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# **STAFF ROLES IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL TENNESSEE SCHOOLS**

**Michele Schutz, Ph.D.**  
**Vanderbilt University**

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# AGENDA

**Today I will address . . . .**

- **Background information on career development for students with disabilities, rural schools, and staff roles**
  - **A research study of 10 rural Tennessee schools**
  - **Important findings and implications for school staff and administrators**
  - **Your questions and answers**
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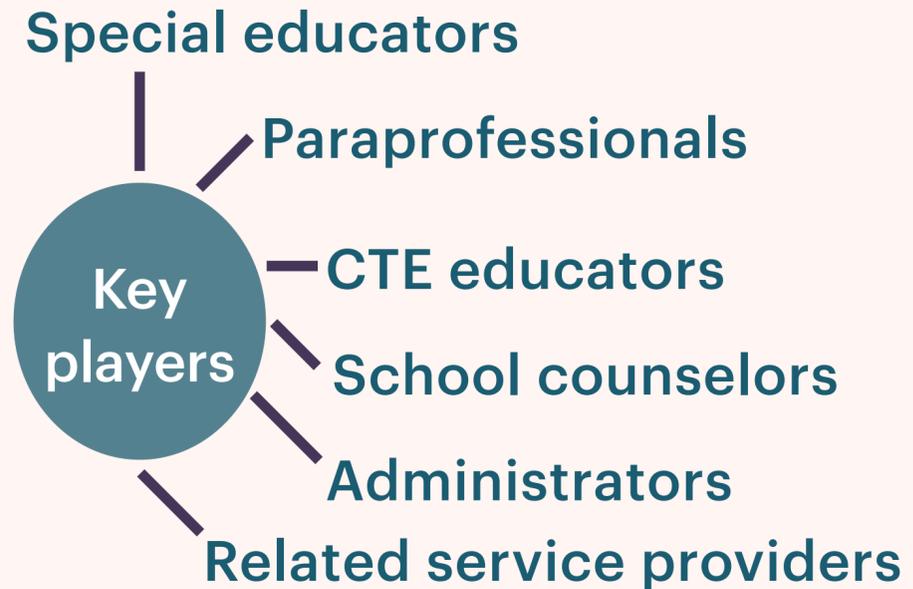
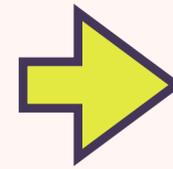
**BACKGROUND**

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# RATIONALE FOR CURRENT STUDY

Preparing students with disabilities (SWD) for work is a primary purpose of special education

Staff from both special education and general education must work together to support SWD



High schools must provide comprehensive career development programs to SWD

These programs are most effective when integrated within efforts to prepare all students for employment



**But it remains unknown . . .**

What roles do these staff play and why?

To what extent are district staffing models viewed to be sufficient?

What does this look like in rural districts?

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# RESEARCH STUDY

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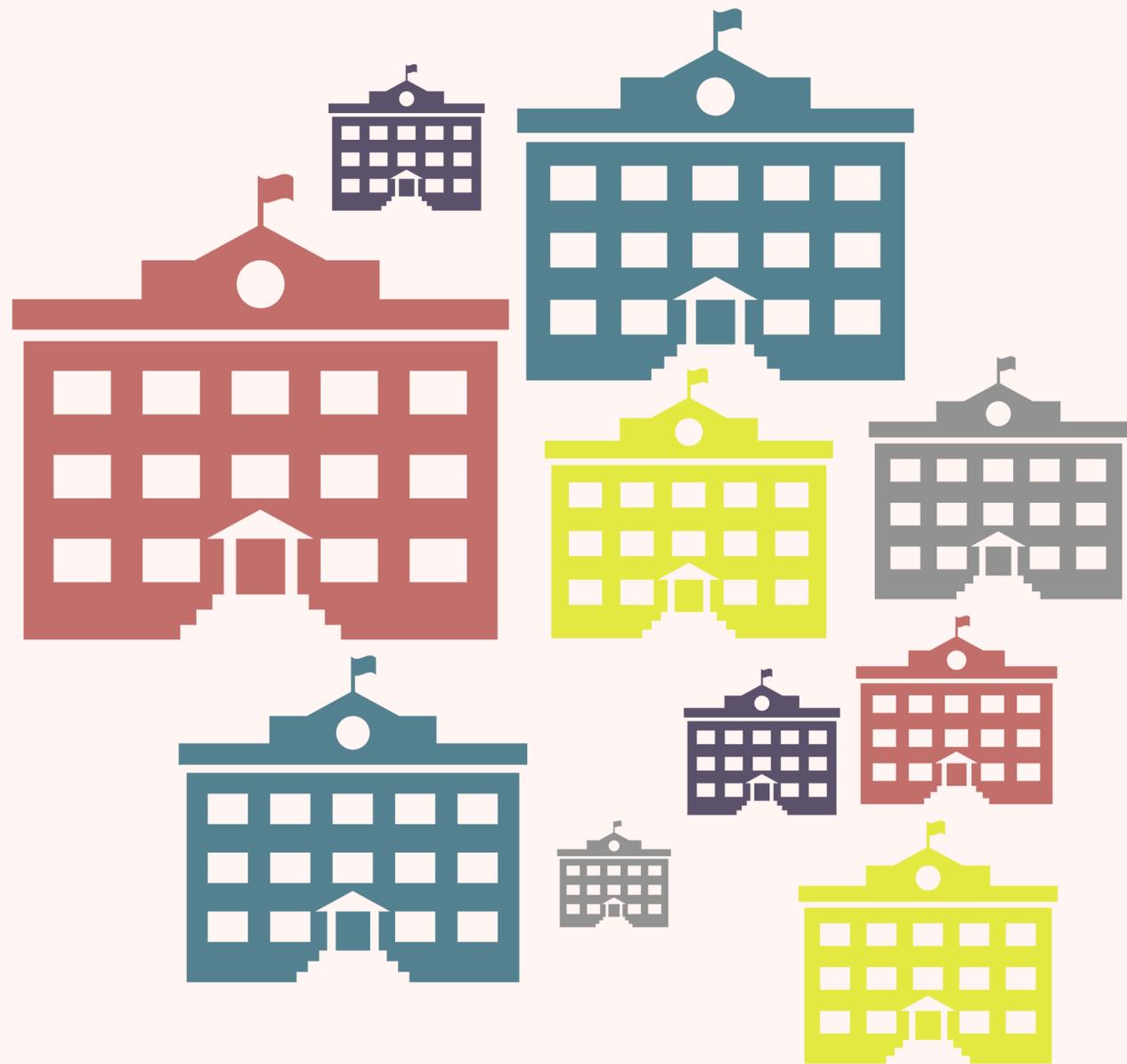
# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the roles of school staff with respect to career development for students with disabilities in rural districts?
2. How do school staff come to assume their roles?
3. How do school staff view their roles and district staffing models?
4. To what extent do roles vary by staff position?
5. What are the strengths and gaps regarding career development programming within rural school districts?
6. How do staff roles and district profiles vary across districts?



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# PARTICIPATING DISTRICTS



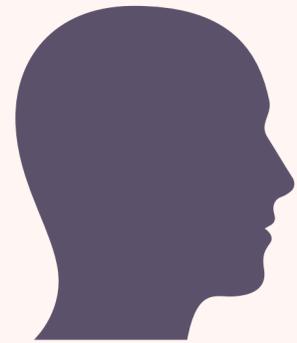
- **10 public school districts serving high school students with disabilities in rural Tennessee communities**
  - **4 in East TN; 3 in Middle TN; 2 in West TN**
  - **Ranged: <1,000 to >7,000 students per district**
  - **Ranged: 1 to 5 high schools per district**
  - **Varied in staffing structures, such as . . .**
    - **District transition coordinator**
    - **Transition-School-to-Work specialist**
    - **Job coaches**
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# PARTICIPANTS

- (a) Were employed at a rural district
- (b) Had leadership responsibilities in special education or knowledge of transition programming



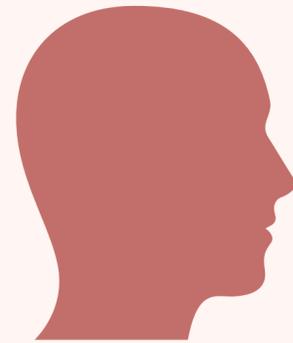
291 total participants



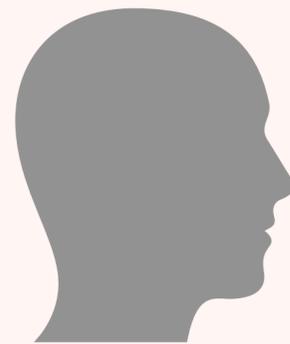
Administrators



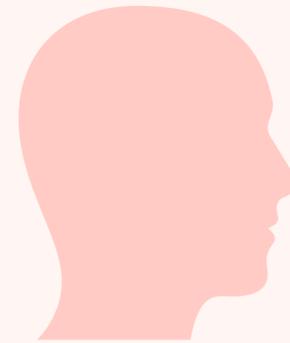
Special educators



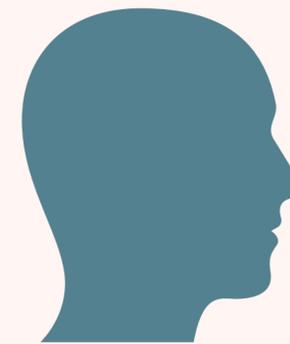
Paraprofessionals



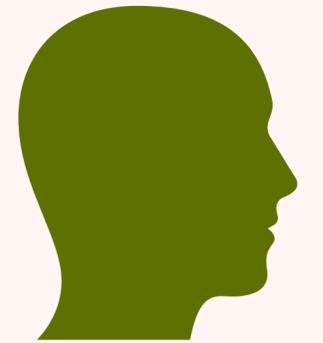
CTE educators



School  
counselors



Related service providers



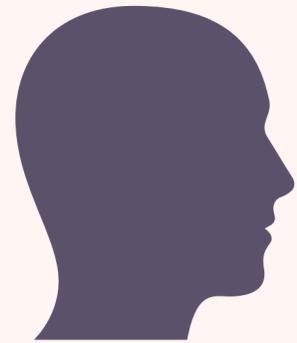
Others

# PARTICIPANTS

- (a) Were employed by a rural district
- (b) Directly or indirectly supported students with disabilities aged 14 or older in preparing for work



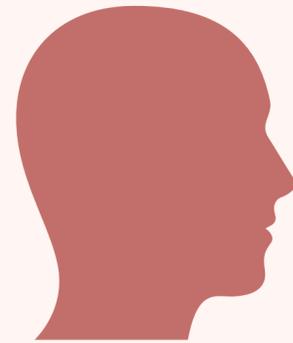
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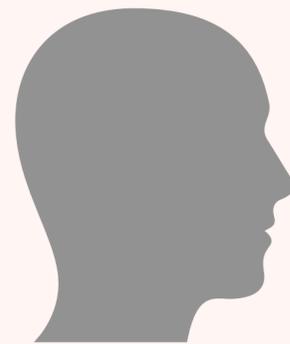
Administrators



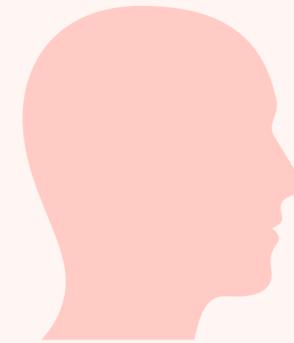
Special educators



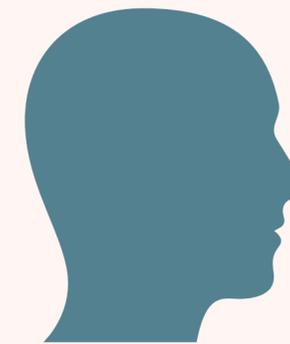
Paraprofessionals



CTE educators



School  
counselors



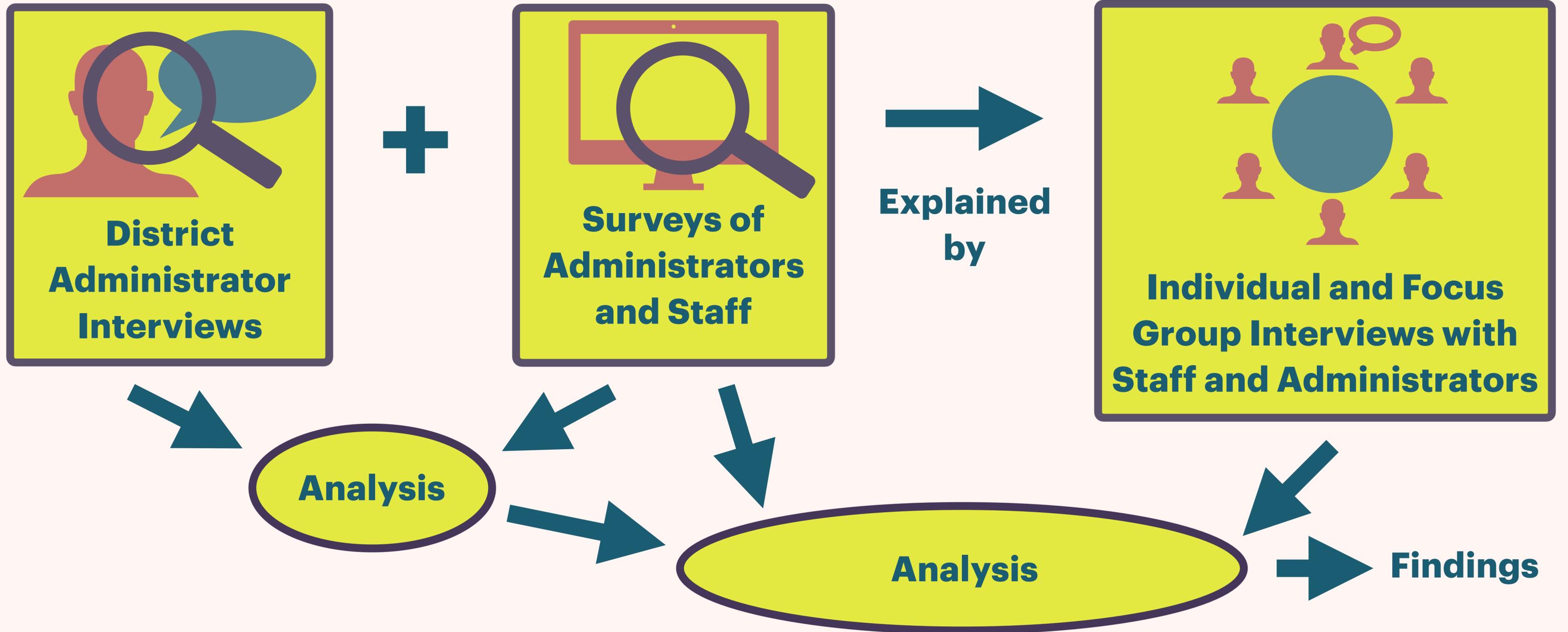
Related service providers



Others

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# MIXED METHODS DESIGN



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# **FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

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**WHAT ARE THE ROLES  
OF SCHOOL STAFF  
WITH RESPECT TO  
CAREER DEVELOPMENT  
FOR STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES IN RURAL  
DISTRICTS?**

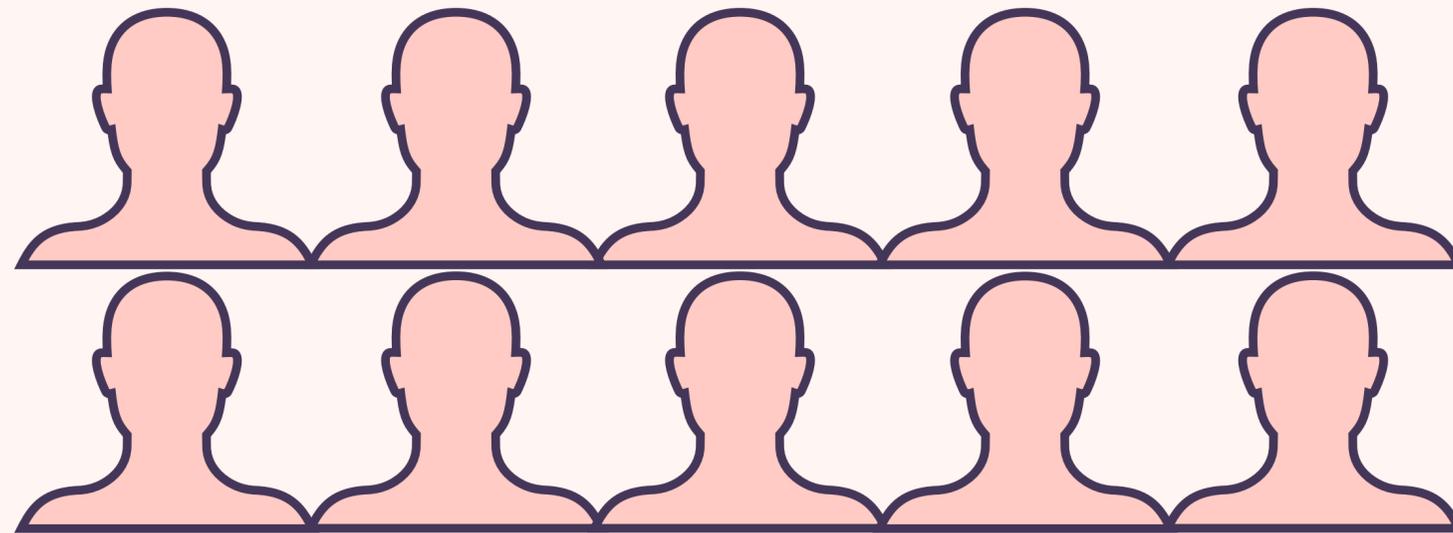


**RQ1**

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# MAJOR FINDINGS

**Staff collectively played a wide variety of roles with respect to career development**

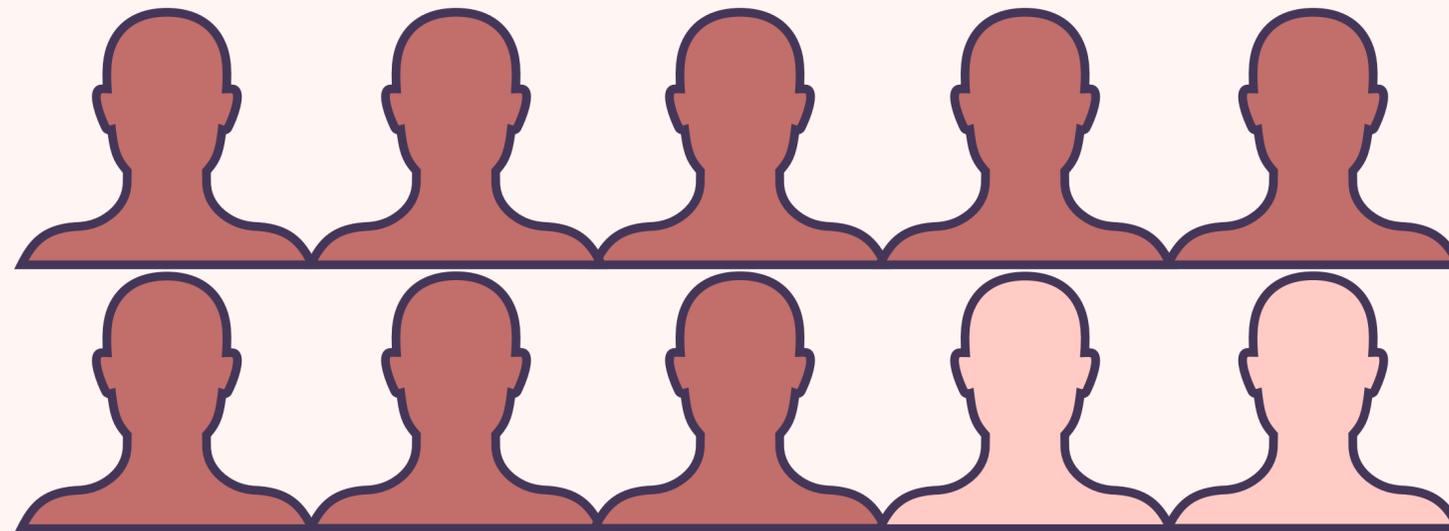


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# MAJOR FINDINGS

**Staff collectively played a wide variety of roles with respect to career development**

Career-related  
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goal  
development



