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STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION
CLASSROOM**

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PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

by

Kendale Marquis White

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Leadership and Policy Studies

The University of Memphis

December 2018

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Catrina and our two children Kahmya and Kase. They have sacrificed a great deal during this process and I love them unconditionally. I would also like to dedicate my work to my parents Leon and Joanne for supporting me throughout the process. Lastly, I would like to dedicate my dissertation to Dr. Larry McNeal. He encouraged me to push myself and to excel. We are both from Bolivar, TN and he said nothing would make him prouder than being able to place the doctoral hood on my shoulders. Unfortunately, he will be unable too, but I know he is looking down from Heaven.

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of principals as it relates to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. This study replicates and extends research in relation to principals and their attitudes toward inclusion. In addition, the researcher determined whether a relationship, if any, exists between demographic variables and their attitudes regarding the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. A self-reporting survey entitled the Principals and Inclusion Survey was used to collect the data from 105 principals.

Results revealed principals' training and experience were limited, principals supported inclusive placements for students with mild to moderate disabilities, and there was a positive correlation between attitudes and training and attitudes and placement decisions. Further, the results indicate the need for quality training and experience for both pre-service and practicing principals. The results may also assist school districts as well as college/university principal preparation programs in making informed decisions regarding coursework, professional development, and practicum experiences for principals.

Keywords: principals, attitudes, inclusion

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Introduction

Principal leadership has evolved over the past two decades and a great deal of attention has been given to the impact principals have on student achievement (Kruger, Witziers, & Slegers, 2007; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). In the past, the role of the principal has been minimized to only being the supervisor of teachers or being responsible for school-wide discipline (Mills, 1974). Now, principals are more involved because they are responsible for the academic achievement of all students (Cherian & Daniel, 2008; McLaughlin, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002).

Hallinger and Heck's (2010) meta-analysis reinforced the consensus among researchers, policy makers, and practitioners that "leadership" makes a difference in the quality of learning in schools. More importantly, principals must be equipped to handle all programs and responsibilities in the school (Brown, 2006; Cooner, Tochtermann, & Garrison-Wade, 2005; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Portin, 2004). Principals are charged to serve many roles and responsibilities (Sage & Burrello, 1994). They are often expected to manage personnel, students, government and public relations, finance, instruction, and academic performance (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Portin, 2004).

The role of the principal is key to the overall success of the school organization and he or she drives the decisions made at the school level (Whitworth, 1999). This also includes the need to set high expectations for both student and teacher performance, create a culture of trust, encourage a positive school climate, and monitor instruction as well as innovation (Dufour, 2002; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Sheppard,

1996). Milson (2006) concluded that principals must be committed to strengthening instructional practices and developing opportunities for teachers and instructional staff members.

With the emphasis of inclusion in K-12 schools, there is an increase of students with disabilities being educated alongside their grade age peers in the general education classroom (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; McLaughlin, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). This shift will challenge principals and require them to spend additional time involved in special education related activities (Lasky & Karge, 2006). At present, however, many higher education leadership programs have limited course work in special education policy, procedures, practices, or field experiences in special education (McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, & Terry, 2010; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Dezell, 2006).

Principals must continue to widen their knowledge base in reference to meeting the needs of diverse learners (McLaughlin, 2009). The challenge, however, is to include students with disabilities in the general education setting as appropriate for each individual student. Inclusion is defined as the process of meshing general and special education reform initiative and strategies in order to achieve a unified system of public education that incorporates all children and youth as active, fully participating members of the school community, views diversity as the norm, and ensures a high quality of education for each student by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for each student (Ferguson, 1995).

Inclusion is a philosophical term that requires the restructuring of schools to eliminate the separation of regular and special education and creates a unified system to accommodate the needs of the students (Edmunds, 2000; Huber, Rosenfeld, & Fiorello,

2001; Luster & Durrett, 2003; Moore, Gilbreath, & Maiuri, 1998). Inclusion has been a global trend for several decades, and has strongly influenced the direction of special education in countries as diverse as Canada, India, South Africa, Ireland, and New Zealand (Timmons, 2002). The concept has sparked a number of debates and court actions over the appropriate placement of students with disabilities (Daniel & King, 1997).

Problem Statement

Researchers have concluded that principals' attitudes are critical in improving the inclusive academic environment and outcomes for students with disabilities (Avisar, Reiter, & Leyser, 2003; Horrocks, White, & Roberts, 2008; Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010). They can be defined as acquired dispositions that inherently influence our feelings, thoughts and actions (Byron & Dieppe, 2000; Carter & Markham, 2001; Tervo & Palmer, 2004). Attitudes motivate how we choose to act and respond to others (McCaughey & Strohmer, 2005). Attitudes also refer to individual's predispositions to act in a stereotypical and predictable way (McCaughey & Strohmer, 2005).

