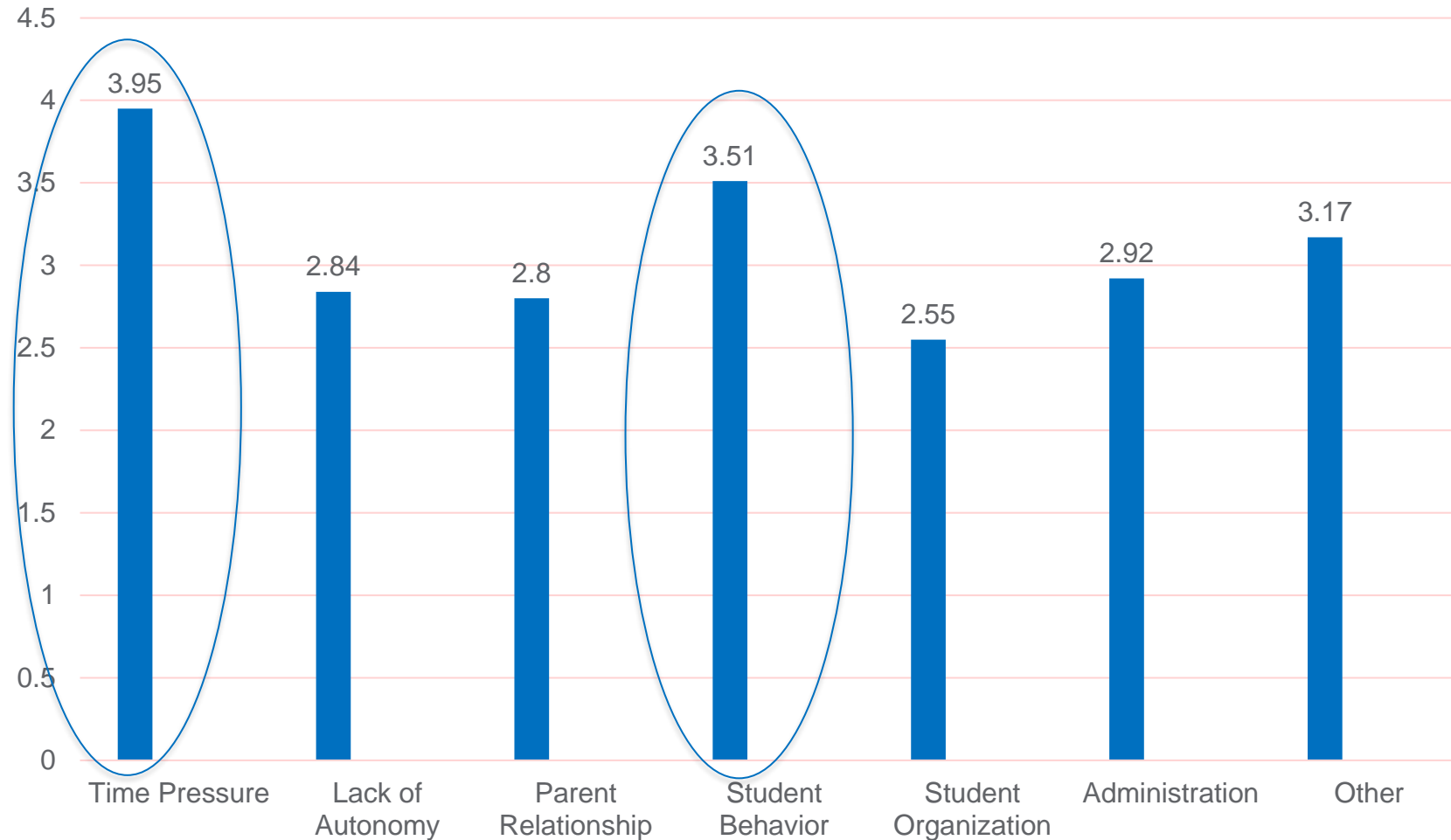


# Teacher Stress

HOW STRESSFUL DO YOU FIND BEING A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER?



# Teacher Sources of Stress



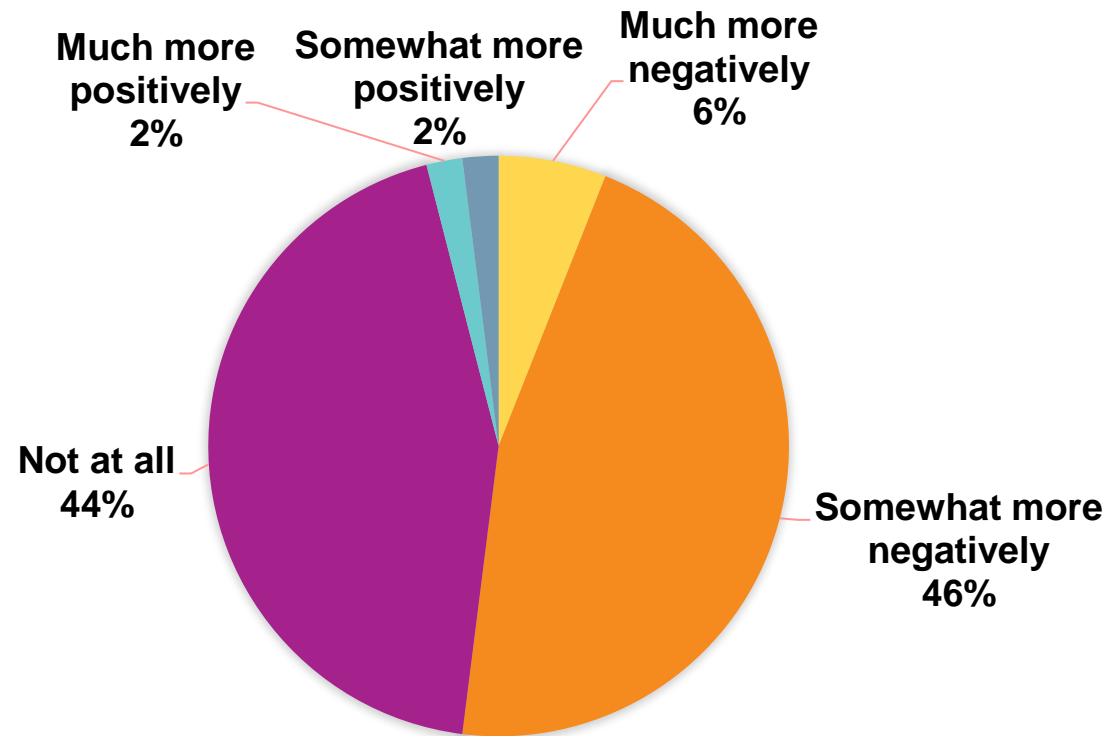
Range = 1 (not at all) to 5 (very) stressful