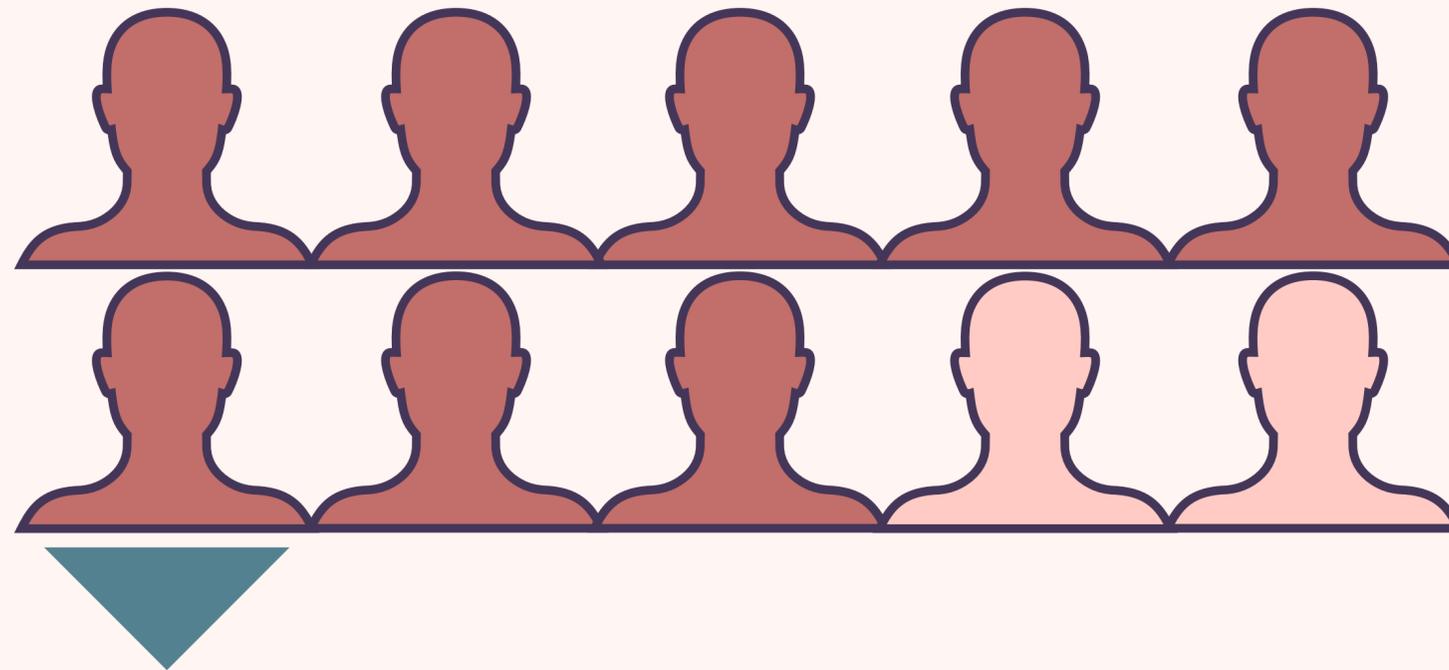
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# MAJOR FINDINGS

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Career-related  
instruction

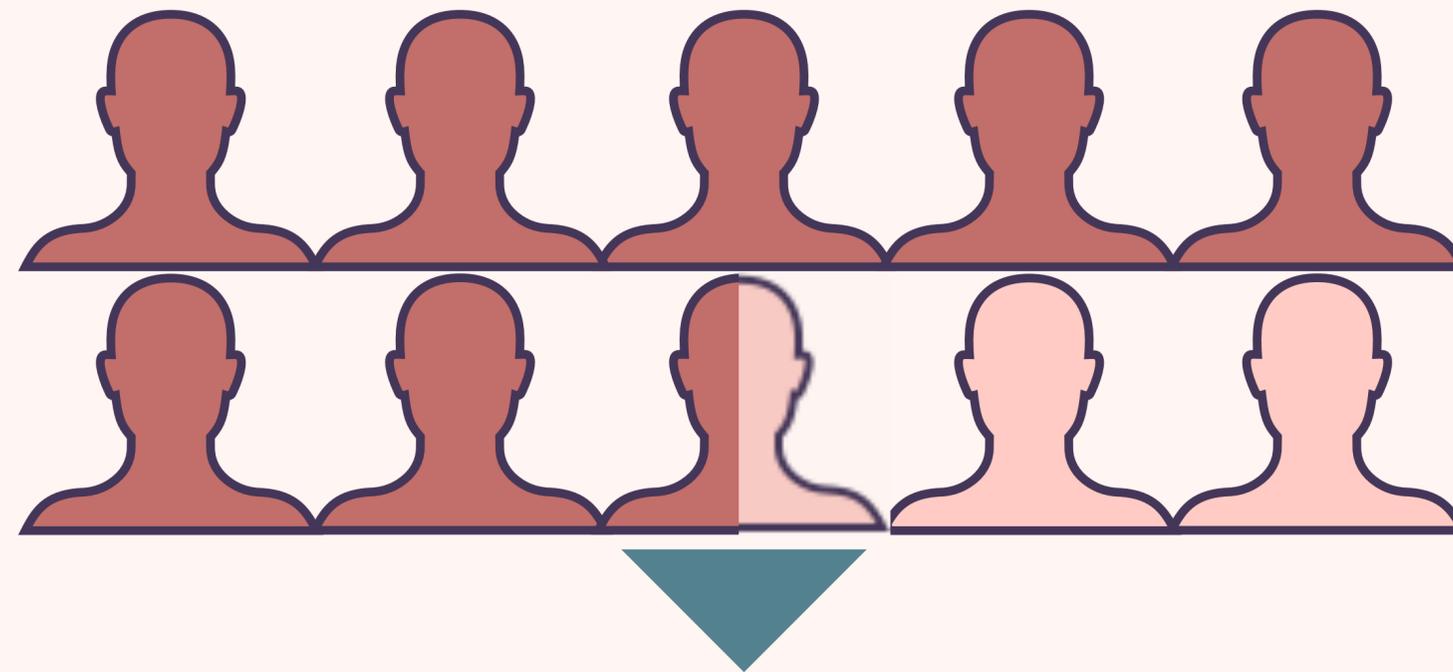
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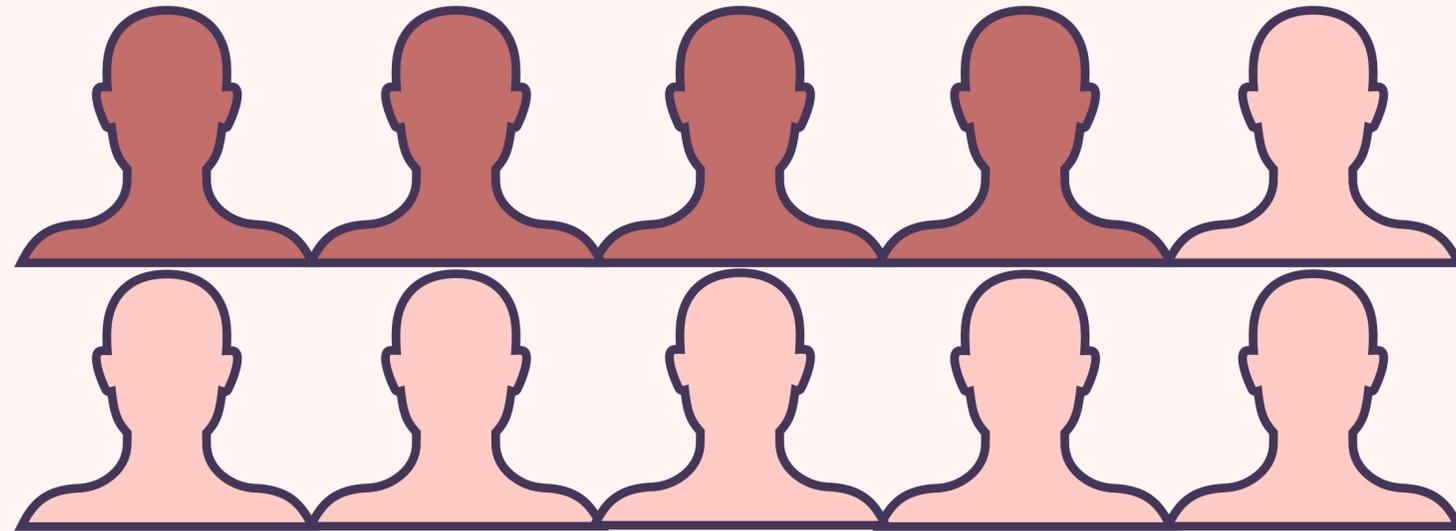
Addressing  
collateral skills  
and needs for  
employment

74%

# MAJOR FINDINGS

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Career-related  
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goal  
development



Program  
development and  
improvement

Career-related  
instruction

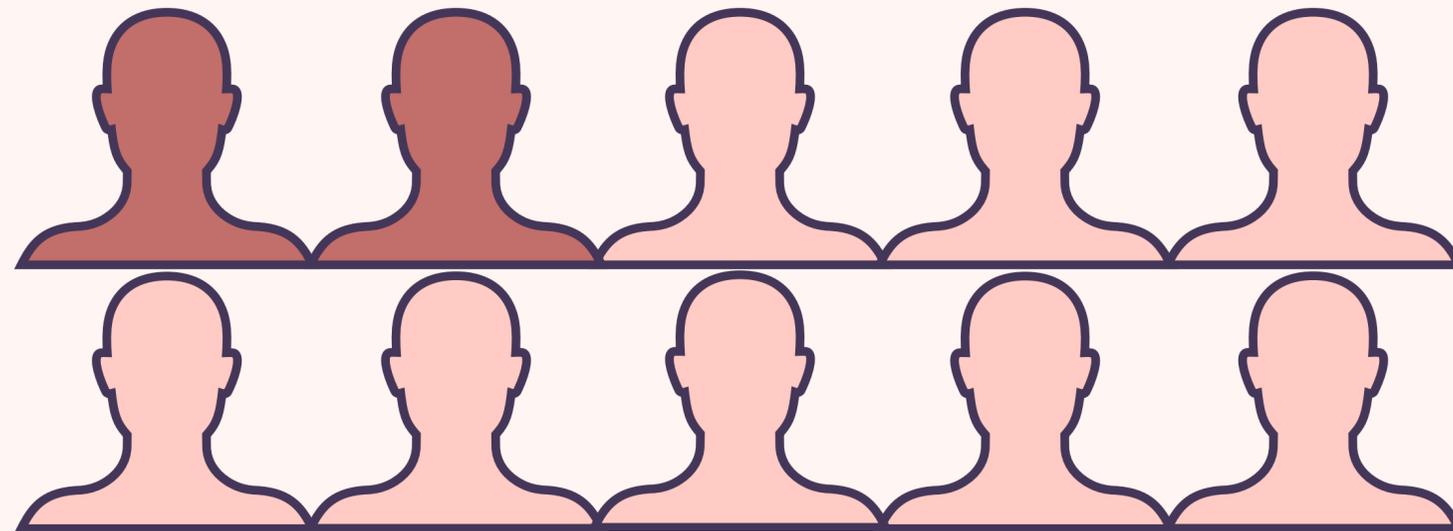
Addressing  
collateral skills  
and needs for  
employment

41%

# MAJOR FINDINGS

Staff collectively played a wide variety of roles with respect to career development

Career-related assessment and goal development



Program development and improvement

Career-related instruction

Addressing collateral skills and needs for employment

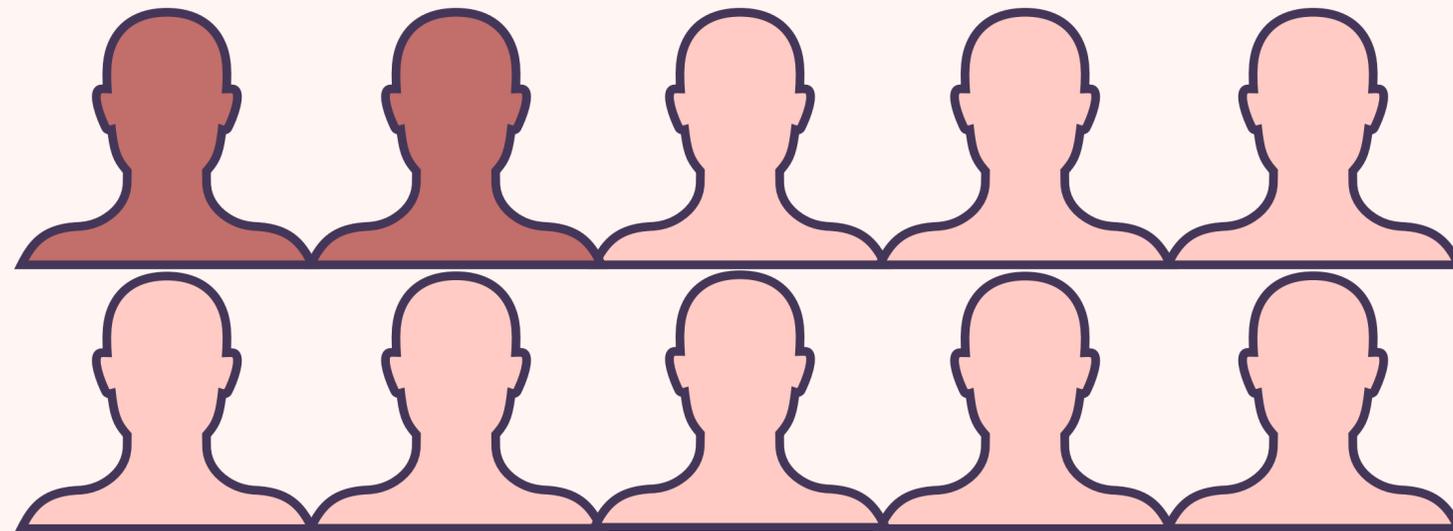
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Receiving training on career development for SWD

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Program development and improvement

Career-related instruction

Addressing collateral skills and needs for employment

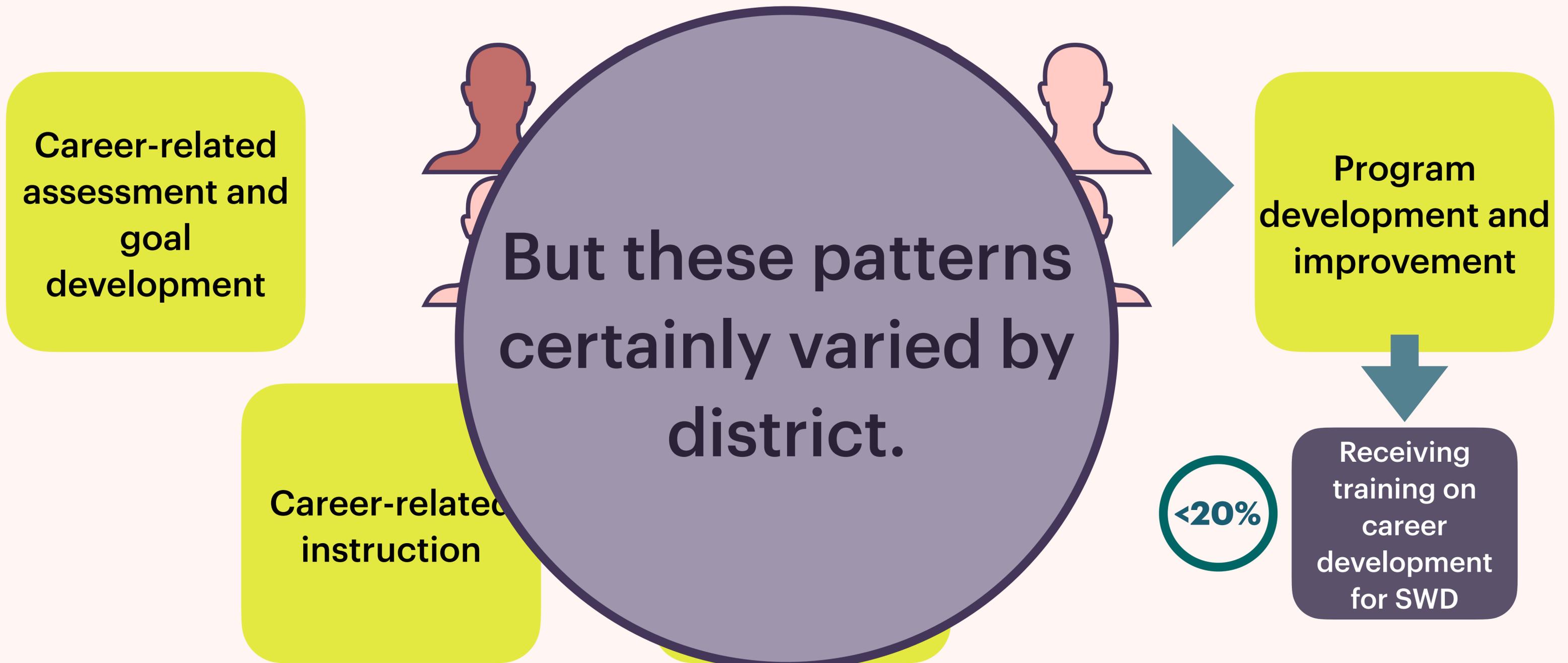
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Receiving training on career development for SWD