Universal acceptance has emerged regarding three dimensions in the concept of attitudes. They include the affective, cognitive, and behavioral (Findler, Vilchinsky, & Werner, 2007)). The affective focuses on the positive and negative emotions as it relates to a group of people (Findler et al., 2007). The cognitive includes the thoughts, ideas, perceptions, opinions, and conceptualization associated with the referent (Findler et al., 2007). The behavioral encompasses the tendency to act a specific way in the proximity of the referent (Findler et al., 2007).

Principals' attitudes, perceptions, and practices must adhere to visions that reflect acceptance, diversity, cohesiveness, flexibility, and ongoing learning (Fullan, 2003b). Principals can either promote or discourage the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Praisner, 2000). Further, principals should identify and require a standard that reflects the belief that all children can learn and are entitled to be educated with their grade peers in the LRE (Fullan, 2003a). For this study, the three dimensions of attitudes will be conceptualized. However, the researcher will be exploring only the cognitive and behavioral components. Ultimately, it is imperative for principals to gain a better understanding of attitudes and how they impact the way principals lead and manage inclusive schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes of public school principals in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Additionally, the study sought to determine the relationship, if any, between demographic variables associated with principals and their attitudes regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the training and experience of principals relative to educating students with disabilities?
2. What are the attitudes of principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting?

3. What are the attitudes of principals regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities?
4. What is the relationship, if any, between the training and experience of principals and their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting?
5. What is the relationship, if any, between the attitudes of principals and the most appropriate placement for students?
6. What is the relationship, if any, between the demographic variables associated with principals and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities?

Significance of the Study

Successful implementation of an inclusion program depends on the attitudes of both principals and teachers. Attitudes impact how we choose to react and respond to others (McCaughey & Strohmer, 2005). The goal of inclusion is to create schools that foster acceptance, a sense of community, and belonging (Rose, 2008). Each year, students with disabilities receive services in the general education setting; however, challenges and obstacles arise as a result (Philpott, Furey, & Penney, 2010). The barriers include the following: (a) negative teacher perspectives, (b) lack of knowledge regarding special education terminology, issues, and laws, (c) poor collaboration skills, (d) limited instructional repertoire, (e) conflict between scheduling and time management, and (f) lack of administrative support (Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999; King, 2000; Roach & Salisbury, 2006; Worrell, 2008).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions are provided to promote uniformity of understanding:

1. *Inclusion* - Inclusion is the process of meshing general and special education reform initiative and strategies in order to achieve a unified system of public education that incorporates all children and youth as active, fully participating members of the school community, views diversity as the norm, and ensures a high quality of education for each student by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for each student (Ferguson, 1995).
2. *Attitude* - An individual's disposition that influences how he or she will positively or negatively respond to an object, person, institution, or any aspect of one's life (Morin, Rivard, Crocker, Boursier, & Caron, 2013). Additionally, universal acceptance has emerged regarding three dimensions in the concept of attitudes. They include the affective, cognitive, and behavioral (Findler et al. 2007).
3. *General or Regular Education* - The set of integrated learning experiences structured across subject areas to provide the skills and knowledge needed for all students to function in society (Berry, 2010).
4. *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* - LRE is defined by IDEA as that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are non-disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplemental aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Yell, 1995).

5. *Categorical Placements* - Special education programs in which students are grouped on the basis of their IDEA eligibility category (Will, 1986).

6. *Special Education* - IDEA defines special education as specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities provided at no cost to parents (IDEA, 1997).

7. *Students with Disabilities* - Students with disabilities refers to children in grades kindergarten through twelfth attending public schools and having a diagnosis of one of the following thirteen disability categories specified in IDEA (2004): 1) autism, 2) deaf and blindness, 3) deafness, 4) emotional disturbances, 5) hearing impairment, 6) intellectual disabilities, 7) multiple disabilities, 8) orthopedic impairment, 9) other health impairment, 10) specific learning disability, 11) speech language impairment, 12) traumatic brain injury, and 13) visual impairment including blindness.

8. *Mainstreaming* - A service delivery model, which places students with disabilities in general education classrooms without the necessary supports and services required for them to achieve learning success (Kasser & Lytle, 2005).

9. *Grand Division*- The state of Tennessee has three grand divisions: West, Middle and East Tennessee (“Tennessee,” n.d.).

Assumptions of the Study

The assumptions underlying this study are as follows:

1. Principals responding to the survey instrument will do so in an honest manner and provide an accurate record of their attitudes towards including students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

2. Principals responding to the survey instrument are knowledgeable and qualified to do so.
3. The survey instrument provides an appropriate measurement tool of principals' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to public schools in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state. Only principals were sampled and participation was voluntary. With participation limited to the inclusion efforts in one Grand Division of a state, the results cannot be generalized. If replicated, expanding the study to include principals from multiple school districts in an entire state or region would be preferable.