# COVID-19 Considerations

**HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC INFLUENCED YOUR RESPONSES TO THE JOB SATISFACTION ITEMS?**



# Aim 3: Summary

- Overall teachers report moderate job satisfaction
- Retention
  - 63% of teachers plan to remain in the field until retirement
  - 16% plan to leave prior to retirement
  - 21% are undecided
- Teachers find being a special education teacher stressful
  - 79% report moderately to very stressful
  - Time pressure and student behavior are the top sources of stress

# Aim 4: Supports & Job Satisfaction

- Stepwise regression models were used to determine the relationship between available supports and job satisfaction
  - A range of predictors and covariates were modeled to predict job satisfaction.
  - We retained a set of theoretically relevant covariates in the model even if some were not significantly predictive of the outcome.
  - We ran separate outcome models for early-career teachers to examine the relationship between first-year supports and job satisfaction.

# Aim 4: Supports & Job Satisfaction

- We explored four sets of variables to determine what predicted job satisfaction

1. Type of professional learning opportunities	Taking university courses to teaching, observational visits to other schools, coaching sessions, network meetings, attending workshops, conferences, or training session as (or not as) a presenter
2. Topic of professional learning opportunities	Special education, uses of technology, reading instruction, student behavior, teach students with disabilities, teach ELL, analysis and use of student assessments, teacher-parent/guardian cooperation or partnership, communicating with people from different cultures or countries

# Aim 4: Supports & Job Satisfaction

- We explored four sets of variables to determine what predicted job satisfaction

3. Other professional learning opportunities	Engage in research, collaboration with other teachers on issues of instruction, teaching observation
4. Supports for professional learning activities	Credits toward re-certification or advanced certification in special education, release time, scheduled time in the contract year for professional learning, stipend for professional learning activities that took place outside regular work hours, full or partial reimbursement of college tuition, reimbursement for conference or workshop fees, reimbursement for travel and/or daily expenses

# Aim 4: Supports & Job Satisfaction

- We explored four sets of variables to determine what predicted *early-career teacher* job satisfaction

First-year teacher support	Participating in a teacher induction program, reduced teaching schedule or number of preparations, common planning time with teachers in your subject, seminars or classes for beginning teachers, extra classroom assistance (e.g., teacher aides), regular supportive communication with their principal, other administrators, or department chair, having a master or mentor teacher
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# Aim 4: Supports & Job Satisfaction

- Initial results
  - Observations, stipends, and professional learning focused on different cultures predicted **greater** job satisfaction
  - Teaching at high schools predicted **lower** job satisfaction

# Aim 4: Supports & Job Satisfaction

- Follow-up analysis controlling for “stress”
  - Greater stress predicted lower job satisfaction
  - Teaching observation predicted greater job satisfaction above and beyond stress
- Early-career teachers
  - Having a mentor predicted greater job satisfaction above and beyond the stress



# Aim 4: Summary

- Teachers are **more satisfied** with their job when they:
  - Observe, or are observed by, other teachers in their classroom (for at least 10 minutes)
- First-year teachers are **more satisfied** with their job when they:
  - Have mentor in the first year
- Teachers are **less satisfied** with their job when they:
  - Experience greater job stress

# Aim 4: Summary

- Potential predictors of job satisfaction mediated by stress:
  - Stipend for professional learning activities that took place outside regular work hours
  - Professional learning focused on communicating with people from different cultures or countries
  - Teaching at high schools

# Implications for Practice/Policy

- Prepare
  - Collaborate with IHEs to provide more flexibility and options to pre-service teachers
- Retain
  - Provide most meaningful supports (i.e., observations; 1<sup>st</sup> year mentors)
  - Although a variety of professional development opportunities and supports are available they vary in their perceived utility
  - Collaborate with teacher representatives to improve utility of PD

# Implications for Practice/Policy

- Retain (continued)
  - Address sources of job dissatisfaction
    - Stress (e.g., time pressure & student behavior)
    - High school special education conditions
  - A significant proportion of teachers either plan to leave the field soon or are unsure
    - Target these teachers for retention efforts

# Key Take Away Points

- Many special education teachers plan to leave the field before retirement or are unsure.
- Special education teachers are stressed.
  - Student behavior
  - Time pressure
- But there are supports administrators can provide to reduce stress and promote greater job satisfaction.
  - Observations
  - First-year mentor

# Next Steps?

- Provide study results to stakeholders
  - Executive summary
  - Presentations
- Proposal for deeper analysis
  - Investigate relationships by region, locale, economic status
  - Test for mediating relationships (i.e., whether the available supports lead to decrease in job stress, which then leads to increase in job satisfaction).