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# MAJOR FINDINGS

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# CAREER DEVELOPMENT ROLES FOR SWD

**The Words of a *General Educator*  
Teaching Career Exploration**

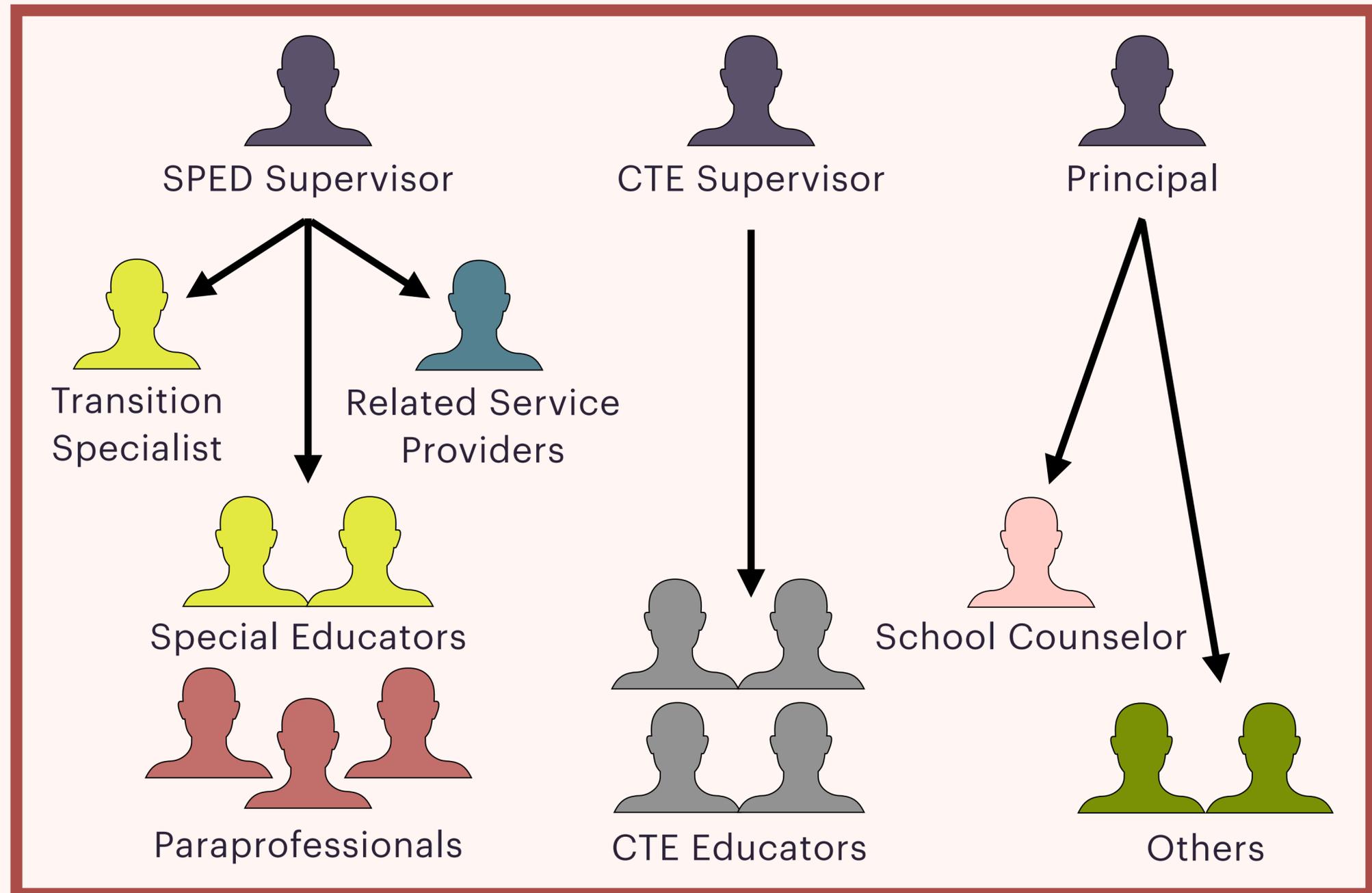
**“How often do I have conversations with these kids? Weekly... [for] some of them, it's daily until I get them on a path and then I will help them fill out their FAFSAs. I will help them get in contact with people who can [help]...and then they have to do the footwork. But I'm that nagging mom who is constantly saying, “You need to go get a copy of your IEP. You need to go to the board of education with your parent for a letter asking for this information” for college.**

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# KEY IMPLICATION

➤ **Districts should adopt a team approach for integrating disability specific programs and those generally available to all students with respect to:**

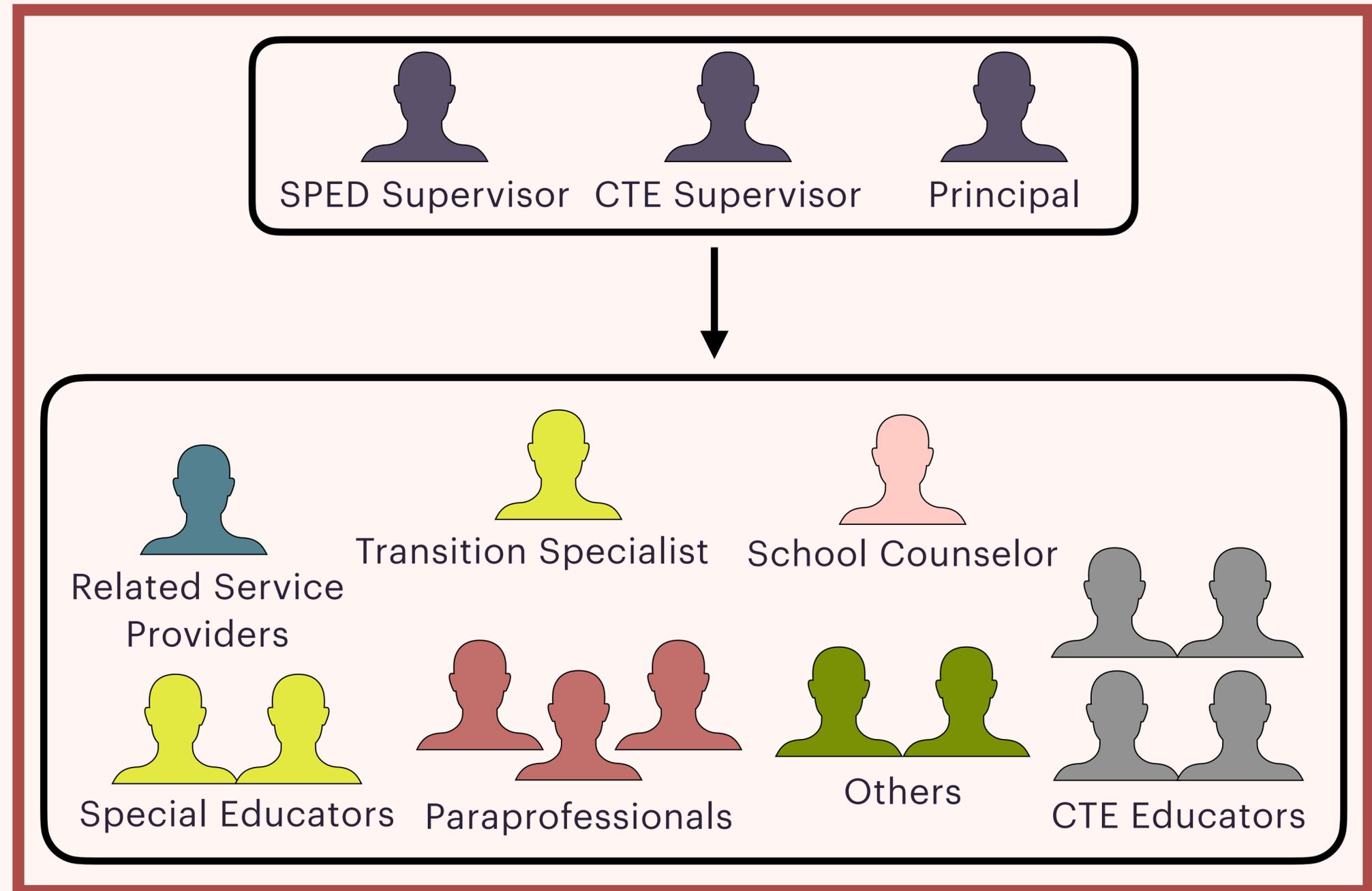
- **Selecting resources**
- **Developing district-wide programs and policies**
- **Recruiting students**
- **Promoting programs to the community**
- **Evaluating programs**
- **Providing training**



# KEY IMPLICATION

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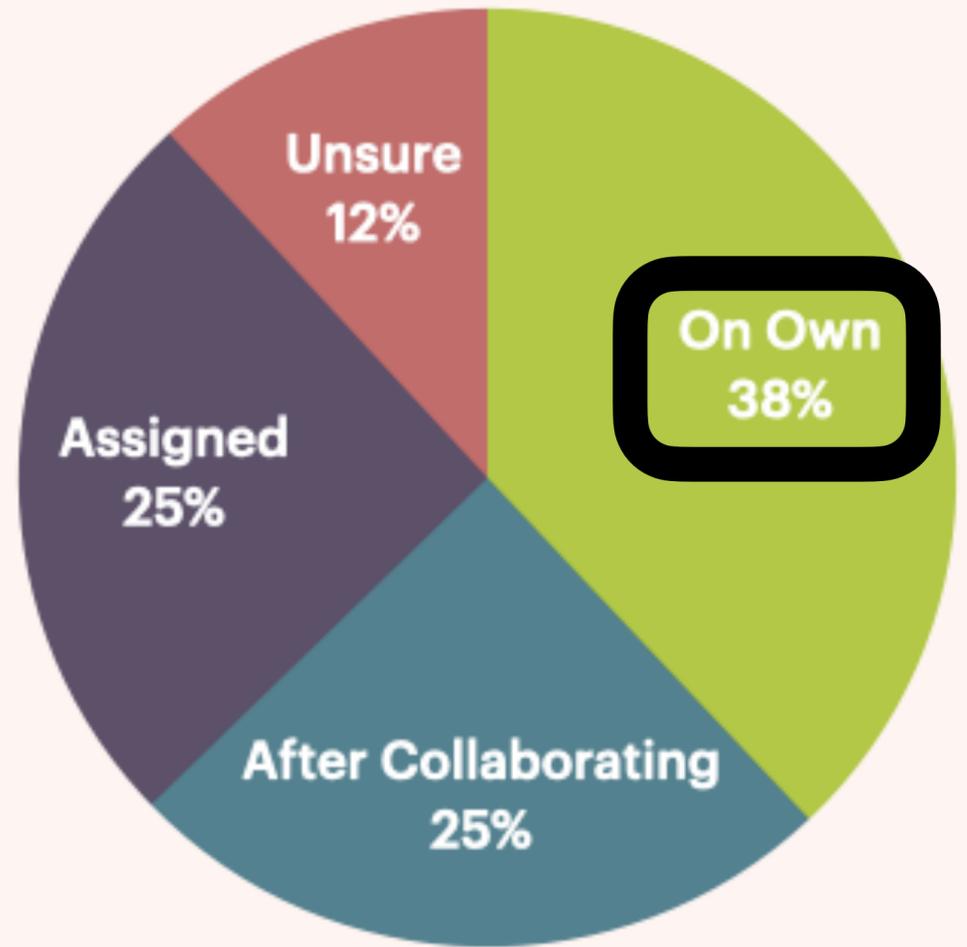
**HOW DO SCHOOL  
STAFF COME TO  
ASSUME THEIR  
ROLES?**



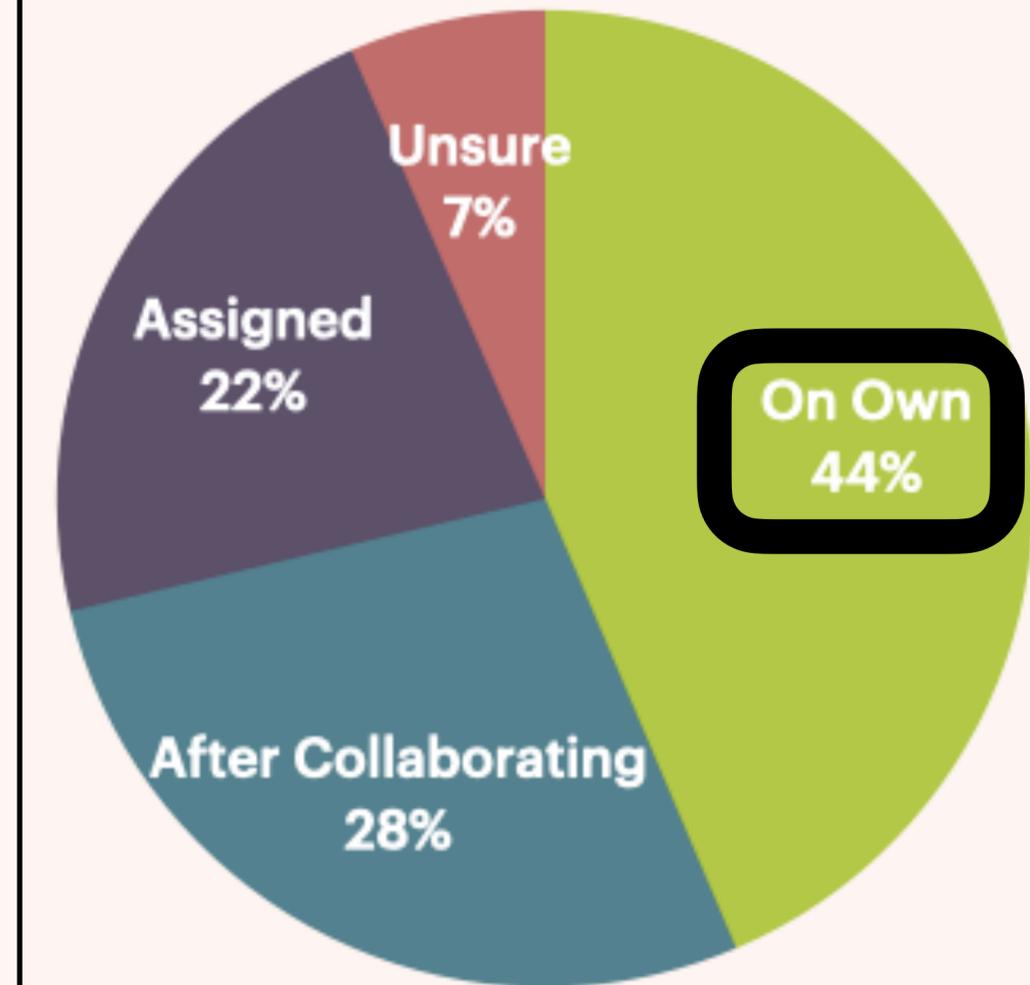
# HOW ROLES ARE ASSUMED

Average Percentage of Staff Who Performed Task for Given Reason

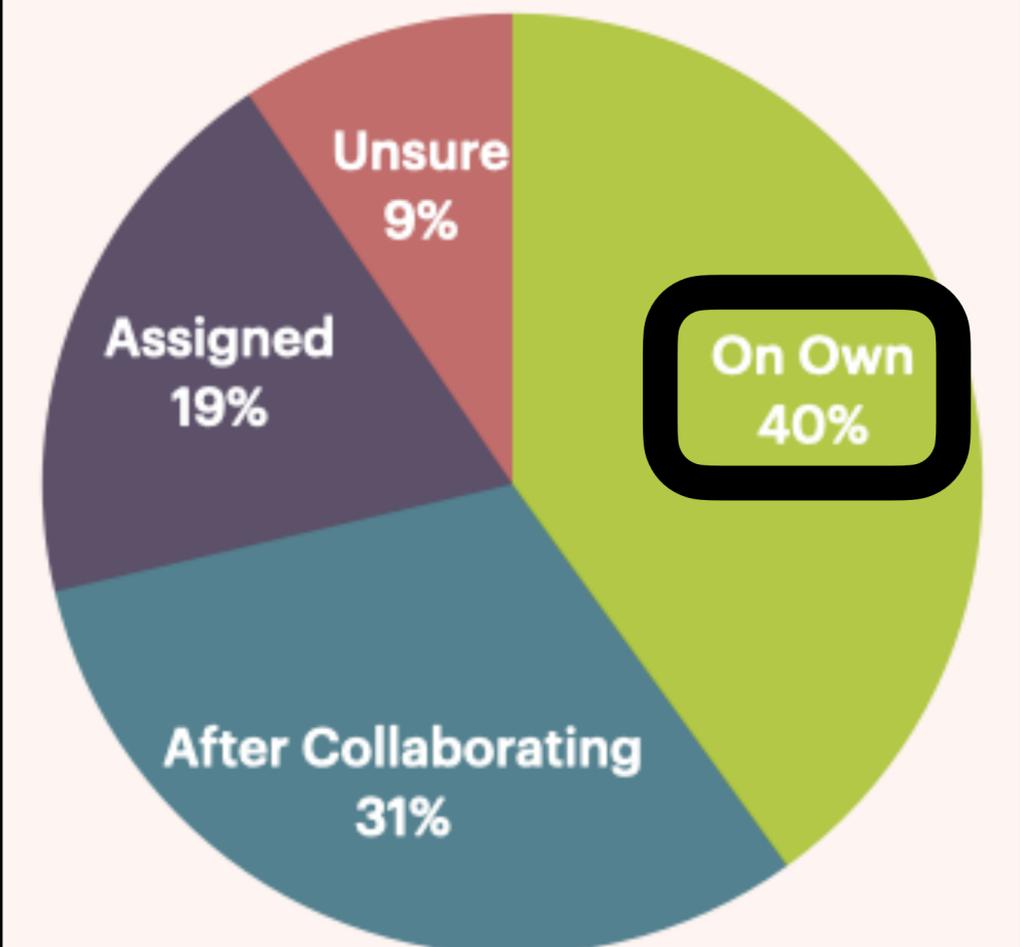
## Career Assessment and Goal Development