The survey instrument used to collect the data is another limitation. The Principal and Inclusion Survey (PIS) was a self-reporting instrument and lacked open-ended questions. The survey was also limited by the reliability and validity of the instrument. In addition, participants may not have given completely honest responses due to situations in schools and the timing of the survey instrument being completed.

Theoretical Framework

Research surrounding leadership in inclusive schools is consistent with transformational leadership. Studies support how principals direct their inclusive vision, build capacity, and create environments that foster collaboration and redesigning schools they lead (Billingsley, 2012; Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). Bennis (1959) was credited with introducing transformative leadership and his research centered on the individual's capacity to raise another person's level of consciousness, build meaning, and inspire human intent. However, nearly two decades later, Burns (1978) was the first to actually conceptualize the relationship

between the leader and the follower. Burns (1978) promoted the idea of transformational leadership as a relationship with one or more individuals connecting in a profound way. Educational leaders who hold beliefs in their abilities are able to change the culture of a building by influencing behaviors, inspiring greatness, valuing high levels of morality and virtues and by building selfless attitudes (Burns, 1978). As a result, transformational leadership underpins the theoretical framework for this study.

Burns declared that transformational leaders disregard self-interest by the leader and impact a particular goal or outcome that will benefit all stakeholders. Burns also proposed that leaders have an obligation to focus attention on moral purpose and values as to the various needs of their followers. Key components of transformational leadership were derived from Maslow's Theory of Human Needs. Maslow posited human beings require a vast range of needs and understanding that the performance of the follower depends greatly on the extent to which individual needs are being met (Burns, 1978).

Burns' ideals parallel those of Abraham Maslow's Theory of Human Needs. Maslow posited that people have a range of needs, and typically they perform effectively in the workplace based on whether their needs are satisfied. According to Burns, transformational leadership fits into the higher levels and requires both a high level of self-esteem and self-actualization to be a successful transformational leader. Burns also believed that true leadership creates change and achieves goals, but also changes the people (Burns, 1978).

Study Overview

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 comprises an introduction, statement of the problem, assumptions, research questions, definition of terms, theoretical

framework, significance of the study, limitations, delimitations, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature related to federal laws and special education, principals' leadership and special education, theoretical framework, history of inclusion, court cases related to inclusion, principal attitudes toward students with disabilities, and a summary. Chapter 3 contains an introduction, methodology, research design, procedures used in the study, instrumentation, validity and reliability information, data collection parameters, data analysis, and a summary and limitations. Chapter 4 presents the results of the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, implications, recommendations for further research, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature regarding the history of special education, the philosophy of inclusion, and the influence of principals on the implementation, leadership, and management of inclusive schools. The review underpins the notion that the role of principal is key in determining the service delivery to students with disabilities and the principal can either promote or discourage school cultures that embrace inclusive schooling. The review in this study also builds the case that effective inclusive school practices can exist in schools with attitudinal, organizational, and instructional changes that are driven and led by the principal.

Special Education History

Since the infancy of public education, individuals with disabilities were often isolated and treated differently (Pardini, 2002). In fact, parents were either forced to institutionalize their children or allow them to stay home (Pardini, 2002). By 1918, every state in the United States signed compulsory education laws requiring a provision of a free public education for all school-aged children (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). At the end of World War II, a number of parent advocacy groups were developed as a result of children being denied educational services. One of the first groups to lead the charge was established in 1947 and was known as the American Association of Mental Deficiency. Over time, other parent groups were established including the United Cerebral Palsy Association, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and John F. Kennedy's Panel on Mental Retardation (Pardini, 2002).

Advocates and parents alike have argued against discrimination towards students with disabilities for years. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court declared segregated public schools were unconstitutional. The court ruled that separating Topeka, KS, school students by race unnecessarily deprived those students of freedom. This case laid an important foundation for what was to come, not only targeting race relations, but also special education. This landmark decision along with subsequent court cases helped shape and support inclusive educational practices (Wright & Wright, 2007).

During the 1960's and 1970's, the field of special education accelerated partly due to the involvement of the federal government (McLeskey & Landers, 2006). Previously, there were few legal protections afforded to students with disabilities before 1970 and state laws provided minimal protection, contained loopholes, or were ignored altogether (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). However, two court cases in the early 1970's pushed the federal courts' decisions regarding children with disabilities. They include the Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Pennsylvania (1972) and Mills v. D.C. Board of Education (1972).

In 1971, the United States government and the Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens initiated a class action lawsuit on behalf of parents of children with mental retardation. PARC was settled rather quickly and resulted in a consent decree. Consequently, the state agreed to begin educating children with mental retardation, free of charge, and typically in local programs. The agreement did not affect children who were not mentally retarded, however, the case did lay the groundwork for the establishment of the right to educate all children with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2007).