## Career-Related Instruction



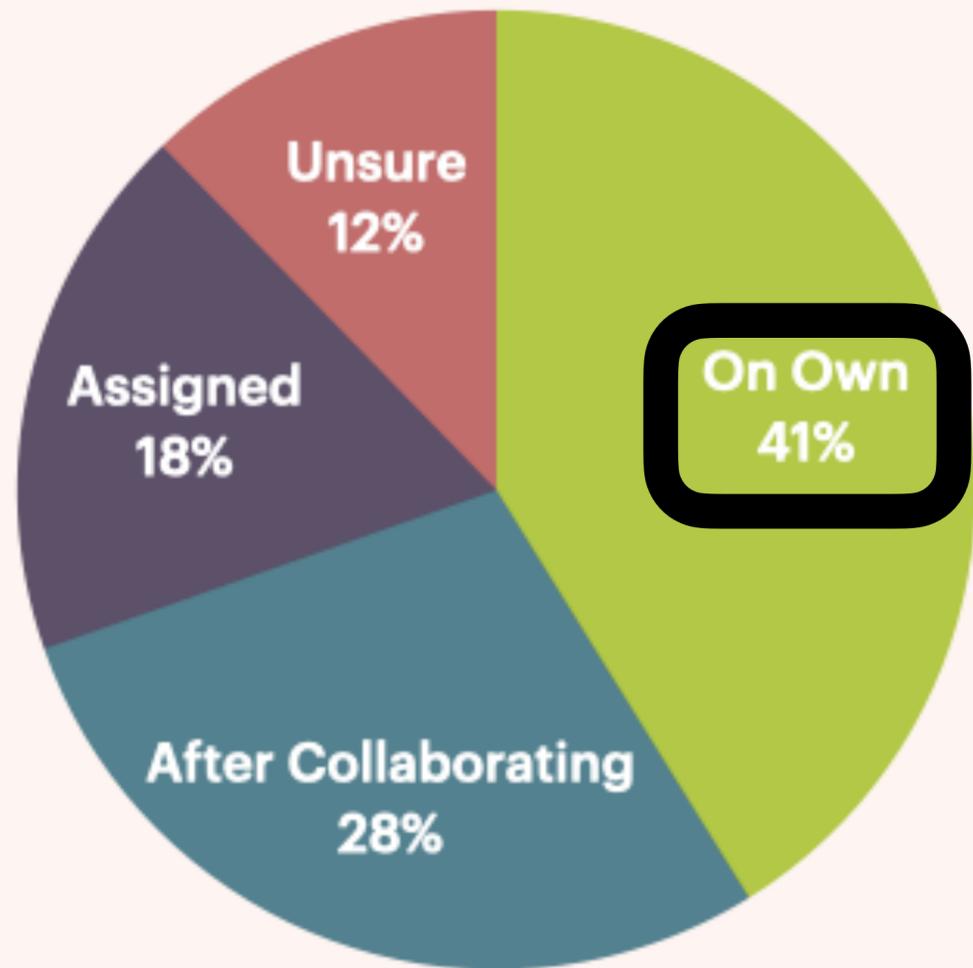
## Addressing Collateral Skills and Needs for Employment



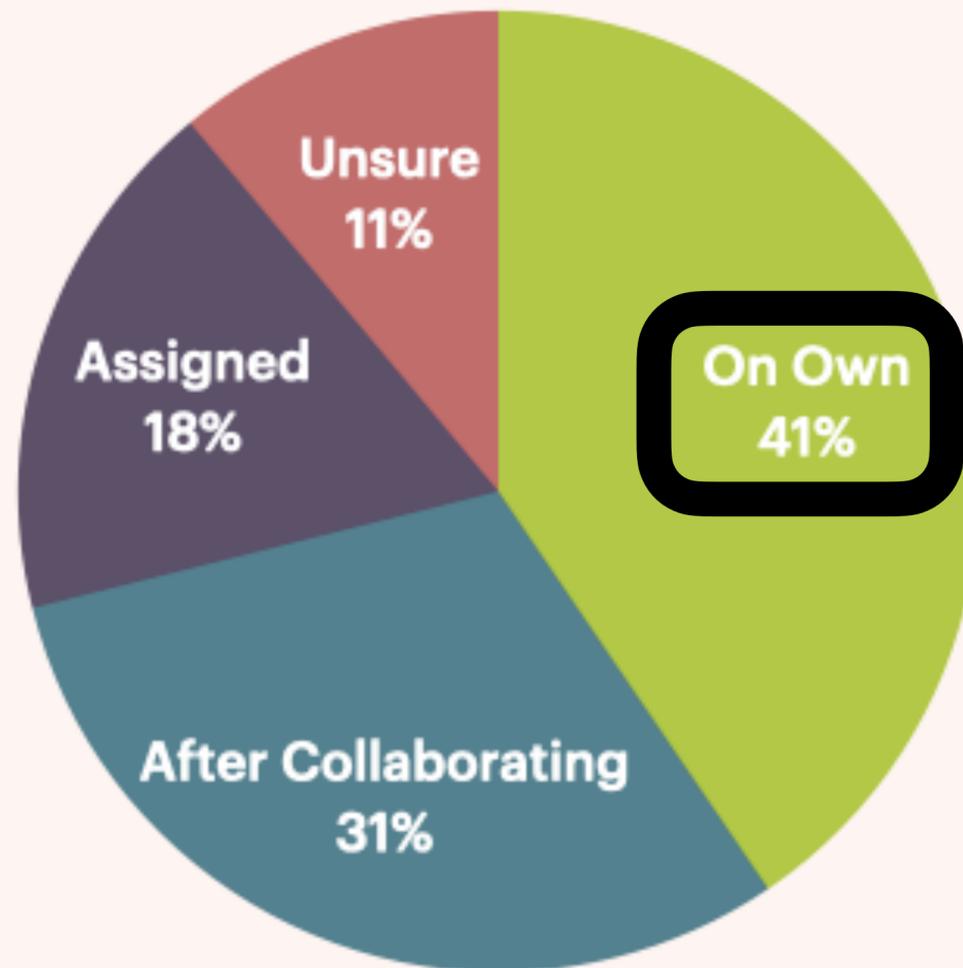
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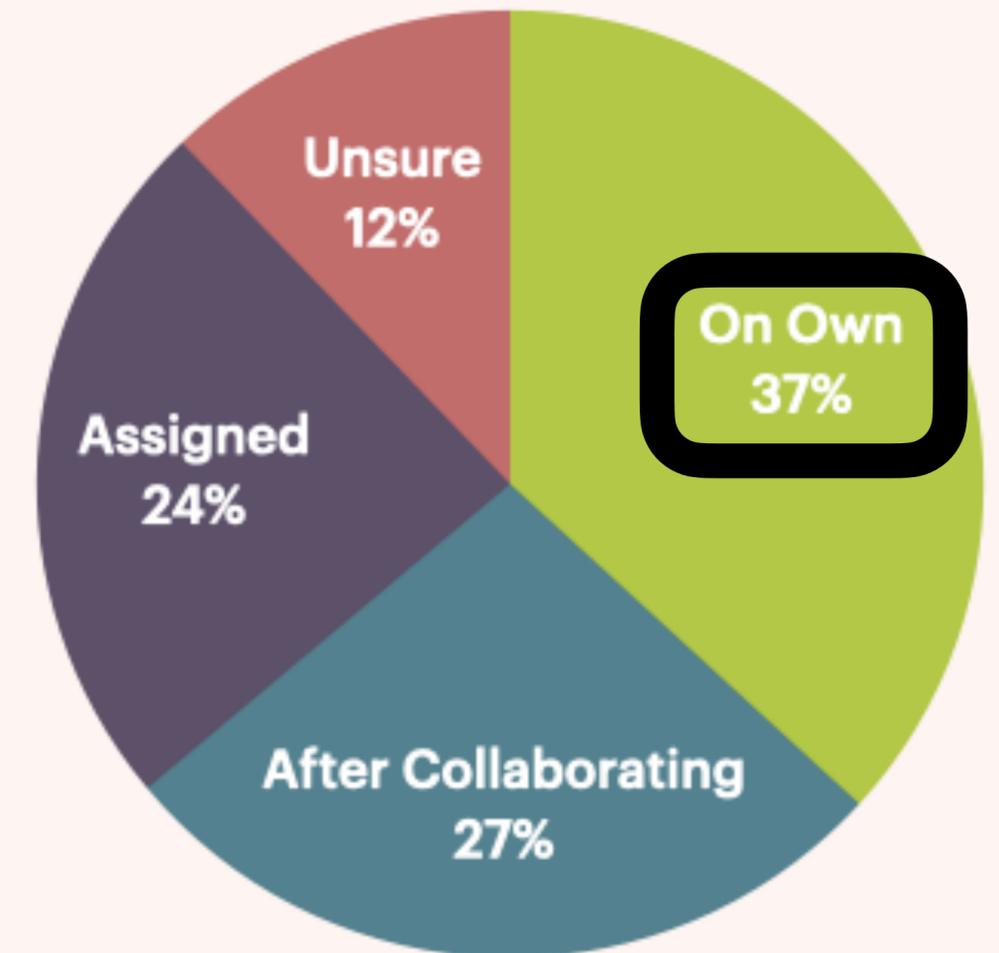
## Career-Related Experiences



## School Partnerships



## Program Development and Improvement



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# HOW ROLES ARE ASSUMED

***The Words of a Special Educator***

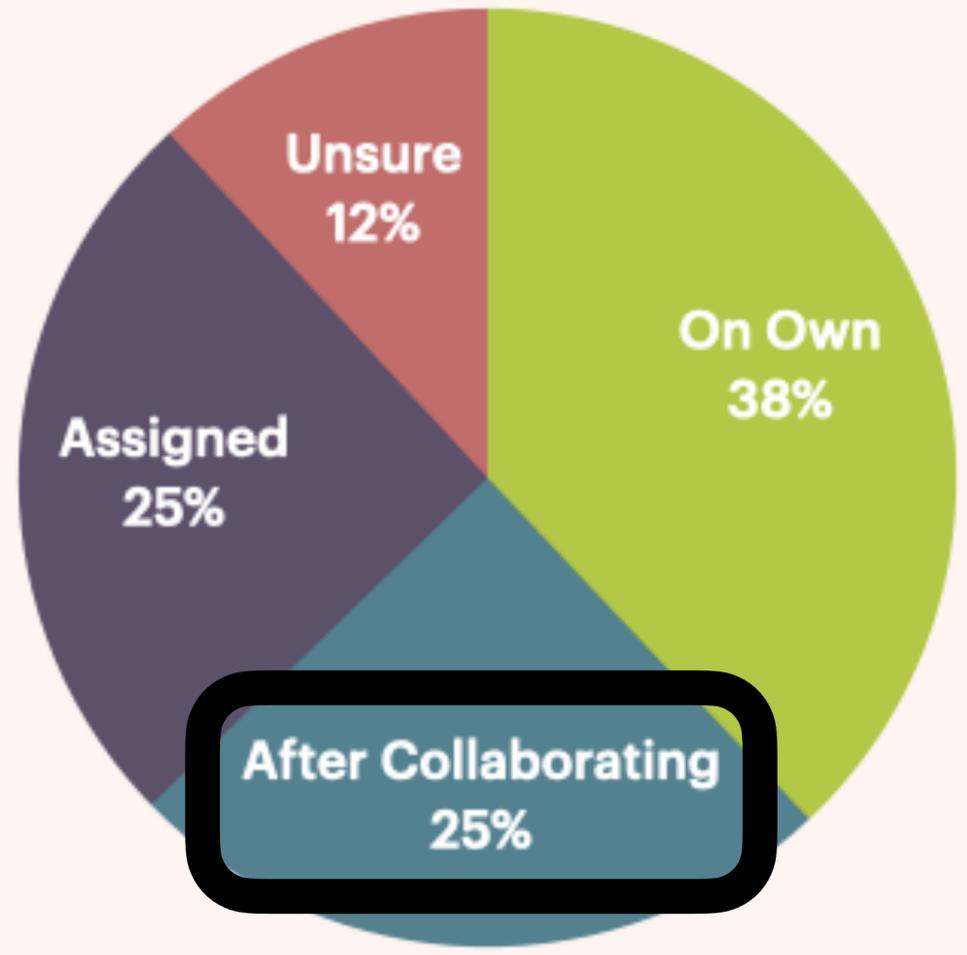
**“I created new work-based learning sites because it was a need that I saw that my students needed something outside [of our school-based greenhouse] for working...I had students that love getting their hands dirty and loved being outside, but I also saw a need for my students who did not like that kind of thing and would be more interested in a possible restaurant experience.”**

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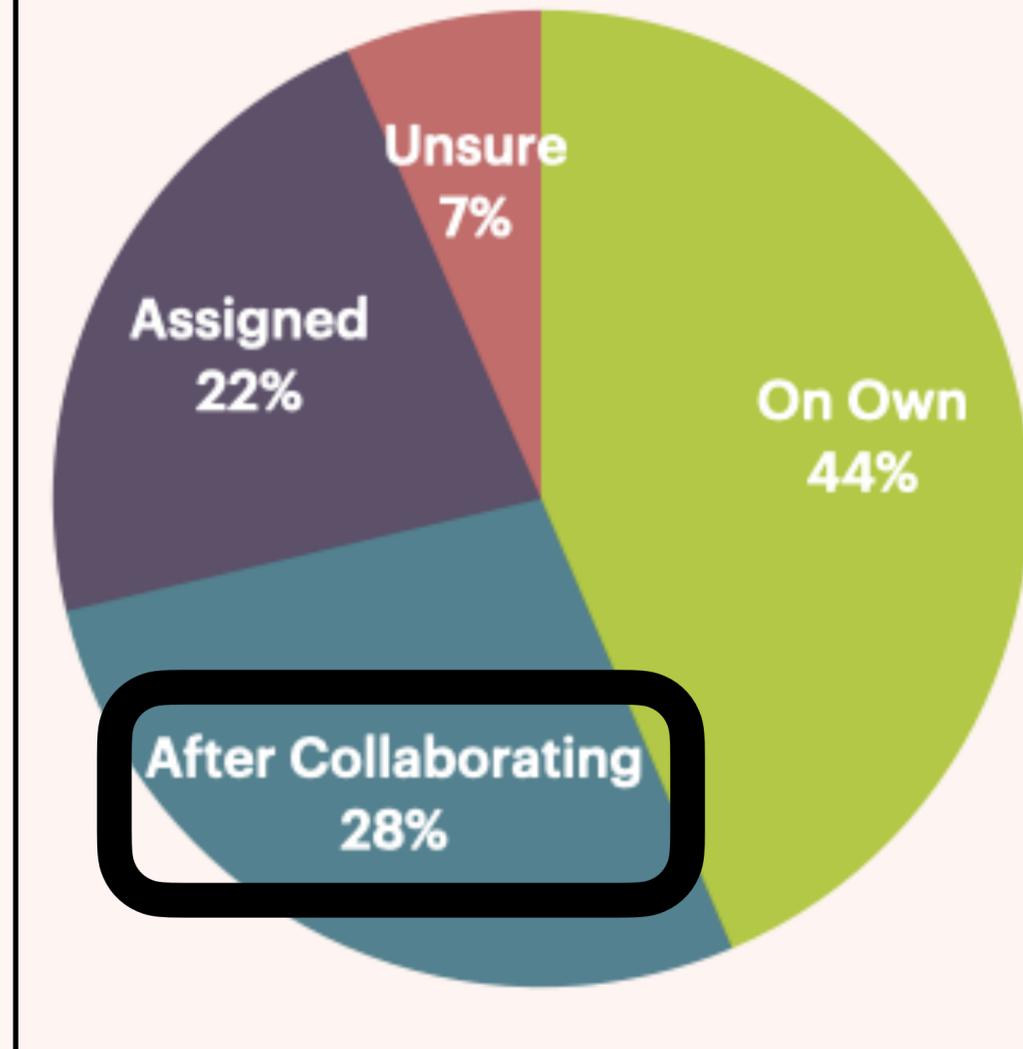
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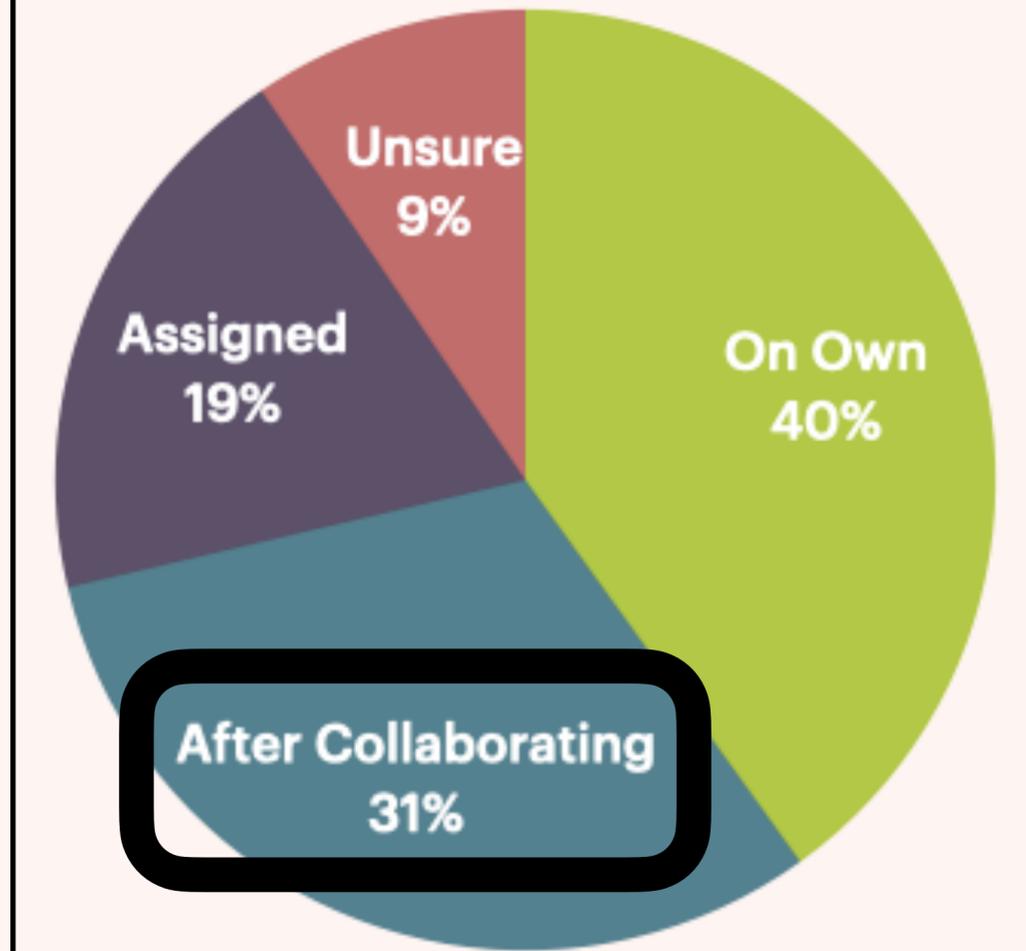
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## Career-Related Instruction