During the same year, *Mills v. Board of Education* was predicated under the same principles as PARC, yet it reached the Supreme Court. In *Mills*, parents brought the case against the District of Columbia public schools for the following: (a) failure to provide special education, and (b) excluding, expelling or transferring children from regular education public school classes not affording them due process law. *Mills* established the Constitutional right to education of all children with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2007). The aforementioned cases set the precedent for students with disabilities to have access to the same education as their nondisabled peers (Friend & Bursuck, 1999). In addition, the cases also served as precursors to the inclusion movement.

Philosophy of Inclusion

In the context of public education, the term inclusion is not a place; it is a way of interacting with others, contributing to the greater community, and doing so regardless of your race, gender, class, disability or other exceptionality. The word “inclusion” does not appear in IDEA, however, educators have adopted a number of definitions throughout the years (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Falvey & Givner 2005; Vaughn, Schumm, & Forgan, 1998).

Inclusion is the process of meshing general and special education reform initiative and strategies in order to achieve a unified system of public education that incorporates all children and youth as active, fully participating members of the school community, that view diversity as the norm, and ensures a high quality of education for each student by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for each student (Ferguson, 1995). The focus is to create schools that foster acceptance, a sense of community, and belonging (Rose, 2008). The ultimate goal, however, is to provide all

students an opportunity to be a part of a learning community that focuses on collaboration, support, and nurturing.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), more than 60% of students between the ages of 6 and 21 were educated in the general education classroom 80% or more of the day. From 2005 to 2014, the percentage of students inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day increased from 53.6% to 62.6% (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This is only a 10% increase over a span of nearly ten years. However, the debate continues as some schools across the country continue to segregate students, while others allow students access to the general education setting.

Reform Efforts Related to Inclusion

The growth of special education evolved as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and federal law (Friend & Bursuck, 1999). On November 29, 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act known as Public Law 94-142. This law required public schools to provide for students with an array of disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). LRE has been the cornerstone of special education law since its inception. In short, LRE provides students with disabilities the opportunity to be educated and provides appropriate supports in the general education setting (Palley, 2006).

Public Law 94-142 has been reauthorized on a number of occasions since 1975. In 1990, the name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This revision provided additional supports for children with disabilities between birth and 5 years old. Further, the law includes a provision for student transition. In short, transition services ensure safeguards are in place as it pertains to students with disabilities. More

specifically, the individualized education plan details goals and objectives from school to adult life for students no later than 16 years of age. It allows self-determination for the student and a path to employment, education, living arrangements, and various activities around the student's future and post school endeavors focused on the key areas associated with transition. In addition, autism and traumatic brain injury were added as disability categories (Wright & Wright, 2007).

In 1997, IDEA was revised again. The law focused on the importance of general education teachers being a part of the team that develops the student's individualized education plan. The law also had a profound effect on students with disabilities because they were often excluded from state-wide testing in the past (Wright & Wright, 2007). Further, the guidelines around large-scale testing or assessments pertaining to student with disabilities was markedly different from state to state and had low participation (Wright & Wright, 2007).

On December 3, 2004, IDEA was reauthorized yet another time. IDEA was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA). The law included changes in paperwork certain procedures, and disability categories as depicted in Table 1. More importantly, the law focused on the assessment piece and the need for special education teachers to be highly qualified in the core content areas if they teach those subjects to students with disabilities (Friend & Bursuk, 2009).

Table 1

13 IDEA Disability Categories

Autism	Deaf-Blindness	Deafness	Emotional Disturbance
Hearing Impairment	Intellectual Disability	Multiple Disabilities	Orthopedic Impairment
Other Health Impairment	Specific learning Disability	Speech or Language Impairment	Traumatic Brain Injury
			Visual Impairment (including blindness)

Note. Disability categories were updated during the reauthorization of IDEA 2004.

Prior to IDEA being reauthorized in 2004, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. The provisions of NCLB held school districts responsible for the academic achievement of all students including those with special needs and specifically required that students reach proficiency in both reading and mathematics by 2014 (Wright & Wright, 2007). Also, one of its major components focused on all students being taught by a highly qualified teacher. This allowed for students with disabilities in both middle and high schools to have greater access to grade level instruction (Friend & Bursuk, 2009).

In 2001, “the phrase ‘scientifically based research’ appears more than 100 times throughout the No Child Left Behind Act” (Hess and Petrilli, 2006, p. 94). In addition, there is also language in IDEA 2004 requiring students with special needs to be afforded the opportunity to participate in programs supported by peer-reviewed research (Cook, Tankersley, & Landrum, 2013). As a result, the importance of evidence-based practices is

significant. In short, Evidence Based Practices (EBPs) are programs or practices that are supported by research and have a positive impact on student outcomes (Cook et al., 2013). Evidence based practices have been identified as a means to address low and unsatisfactory achievement. Experts in various fields use EBPs as a global decision-making tool. They select and prioritize instructional practices based on the practitioners' readiness level and the needs and values of the consumer (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes, & Richardson, 1996; Spencer, Detrich, & Slocum, 2012).

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting provides those students with access to an environment where learning is key and improved student outcomes can be realized (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hopper, 2012; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). The principal is a key contributor to the success or failure of inclusion by the way he or she communicates their commitment to the process (Praisner, 2003; Zimmerman, 2011). Further, effective principals also focus on establishing a culture for change (Fullan, 2002a, 2000b).

Shaping the School Culture and Establishing a School Climate

School culture refers to the shared beliefs, behaviors and customs which guide and impact school practices (Peterson & Deal, 1998). As school leaders, principals play a pivotal role in developing and sustaining inclusive school environments by establishing a culture of open communication, respect, and trust as they foster communities where everyone is invested and has a sense of urgency and responsibility for improving learning for all students (Billingsley, 2012; McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). Further, principals play a significant role in the type and quality of services students with disabilities receive in the general education setting (Praisner, 2003).

Developing an inclusive school is linked to extensive redesign or systemic change and the principal is primarily responsible if change is to occur (Idol, 2006; Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, & Capper, 1999; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011). Change comes in the form of addressing the beliefs of school staff and stakeholders in reference to students with disabilities, reviewing curriculum and instructional design, and addressing teacher roles and responsibilities. According to Green (2005), to shape cultures, principals must lead so that all stakeholders understand their individual roles, support shared goals, and commit to working towards achieving successful student outcomes. Further, systemic change in schools and school culture is needed for inclusive schools to thrive and is invariably supported by the leadership of the principal to be sustained over time (Ingram, 1996; Waldron et al., 2011).

The National School Climate Center (2014) defines school climate as a means to characterize school life and determine the quality of the school atmosphere. The council offers the following criteria to determine school climate: (a) rules and norms, (b) physical security, (c) physical surroundings, (d) school connectedness and engagement, (e) social support for students, (f) social supports for adults, (g) respect for diversity, and (h) leadership. However, for the purpose of this study, school climate directly relates to the attitudes, beliefs, values, and instructional framework that surround both the academic success and overall operation of the school (Brookover, Erickson, & McEvoy, 1997).

Principals must exhibit an innate ability to balance and address what affects the climate of a school. This includes every component of the school community, from teacher retention to teacher job satisfaction and motivation, student discipline, and student academic outcomes (Van Horn, 2003). Principals should also ensure that they

have the capability to examine, nurture, and plan appropriately to sustain a positive school climate. Pellicer (2003) contends that principals who are purposeful and intentional surrounding various dimensions of school climate can have a positive change on student achievement.

School climate has also been identified as a key component of effective schools and in some cases a strong predictor of student academic success (McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Van Horn, 2003). However, getting there requires the principal to map out and highlight the benchmarks needed to measure the progress (National School Climate, 2014). Good principals push their vision and stay abreast of what affects the overall climate of the school (Van Horn, 2003).

Research Related to Principals' Attitudes Toward Inclusion

Ramirez (2006) examined the attitudes and perceptions of elementary principals residing in Texas relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The researcher concluded that principals tend to favor the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Further, the data suggested principals' perceptions depend on the amount of training, experience or knowledge with regards to special education. The data also determined that age, gender, school size, and the percentage of students with disabilities had no significant impact on the attitudes of the respondents.

Lindsey (2009) investigated middle level principals' attitudes toward inclusion relative to the following: professional experience, training, and principals' knowledge. The participants were typically female, middle aged, and had an average of 15–20 years of experience teaching in a general education setting. On the other hand, 85% of the

principals reported they had zero to five years of teaching experience in the area of special education. In general, the principals had a positive attitude toward inclusion and there was no significant difference based on gender or race. Principals also reported that mental retardation, multiple disabilities, autism, emotional disturbance and traumatic brain injury were all disability categories that required a more restrictive educational placement. Lastly, respondents were indifferent with regards to whether students should be integrated into general education classes by law and/or policy. Only 53.5% agreed, 17.5% were undecided, and 30% disagreed with the concept of students with disabilities being in the general education setting.

Sanks (2009) examined the relationship between principals' attitudes and their inclusive practices. The study also examined the relationship between principals' attitudes toward inclusion and the adequate yearly progress (AYP) of students with disabilities in both Reading/Language Arts and Math. Lastly, the study explored principals' attitudes toward inclusion and their inclusive practices and whether those attitudes and practices were predictors of AYP in their individual schools. The findings suggest principals in the study have a generally positive attitude toward inclusion. The findings also suggest that principal attitudes and practices in regards to inclusion were not predictors of whether their schools made AYP or not. Yet, the principals' attitudes toward inclusion did relate to their school's AYP status.