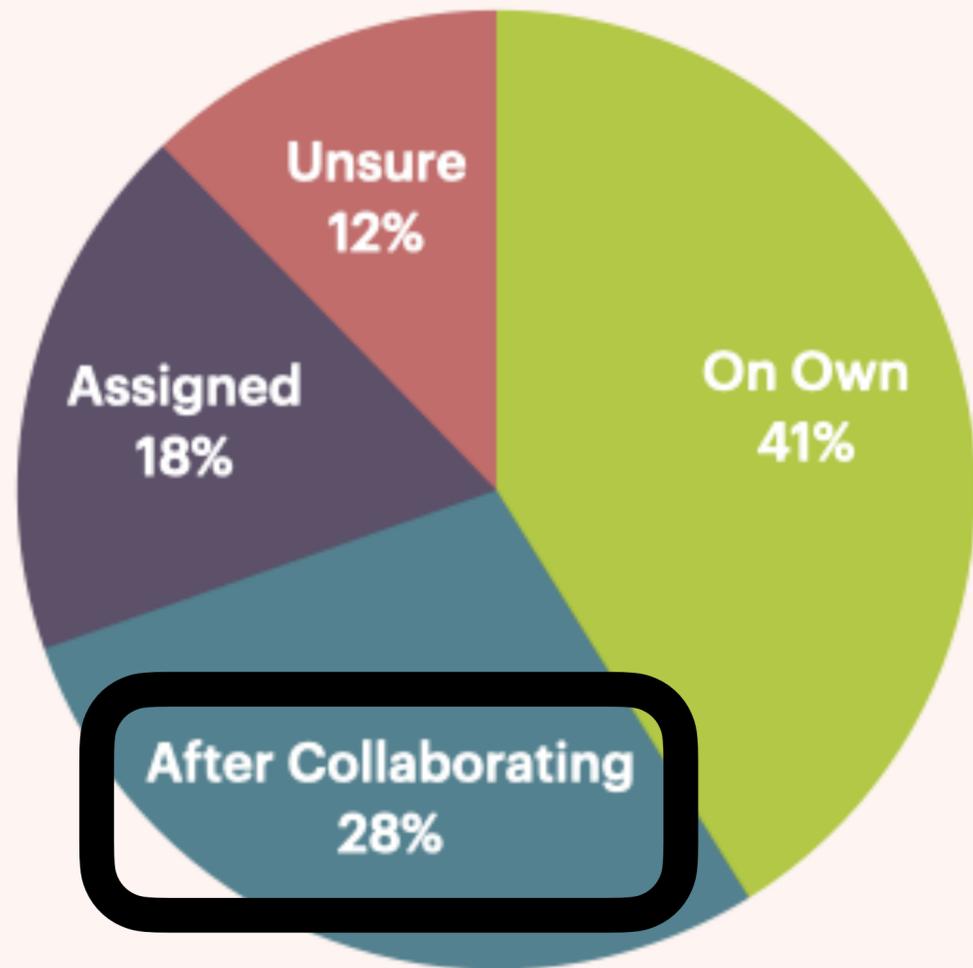
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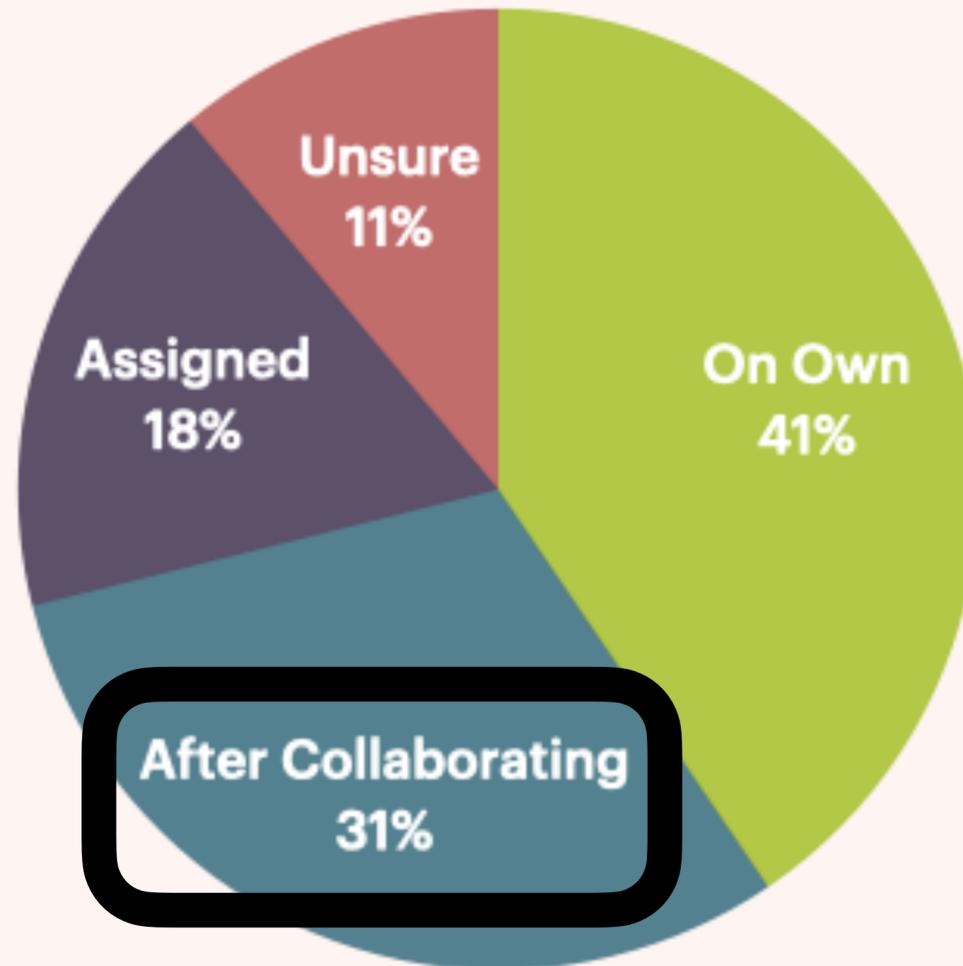
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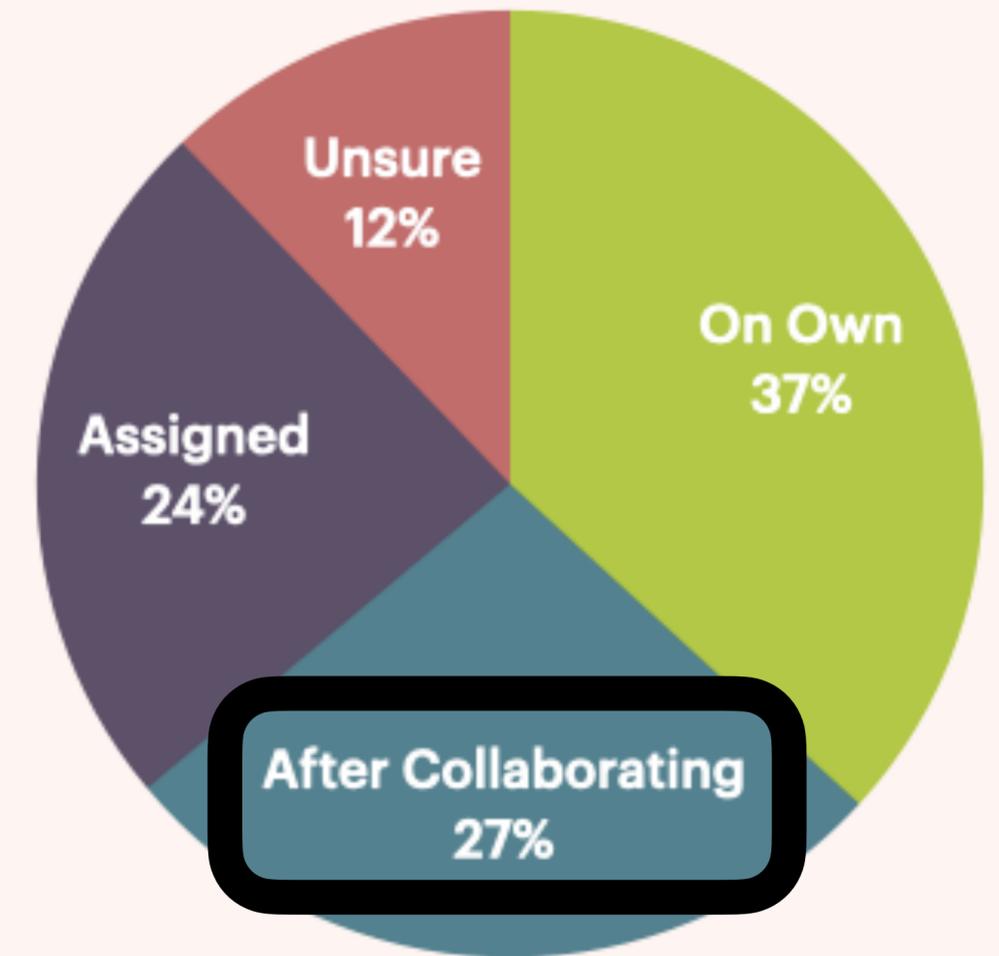
## Career-Related Experiences



## School Partnerships



## Program Development and Improvement



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# HOW ROLES ARE ASSUMED

***The Words of a School Counselor***

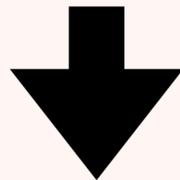
**“The first couple of years we did FAFSAs, I did not seek out the students [with more severe disabilities], but [a special educator], thankful to him, said, ‘Oh no, there's [postsecondary education] opportunities that they could have that the state could possibly fund.’ So now I make sure every single student has filed a FAFSA.”**

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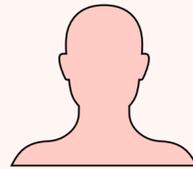
# KEY IMPLICATION



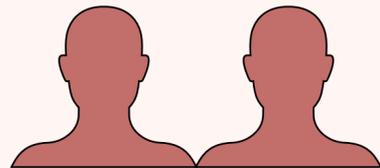
Administrators



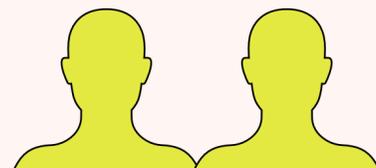
Related Service  
Providers



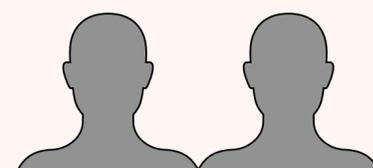
School  
Counselors



Paraprofessionals



Special Educators

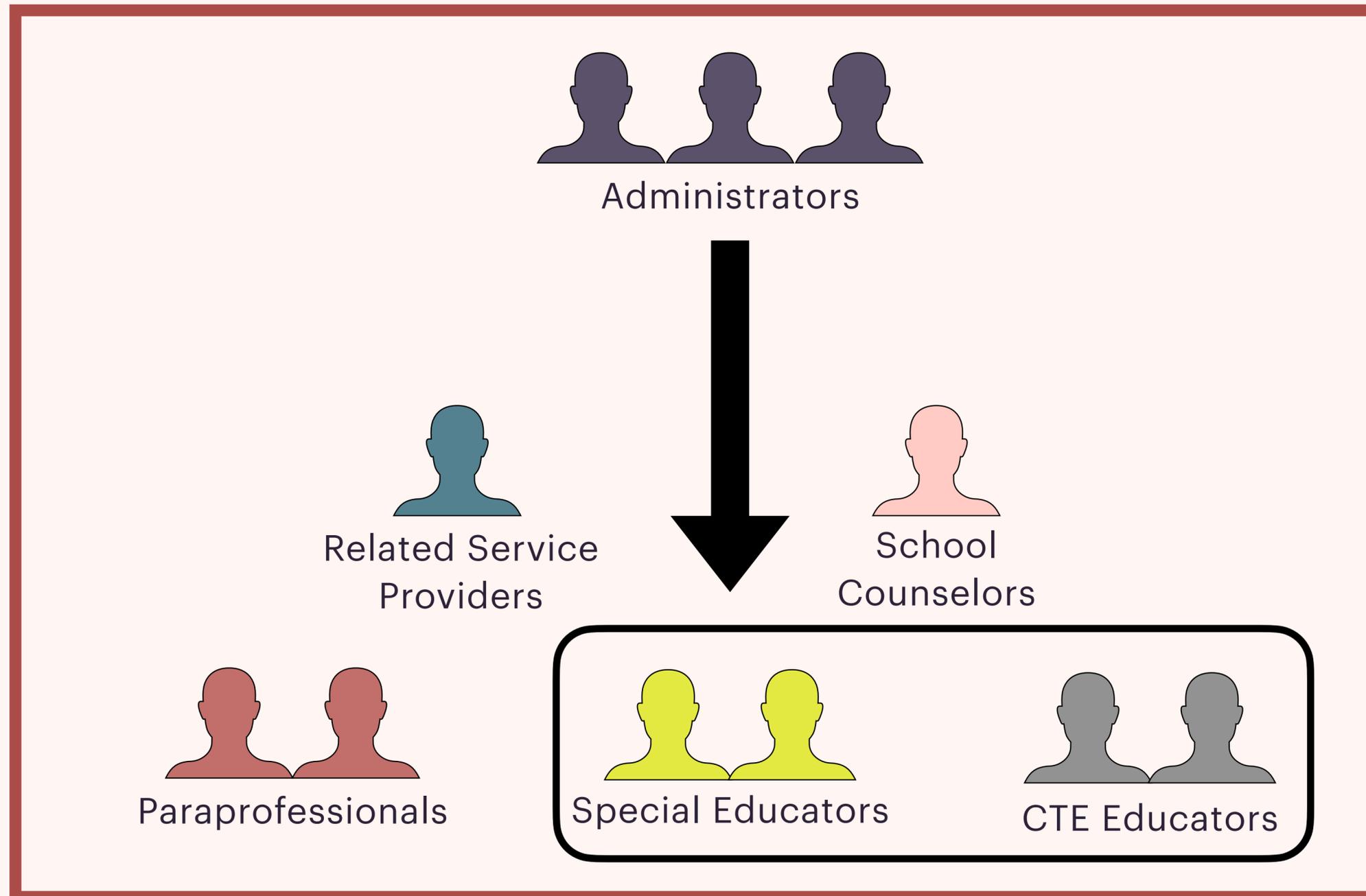


CTE Educators

**Administrators should provide:**

- **Professional development on career development for students with disabilities to address the diverse background knowledge and needs of staff**

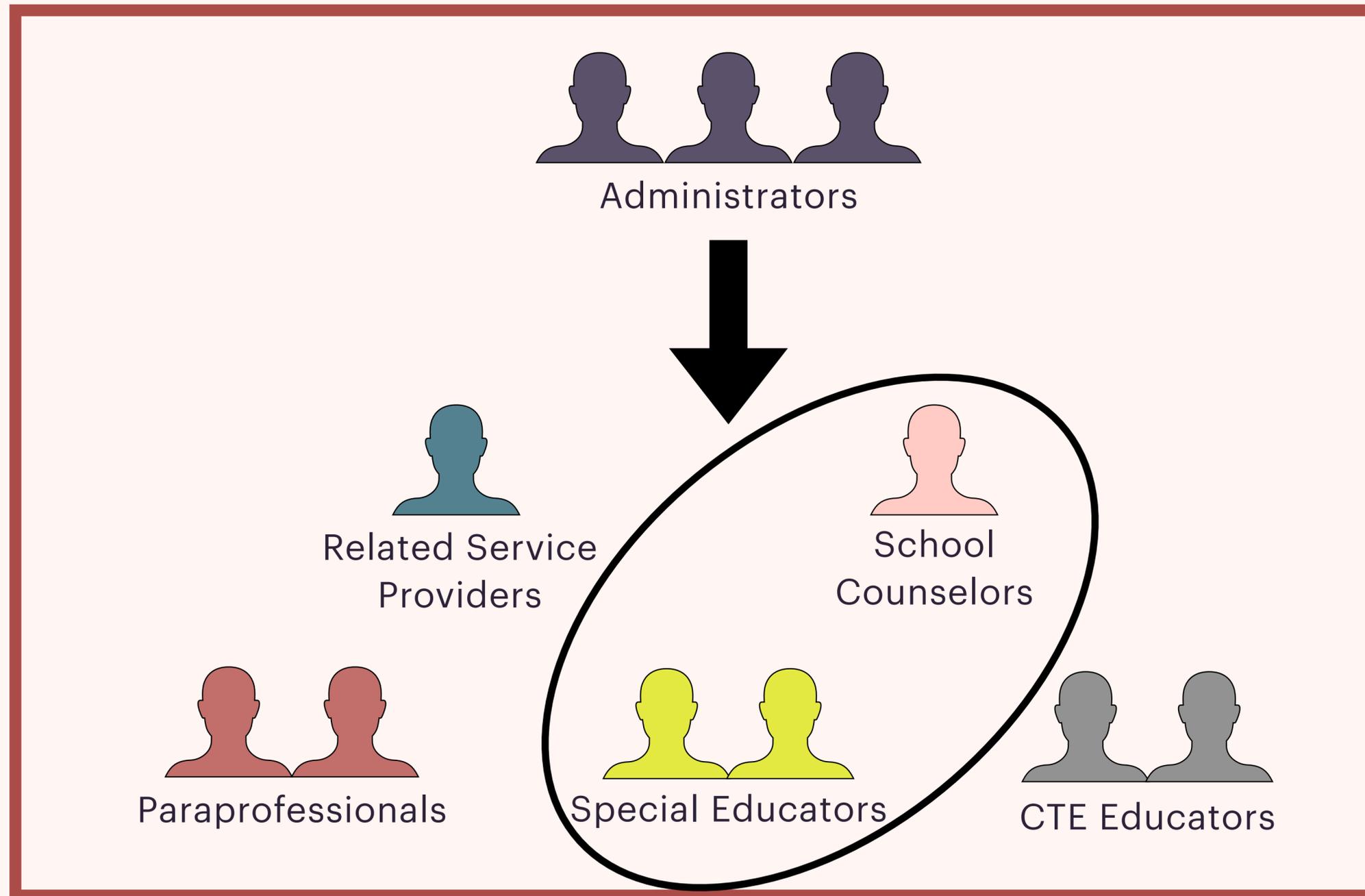
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## Administrators should provide:

- **Professional development on career development for students with disabilities to address the diverse background knowledge and needs of staff**
- **Cross-departmental training and common meeting times to intentionally facilitate collaboration across departments**

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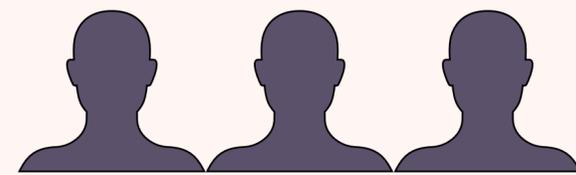


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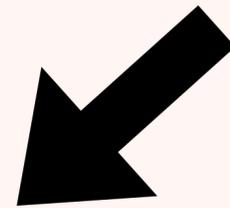
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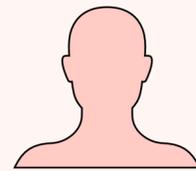
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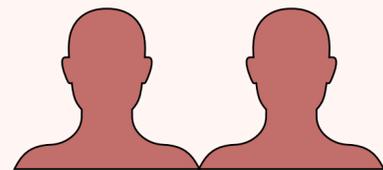
Administrators



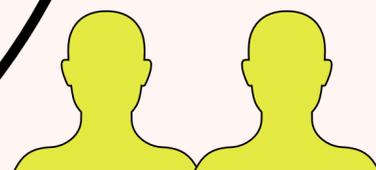
Related Service Providers



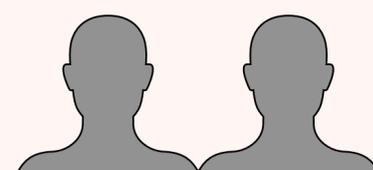
School Counselors



Paraprofessionals



Special Educators

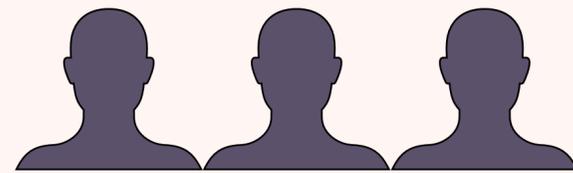


CTE Educators

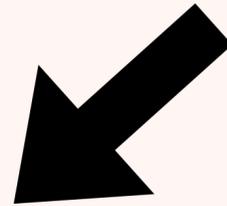
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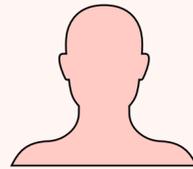
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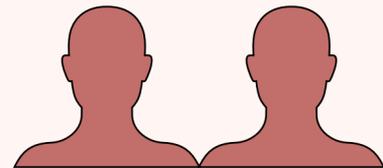
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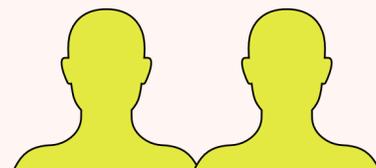
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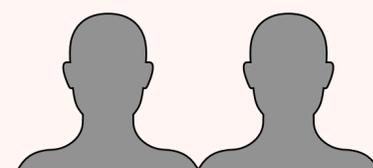
School Counselors



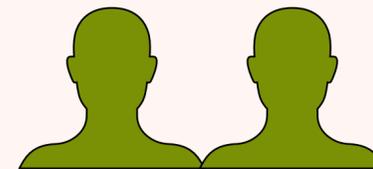
Paraprofessionals



Special Educators



CTE Educators



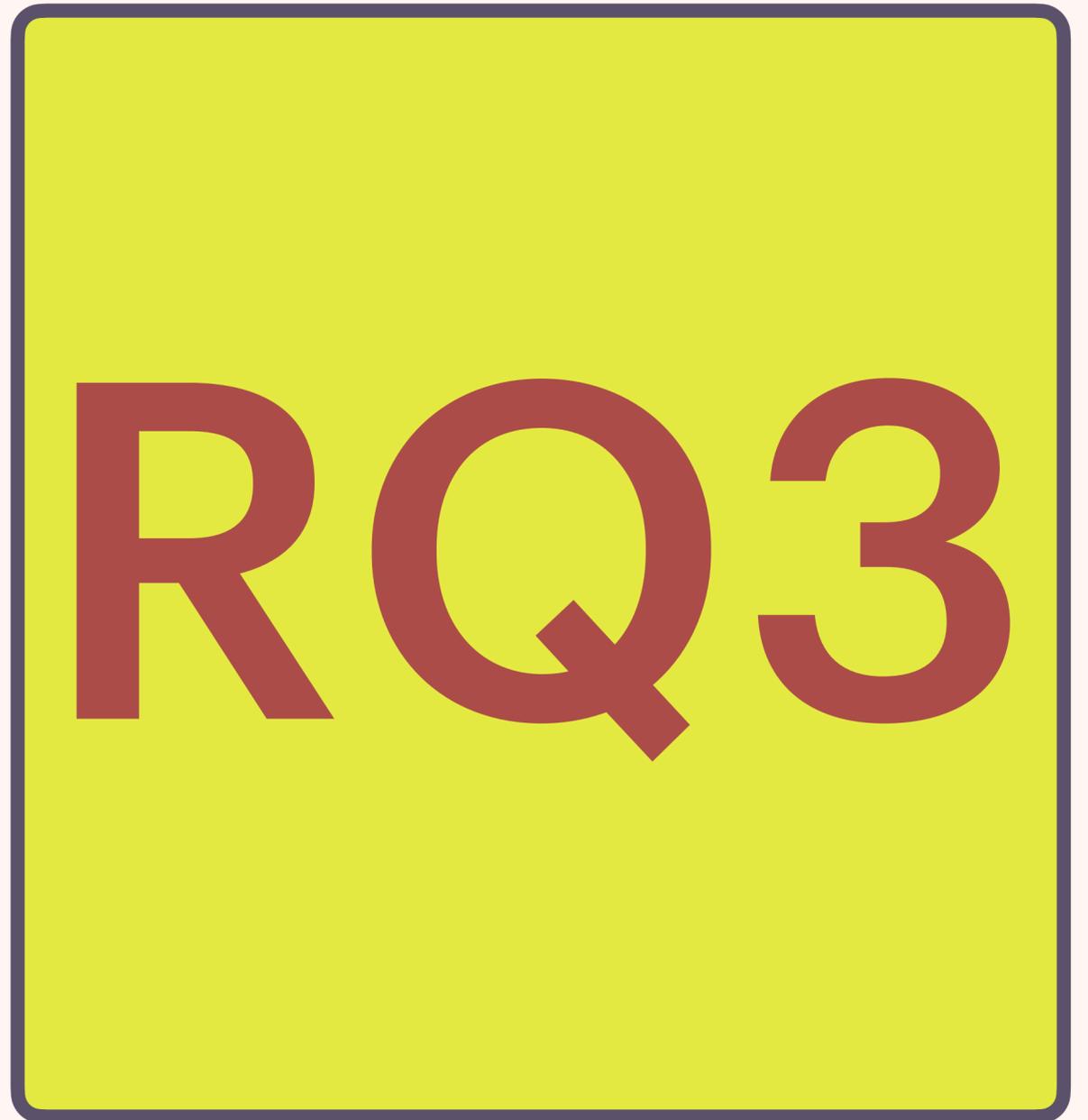
Employers

**Administrators should provide:**

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**HOW DO SCHOOL  
STAFF VIEW THEIR  
ROLES AND  
DISTRICT STAFFING  
MODELS?**



# STAFF VIEWS

Staffing is Sufficient to Prepare All Students for Employment



# STAFF VIEWS

## Staffing is Sufficient to Prepare SWD for Employment



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# VIEWS ON STAFFING

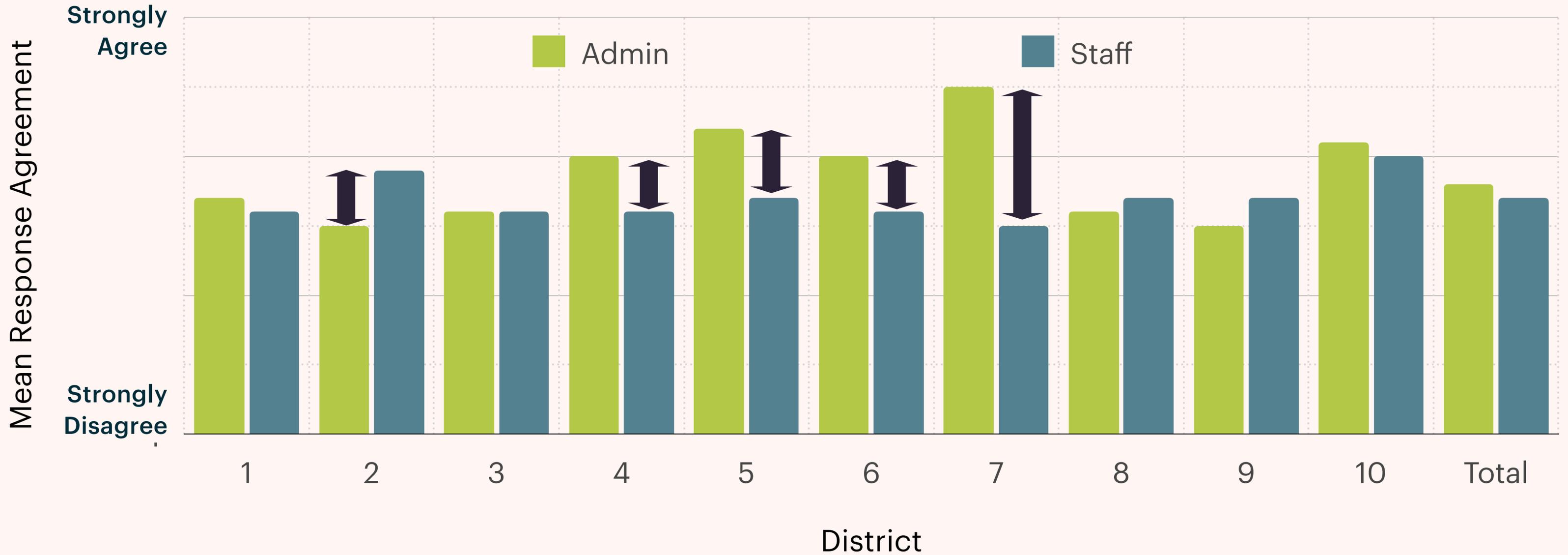
***The Words of a Special Educator***

**“We’re so short staffed right now, we don't even have enough [paraprofessionals]. I mean, honestly, I think there's two positions currently open, and we're struggling to keep students covered in their inclusion settings, barely enough staff to carry them to job sites. So, at this point we simply don't have enough for a person extra to really focus on transition and career development, especially for students with high-incidence disabilities.”**

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# STAFF VIEWS

## District Effectively Prepares SWD for Future Employment



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# VIEWS ON STAFFING

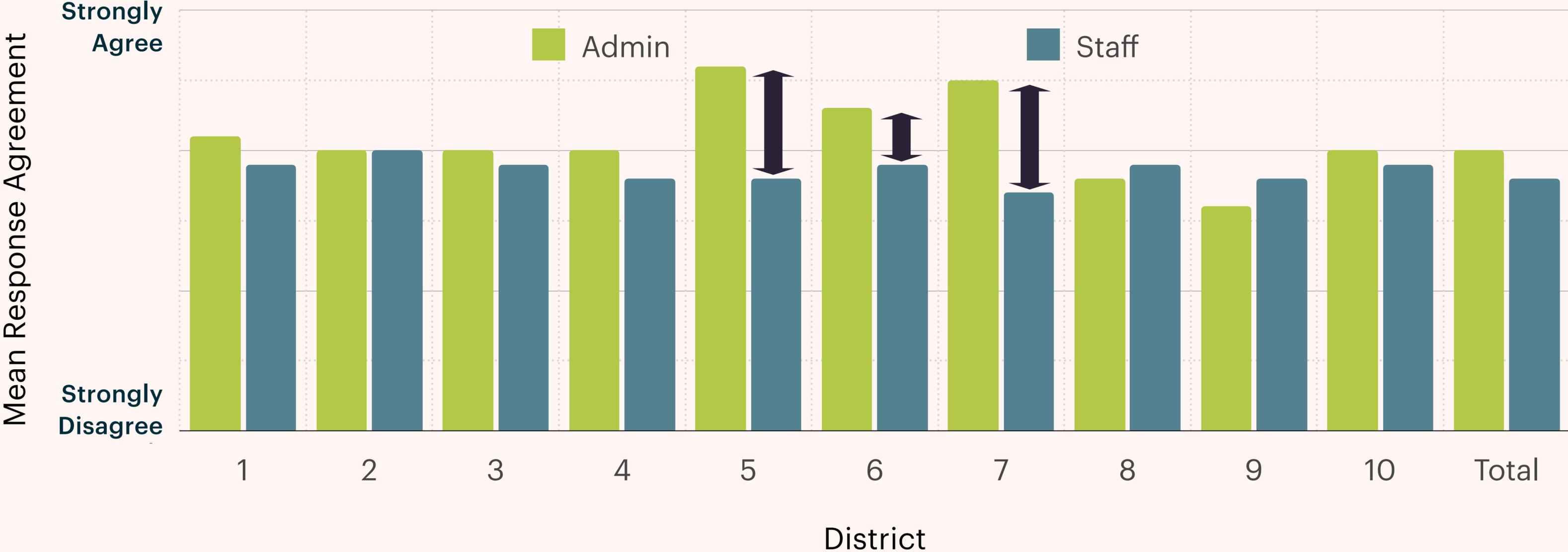
**The Words of a *Special Education  
Case Manager***

**“Hopefully by senior year, [students] know what college they want to go to...but, really, there's no specific time they could really work on that in school. I just have it as a goal that they will be searching the internet...and we can get the information, but there's so much more that needs to be done. I wish there was more time to talk one-on-one with the students and actually work on these things.”**