Farris (2011) investigated the attitudes of high school principals in Texas towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The researcher also examined the principals' personal experiences, professional training, and formal training as it relates to their attitudes toward including students with disabilities. Overall,

the principals' attitudes were considered positive. Additionally, the findings suggested there was a significant relationship between the principals' perception of inclusion and their personal experiences. The findings also suggest that there is a positive correlation between the perception of students with disabilities and years of experience as a general education teacher, special education teacher, or as a principal in a high school.

Lorio (2011) examined Louisiana high school principals' attitudes and the relationship between their attitudes and demographic factors. The population was comprised of 366 high school principals, however, consent was received to administer the survey to 207 principals. Only 52 of those responded to the survey. The principals' attitudes were positive towards most of the items on the survey as it relates to inclusion. However, respondents did react negatively to items tied to aggression towards fellow students or school staff members. Also, principals held negative attitudes about professional development provided for teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals to work with students with disabilities. Further, principals were concerned with including students with severe disabilities and the problems that arise surrounding teachers' classroom management.

Galano (2012) conducted a study to evaluate the attitudes and perceptions of urban elementary school principals. The dissertation focused on the characteristics that influence principals' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. Over 96% of the elementary principals in the study reported a moderate to strong positive attitude. Regarding demographic indicators; however, there were no statistically significant relationships between the principals' professional experience, gender, age, and attitude.

Murray (2013) explored principals' attitudes and behaviors toward the inclusive practices of co-teaching and differentiated instruction. The researcher compared the responses from principals who lead schools that represent the top 20% of those in the district who practice inclusion against the bottom 20% of schools in the district who practice inclusion. The percentages were based on the Pennsylvania Least Restrictive Environment Index. There was no significant difference between the two groups of principals in reference to attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of the respondents regarding inclusion of students with disabilities, placement of those students, co-teaching, or differentiated instruction.

Minter (2012) investigated Missouri middle/junior high school principals' perceptions of inclusion. The researcher also examined the perceptions of collaboration between both special education and general education teachers. The survey results revealed a strong positive view towards inclusion. The respondents agreed or strongly agreed with ten out of the twelve items surrounding inclusion.

In regards to the basic knowledge of inclusion, respondents indicated they gained knowledge via classroom experience as a teacher or through their position as a principal. Further, the type of disability and prior work related experiences do not influence the principals' perceptions of inclusion. Also, the gender of the principal was found not to be significant; however, female principals were more in agreement than their male counterparts as it relates to students' opportunities for diversity in the classroom. Lastly, principals reported a positive view of collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers. However, principals had mixed reviews surrounding the relationships between general education and special education teachers (Minter, 2012).

Weller (2012) investigated the attitudes of elementary school principals with regards to the inclusion of students with autism and the relationship between their attitudes and placement decisions. The researcher gained the perspective of six elementary principals with a minimum of three years of experience. The study was designed to explore the following: (a) concerns regarding the inclusion of students with autism meeting academic expectations in the general education setting, (b) analyzing how personal and professional experiences and professional development impact the inclusion of students with autism, and (c) identifying the attitudes of principals with regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities as opposed to those students with autism in the general education setting. The key finding from the study suggests predicting positive principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment stems from the principals' belief that students with autism can be successful in the general education setting.

Stith (2013) explored whether a relationship existed between elementary principals in Virginia and their attitudes toward the inclusion of student with disabilities. The researcher also examined the effect principals' training, experience, placement decisions, and state assessment decisions had on principals' attitudes. The findings suggest that there is no significant correlation between the principals' training or experience and their attitudes towards students with disabilities. However, there was a significant correlation between placement decisions and state assessment decisions. Further, the study indicated that the respondents had a significantly positive attitude toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The results also revealed principals' attitudes toward students with disabilities being included

in the general education setting were generally positive regardless of their individual level of training and experience.

Jacobs-Bell (2014) examined elementary principals and special education administrators and how their attitudes, special educational training, and teaching experience relates to their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. The results revealed that there was not a significant difference between school principals' and special education administrators' attitudes in regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Also, there was not a significant difference between school principals and special education administrators as it relates to the number of special education credits earned and specific topics in special education coursework and their attitudes toward inclusion. In addition, there is not a significant difference between school principals and special education administrators as it relates to the number of in-service hours completed and their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Inglesby (2014) explored the significance of special education leadership and the roles elementary principals play in ensuring the success of all students. Further, the study centered on the leadership behaviors associated with serving students with disabilities. Those specific behaviors are as follows: (a) principal efficacy, (b) attitude, (c) disposition, (d) beliefs, and (e) technical knowledge. The PULSE workshop series was attributed to a positive shift in efficacy, cultural proficiency, and technical competence.

Chandler (2015) investigated the attitudes of both elementary and secondary principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. The researcher concluded that school enrollment was significantly associated with their attitudes toward inclusion. Schools with less than 500 students had principals with more positive attitudes as

opposed to those with more than 500 students. The study also noted two significant findings associated with the number of years of experience teaching special education and whether the principal had a relative or friend with a disability.

Williams (2015) investigated the attitudes and perceptions of principals in the state of Illinois. The respondents provided information via the Principals and Inclusion Survey developed by Praisner (2000). The researcher examined demographic factors, principal backgrounds, work experience regarding working with students with disabilities, and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. The findings suggest that demographic characteristics and occupational characteristics did not impact the attitudes of principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. Also, the educational background and prior experience of principals with students with disabilities had no significant impact on their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. Further, there was no relationship between the attitudes of the principals and their decisions surrounding the appropriate placement of students with disabilities.

Workman (2016) examined the attitudes of schools principals towards the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The secondary purpose was to investigate the relationship between specific demographic factors of principals in rural settings and their attitudes towards including students with ASD in the general education classroom. The attitude scores of the respondents were neither strongly positive nor negative. The scores were neutral across all levels of ASD. The researcher also reported that an overwhelming percentage of the participants tended to lean towards the inclusion of students with ASD. There was also a significant relationship between the attitude of the principals and the placement of students with ASD with level 3. Further, there was a

significant relationship between the years of service as a full-time special education teacher and the attitude towards students identified as level 3. Lastly, the study revealed that the demographics of the principals did not play an important role in their individual attitudes toward students with ASD. The rural location of the school was not impacted by demographics.

Laroussi (2016) investigated the perceptions of elementary principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers as it relates to practices and processes needed to support an inclusion program. The study used the collective case study approach to closely examine the experiences of principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. The participants shared the following: (1) leadership focused to address teachers' human and professional needs and the goals of the school, (2) focus on strong collaboration, (3) distributive leadership practices and access to resources, and (4) the impact instructional practices have on the implementation of an academically successful inclusion program.

Summary of the Literature on Principals' Attitudes Toward Inclusion

This section analyzes three previous studies that examine principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities and placement of those students. Table 2 provides a summary of the previous three studies including the authors, participants, research design, and results of the studies.

Praisner (2003) examined principals' attitudes toward inclusion. The sample included 408 elementary principals that were randomly selected from Pennsylvania. The influences those attitudes had on the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities were also addressed. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What are the attitudes of elementary principals toward the inclusion of students with severe/profound disabilities in the general education setting?
2. What is the relationship between principals' personal characteristics, training, experience and/or school characteristics and their attitudes toward inclusion?
3. What is the relationship between principals' perceptions of appropriate placements for students with different types of disabilities and their attitudes and experiences?

The researcher used the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) to determine if training, experience, and program factors had an impact on principals' attitudes. Additionally, the PIS was comprised of four sections: (a) demographics, (b) training and experience, (c) attitudes toward inclusion, and (d) principal beliefs about the most appropriate placements. Of those surveyed, 21.1% of the principals had a positive attitude towards inclusion and 2.7% had a negative attitude about inclusion. The remaining respondents, which equaled 76.6%, fell within the uncertain range. This suggests the respondents did not have a positive or negative attitude but one skewed towards a positive attitude. Next, the researcher determined there was a relationship between variables associated with the respondent's attitude toward inclusion. The Pearson-Product Moment Correlation coefficient and the Point-Biserial Correlation were both calculated to identify if any statistically significant results occurred. There were correlations between attitude toward inclusion and special education credits, in-service hours, specific topics taken, and experience. There was a significant correlation between the Experience Score and the Attitude Score. The results indicate the more positive the principal's overall experience with individuals with disabilities, the more positive the attitude. Further, the researcher

examined the type of specific topics related to special education and inclusion included in preparation programs. The mean score was 6.23 with a standard deviation of 3.28. In addition, only 2% of the principals had taken all of the topics included in the survey and there was not a single topic that had been taken by all respondents. As it relates to specific course work, most principals participated in the following: 83% special education law, 77.7% the characteristics of students with disabilities, and 62% behavior management. The number of in-service hours in regards to inclusive practices and the number of special education credits gained via a formal training program were related to the Attitude Score. Therefore, the more hours and credits the more positive the resulting attitude toward inclusion. The researcher also explored two differences associated with disability categories. One, least restrictive placements in the general education setting were selected most often for the following three categories: speech and language (93.7%), physical disability (87.4%), and other health impairment (84.9%). The general education setting was chosen less likely for autism (30.1%) and serious emotional disturbance (20.4%). Two, the category of serious emotional disturbance was the only category with a mix of negative and somewhat negative experiences. The overall findings associated with the study suggest that principals' attitudes are important when including students with disabilities. Additionally, the research was conducted to enhance and highlight principals' attitudes toward inclusion, various factors surrounding attitudes, and the potential impact placement decisions have for students with disabilities. The study also promotes additional research and focus: (a) factors affecting placement perceptions, (b) role of past experience with students with disabilities, and (c) the various types of training in inclusion.