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# STAFF VIEWS

## Staff Roles are Clear for Supporting SWD in Career Development



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# VIEWS ON STAFFING

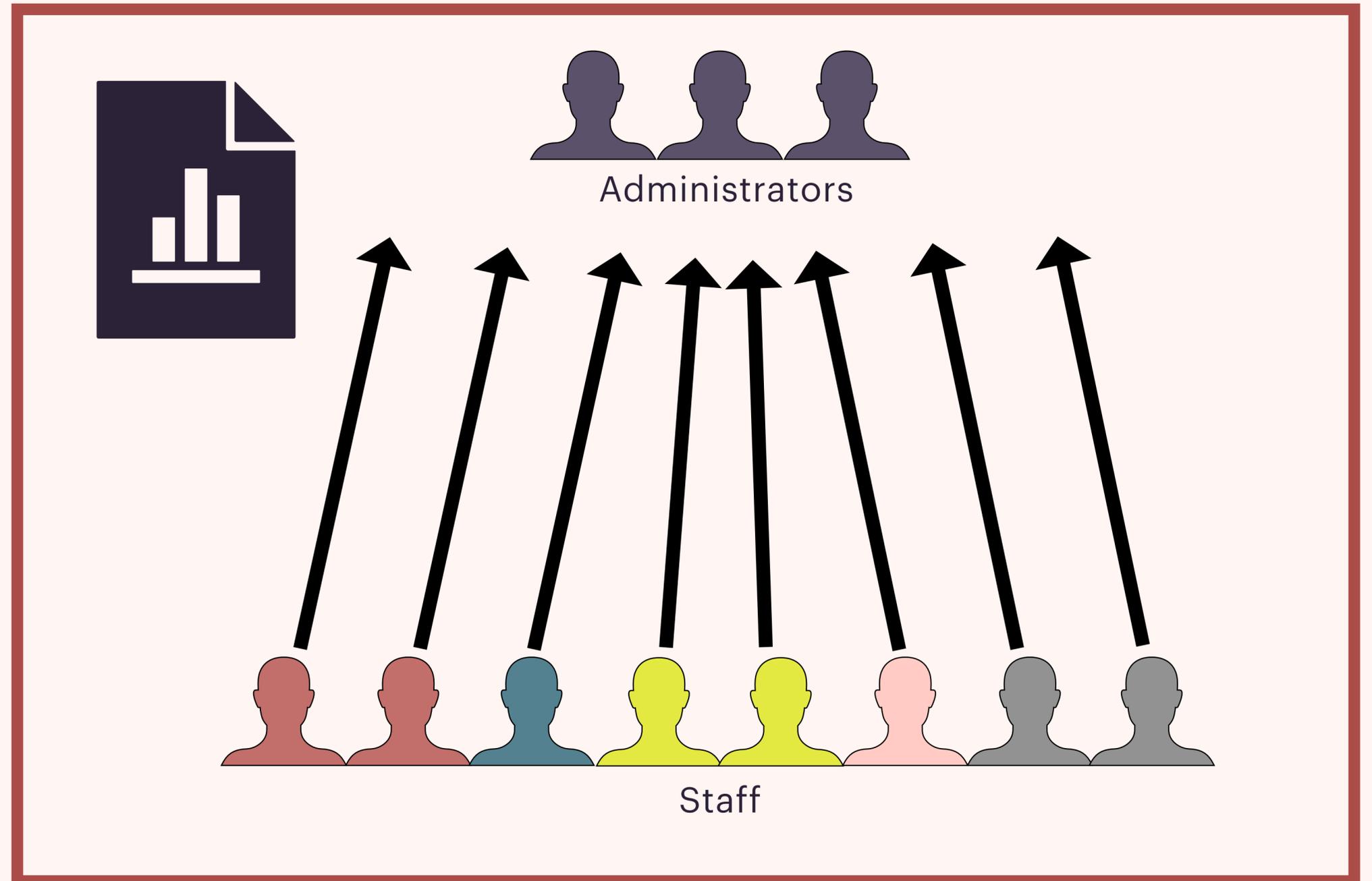
**The Words of a *Transition  
Specialist***

**“When I started my position, I had this CTE educator who teaches career exploration saying ‘You’re doing some of the stuff I’m doing, so why are you here?’ But, I’m doing it with a select population [of students] to reinforce because they’re going to need more than what you’re able to give in their senior year.....still, I’m really not sure what I should be focusing on. I feel like we are building a plane while we are trying to fly it.”**

# KEY IMPLICATION

**Administrators should:**

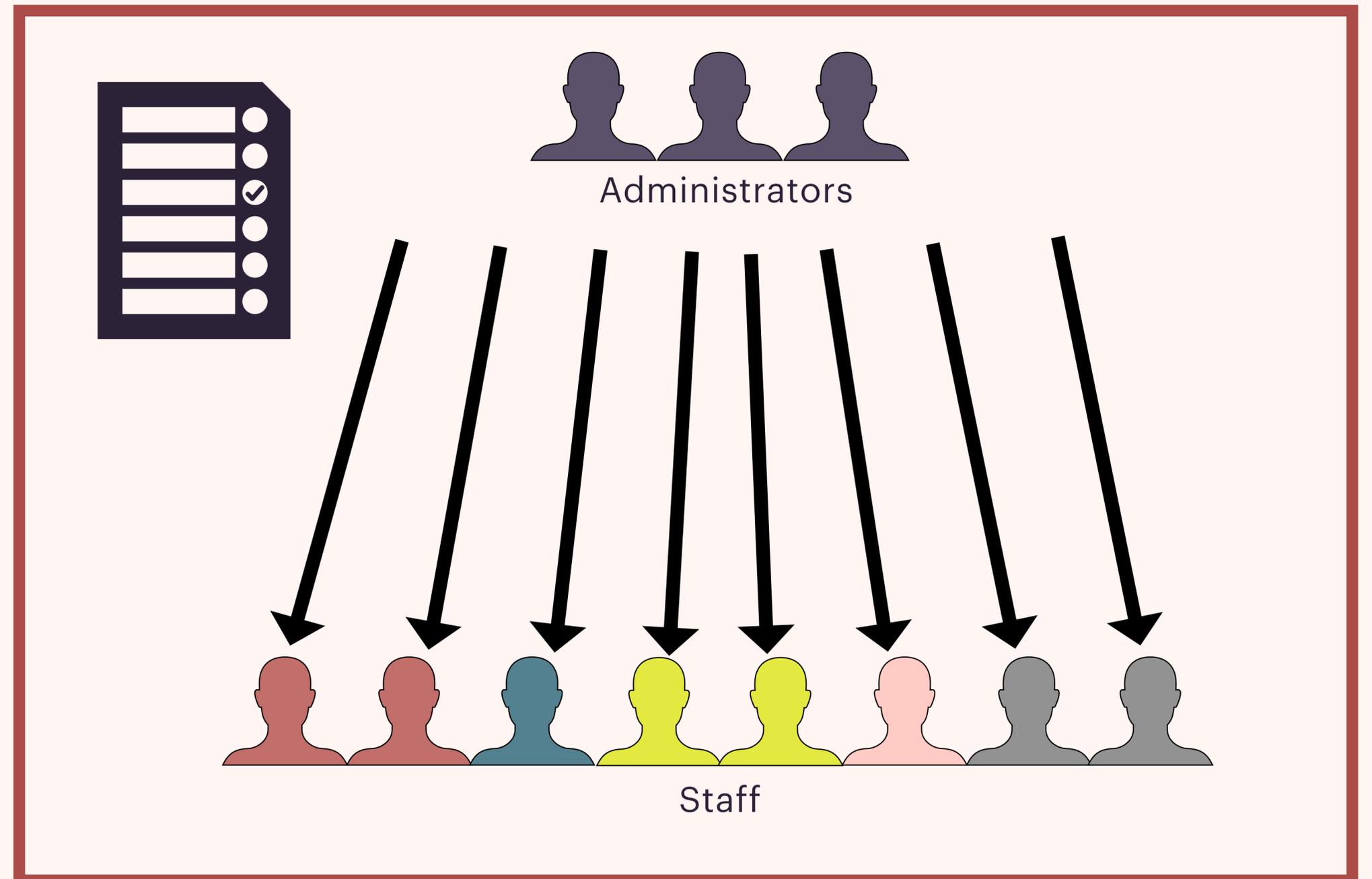
- **Gather information from staff on their perceptions regarding staff models and role allocation**



# KEY IMPLICATION

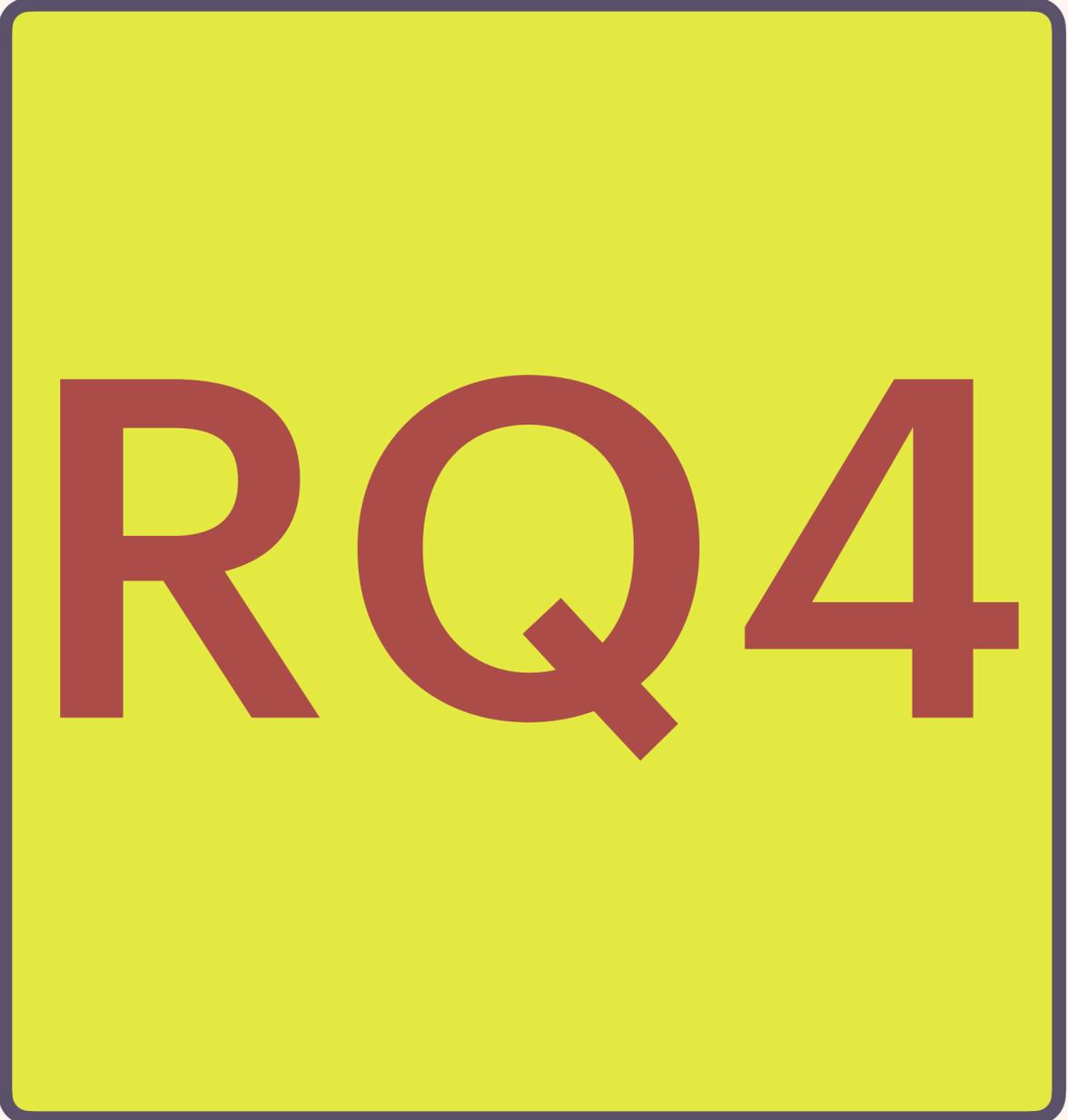
## Administrators should:

- **Gather information from staff on their perceptions regarding staff models and role allocation**
- **Develop staff positions with clearly delineated roles**



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**TO WHAT EXTENT  
DO ROLES VARY BY  
STAFF POSITION?**



**RQ4**

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# **OVERWHELMING INVOLVEMENT . . . .**

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# ROLES BY STAFF POSITION

***The Words of a Special Educator***

**“[Special educators] are a combination of a teacher, counselor, psychiatrist, drill sergeant...all things wrapped into one...If I ruled the world, I think every teacher would spend at least a year working in special ed, so they can understand exactly what we do, what we deal with on a daily basis.”**

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**VERY LIMITED  
INVOLVEMENT . . . .**

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# **ROLES BY STAFF POSITION**

## **The Words of a *Speech Language Therapist***

**“[When it comes to supporting students in achieving future goals], I feel like I have to be nosy about it. Say it is a student’s last year and he's going to graduate. Well, what is his next step? What is there for him? Are there programs that he can go to?”**

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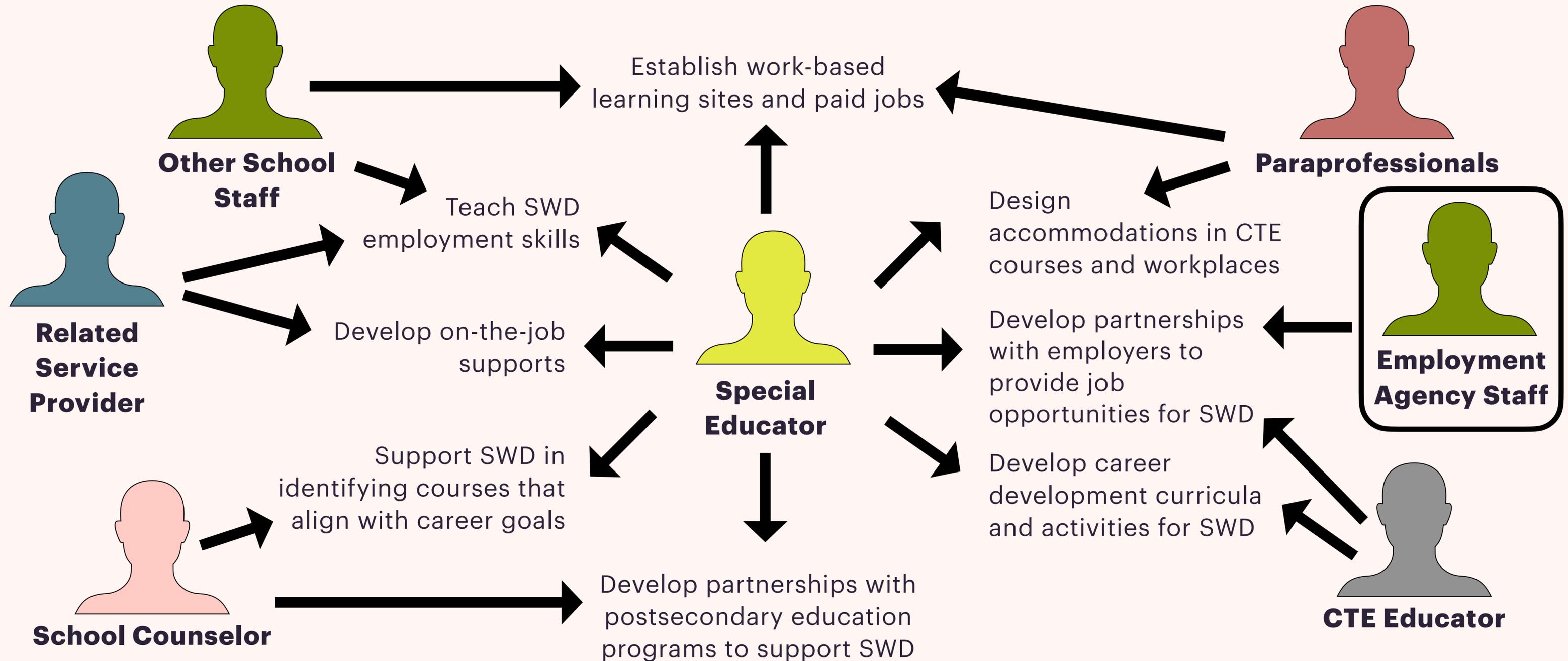
# ROLES BY STAFF POSITION

**The Words of a *Paraprofessional***

**“I can read [my students] stories... but I wonder where they're going to go when they're 22 and they leave me. They're not going to sit around doing reading worksheets, you know, they're going to be doing normal things...but, they're not very dependable [for a job]... I don't know what kind of career I would steer them towards having.”**

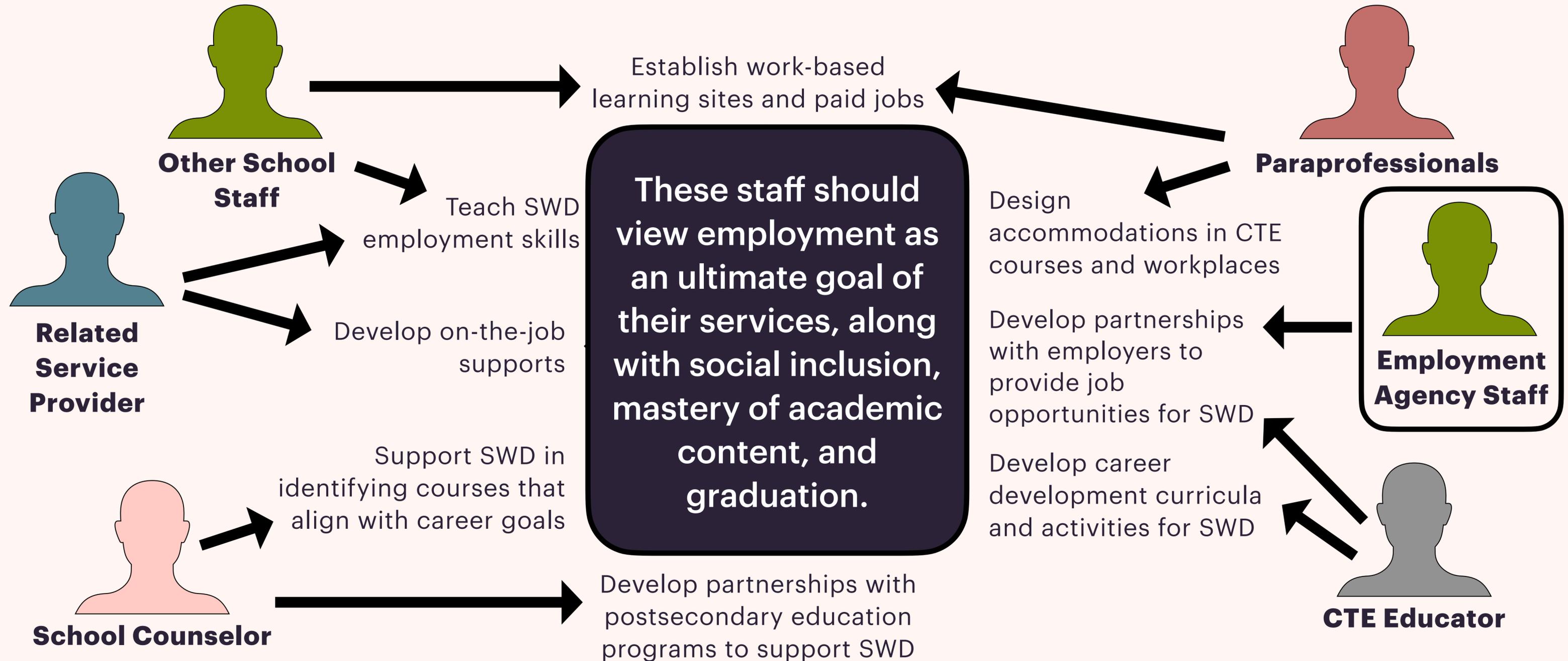
# MAJOR FINDINGS

Special educators played dispersed roles and could benefit from other staff contributions



# MAJOR FINDINGS

**Special educators played dispersed roles and could benefit from other staff contributions**



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**INVOLVED IN CREATIVE  
WAYS . . . .**

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# ROLES BY STAFF POSITION

***The Words of a CTE Educator***

**“I had made mention [to local technical school instructors] of a couple students with disabilities who were planning to go to their school about issues that I knew they were going to have, so that there was an awareness of the students coming. This is how we can overcome that. I think having the connection between high school and the instructors for the [technical school] made a world of difference for those two particular boys...these kids have come out with industrial maintenance degrees and they're making a decent living now.”**

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# ROLES BY STAFF POSITION

## *The Words of a School Counselor*

**“My role as school counselor has been to work with the special education teacher to understand what students need to be successful at their work sites and basically supporting them with anything they need. If they need clothing to wear to their job sites, I have resources to help get them appropriate clothing. If they need access to a shower at school. And setting up their schedule to allow for their work-based learning to fit in...really anything we can do to help them.”**

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# KEY IMPLICATION

- **Special educators should tap into the capacities of their colleagues beyond special education and others outside of the school district to support the career development of students with disabilities**
- **Administrators should provide infrastructure that promotes utilizing partnerships for employment preparation of students with disabilities**



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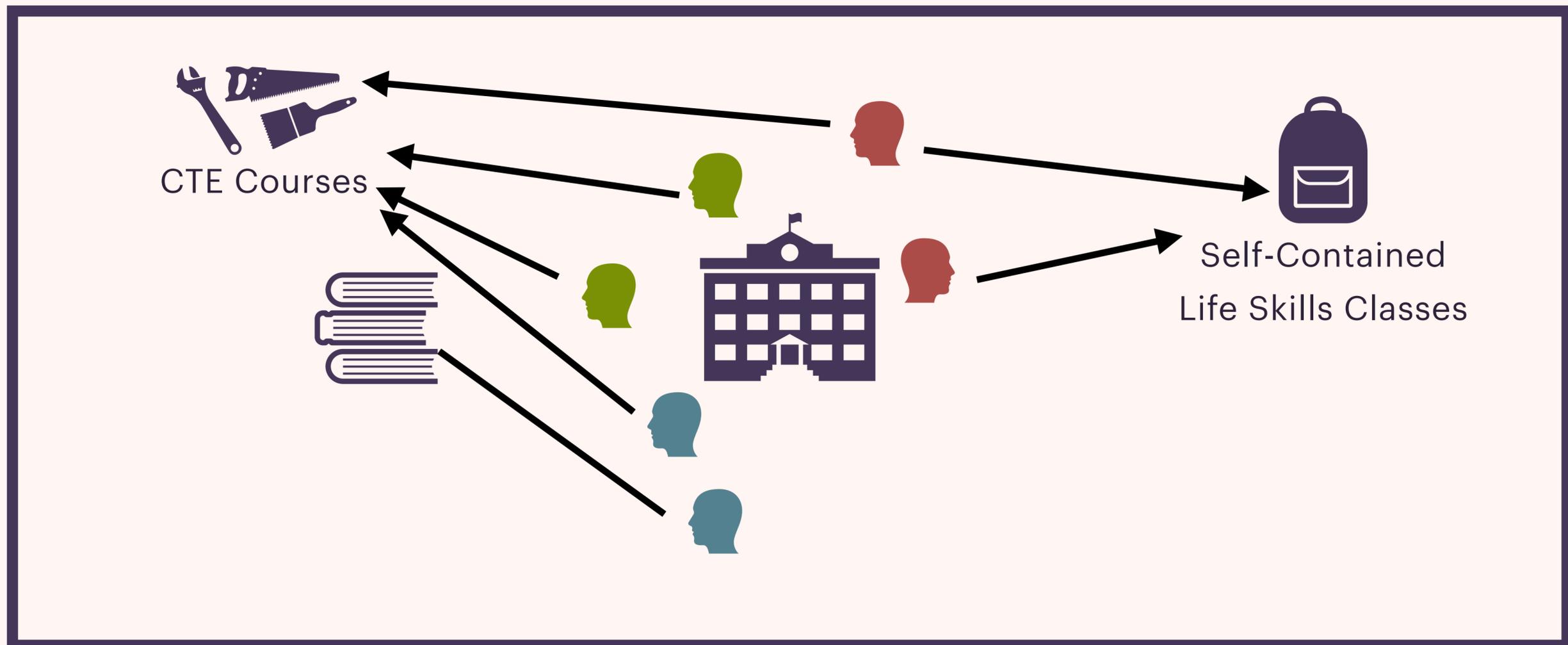
**WHAT ARE THE  
STRENGTHS AND GAPS  
REGARDING CAREER  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAMMING WITHIN  
RURAL SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS?**



# MAJOR FINDINGS

**Participants characterized the career development activities of their districts to be robust but reported mixed views in the extent to which students with disabilities accessed these services**

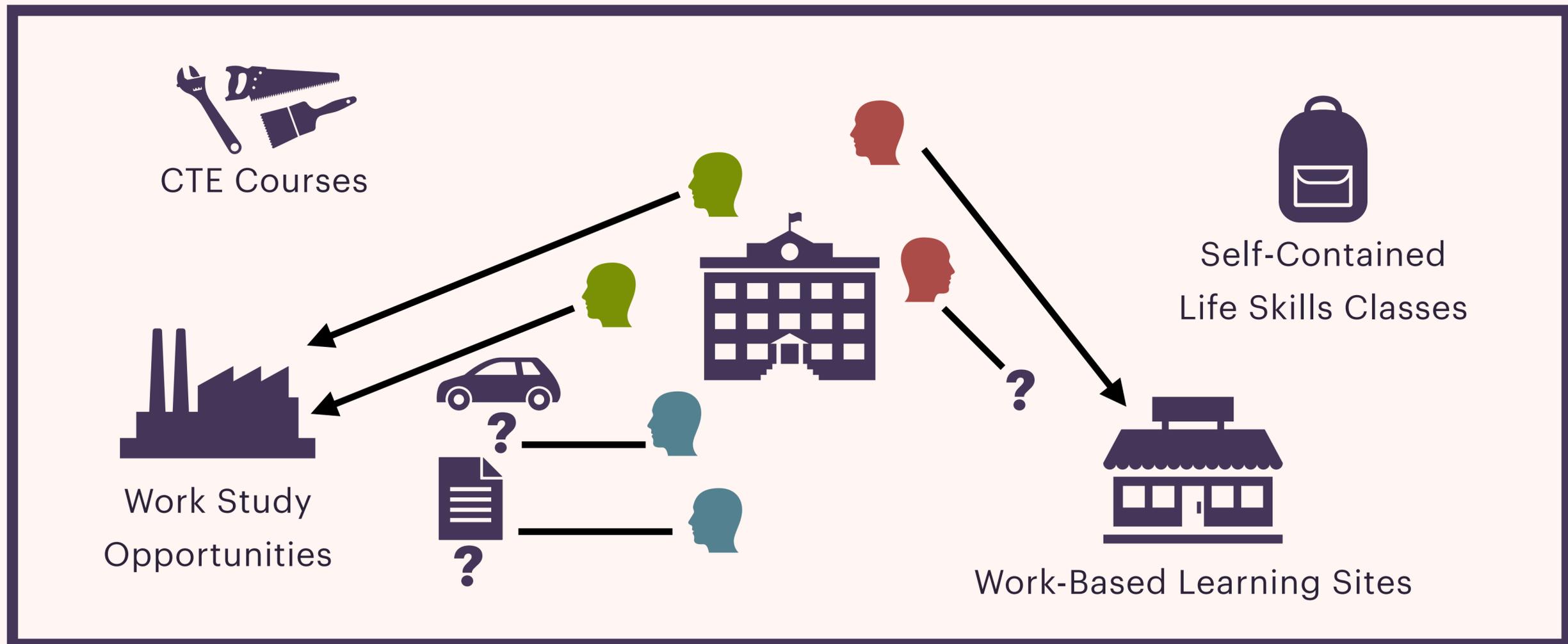
 = students without disabilities     = students with high-incidence disabilities     = students with severe disabilities



# MAJOR FINDINGS

**Participants characterized the career development activities of their districts to be robust but reported mixed views in the extent to which students with disabilities accessed these services**

 = students without disabilities     = students with high-incidence disabilities     = students with severe disabilities



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# KEY IMPLICATION

**To ensure that all students have access to high-quality employment preparation, administrators and staff should . . .**

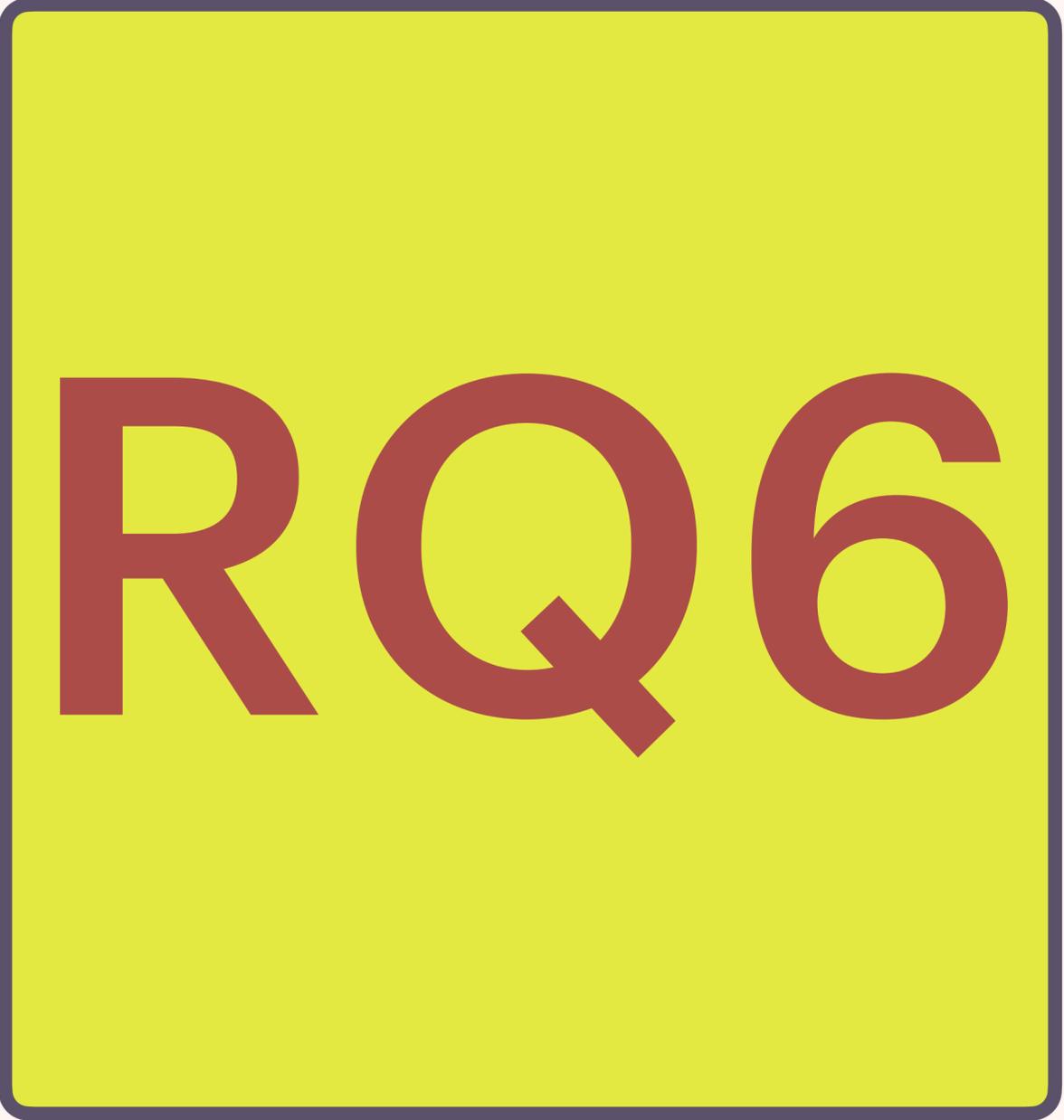
➤ **Provide students with high-incidence disabilities with explicit supports necessary to meaningfully access available district career development activities**

➤ **Hold high expectations for students with severe disabilities to pursue employment that aligns with their strengths and interests and provide staff with training and collaboration time to support their inclusion**

➤ **Utilize existing partnerships in new ways to provide career-related opportunities and supports for students with disabilities**

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**HOW DO STAFF  
ROLES AND  
DISTRICT PROFILES  
VARY ACROSS  
DISTRICTS?**



**RQ6**

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# MAJOR FINDINGS

**Several factors emerged to impact staffing and role allocation in different ways across districts, such as . . .**



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# MAJOR FINDINGS

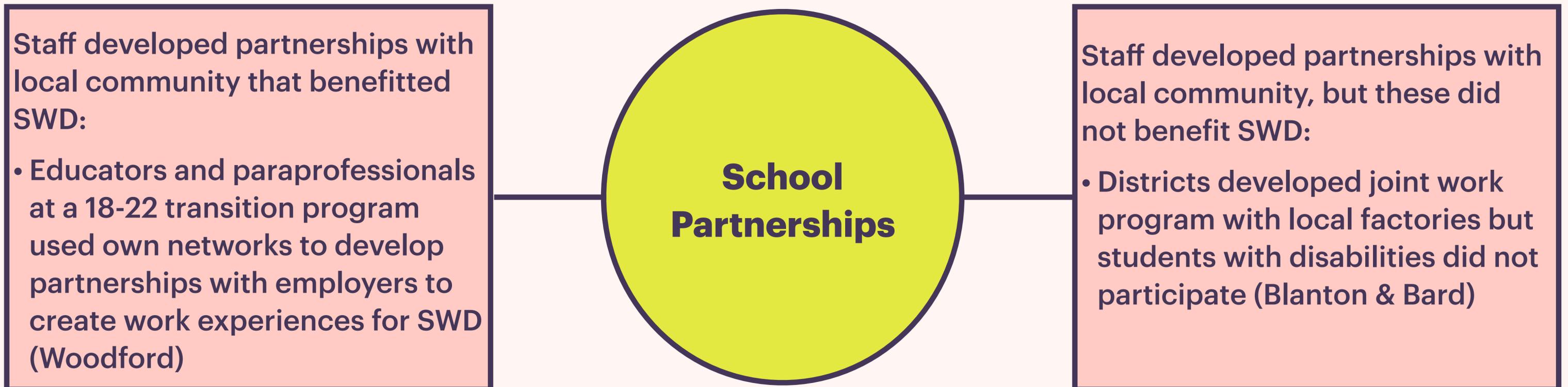
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# MAJOR FINDINGS

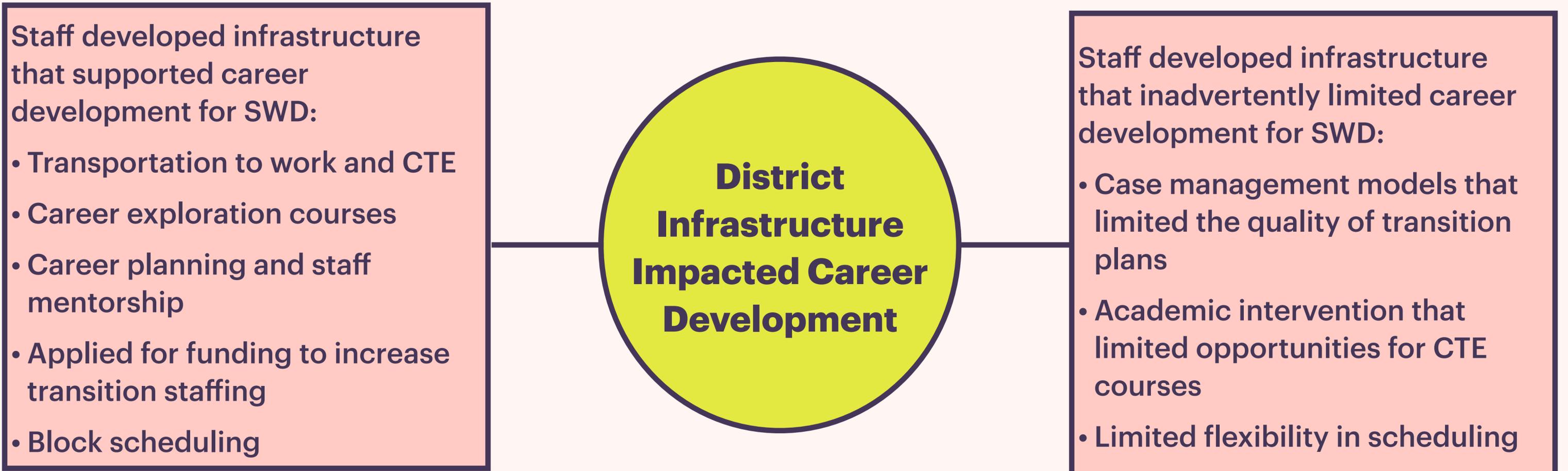
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# MAJOR FINDINGS

**Several factors emerged to impact staffing and role allocation in different ways across districts, such as . . .**



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# THANK YOU!

Questions or comments?



[maschutz@illinois.edu](mailto:maschutz@illinois.edu)

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