In the second study, Boyle and Hernandez (2016) investigated the attitudes and perceptions of Catholic school principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. Overall, the study was developed to gauge Catholic school principals' attitudes towards inclusion and how those attitudes impact enrollment decisions for students with disabilities seeking to enroll in Catholic schools. They also examined the relationship between a principal's previous experiences with students that have disabilities and the principal's objectivity surrounding the enrollment of students with disabilities in their schools. Additionally, the authors discussed implications for practice. Catholic elementary diocesan school principals from one mid-western state were asked to complete an online survey. The study focused on the two following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Catholic school principals towards serving students with disabilities within a Catholic school setting?
2. What are the professional development needs that would increase the capacity of the Catholic school to more effectively meet the needs of those with special education needs?

The survey was adapted from the Principal and Inclusion Survey (PIS) (Praisner, 2000). The researchers contacted 342 principals and 81 responded, however, only 54 principals completed the entire survey. The Attitude Scores ranged from 25 to 49 with a mean of 37.1, a standard deviation of 4.7, and a median of 38. A score of 30 indicates a neutral attitude; a mean score of 37.1 represents a more positive than negative attitude towards inclusion. Further, principals with more positive attitudes had a higher percentage of students in their individual schools. In addition, there was not a significant relationship between principals' attitudes towards inclusion and their years of experience. There was

also no relationship between principal attitudes and the number of classes completed in special education. Most principals indicated they had no previous experience with children with traumatic brain injuries, intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, and visual impairments/blindness. As a result, over half of the principals (53.1% to 67.9%) stated they would not enroll students from the following groups: traumatic brain injuries, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities. Additionally, half of the principals (45.7%) were not interested in enrolling students with visual impairments/blindness. In regards to staff development needs, 92.6% of the principals indicated they had professional development in differentiated instruction. Nearly half the principals (54.3% to 65.4%) had received staff development in teaching and learning, alternative assessment techniques, teacher collaboration, and characteristics of students with disabilities. Very few principals (4.9%) reported professional development in the area of parent and community support for inclusion. The researchers also took a closer look at professional development opportunities that might increase the capacity of Catholic schools and enhance the experience for students with disabilities. Additionally, attitudes were positive towards inclusion. As it relates to high incident disabilities, the principals' previous experience had no direct impact on their willingness to enroll those students. Six disability categories were directly associated with the principals' prior experience and their willingness to enroll students with disabilities and five of the six were low incidence disabilities. The second research question focused on building capacity to better meet the needs of students with disabilities through professional development. Financial constraints were identified as a major barrier to inclusion. Almost half of the principals (44%) admitted they would include more students with disabilities if they had the funding

to do so. Further, half of the principals provided opportunities for teachers to receive professional development in inclusionary practices. The findings also suggest the need to increase collaboration. Only 55.6% of the principals had professional development in collaboration.

The third study, Ball and Green (2014) was conducted to examine whether experience and training impacted school leaders' attitudes towards including students with disabilities in the general education setting. In addition, the researchers sought to gain information related to school leaders' attitudes, perceptions, and training and if their experiences had a positive or negative affect on inclusive practices. One hundred seventy elementary and secondary principals were asked to participate in the study. A total of 130 respondents actually participated. The following research questions were designed to drive the study:

1. What is the training and experience of school leaders relative to educating students with disabilities?
2. What are the attitudes of school leaders toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting?
3. What are the perceptions of school leaders regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities?
4. What is the relationship, if any, between the training and experience of school leaders and their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting?
5. What is the relationship, if any, between the attitudes of school leaders and their perceptions of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities?

6. What is the relationship, if any, between the demographic variables associated with school leaders and their perceptions of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities?

The researchers utilized the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) developed by Praisner (2000). The PIS has four sections: (1) four questions assessed characteristics of both the student and the school; (2) thirteen questions assessed the training and experience of the respondents; (3) ten questions assessed respondents' attitudes towards students with disabilities; and (4) eleven questions assessed the respondents' perceptions of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. Additionally, the PIS was modified to include the most current disability categories identified in IDEA (2004) and to include assistant principals as well. School leaders had limited training and experience as it relates to inclusive practices. However, a large number of leaders (84%) had received formal training in special education, but the range was only 1 to 9 credits. Only 39.1% of school leaders had personal experience with an individual with a disability. The first question examined the training and experience of schools leaders relative to inclusion. The data reflects that overall training was limited. Of the participants in the study, only 34 out of 138 school leaders had full-team special education teaching experience and 20 reported having special education certification. The second question posed by the researchers examined the attitudes of school leaders towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. The results indicate that school leaders' attitudes were slightly negative. The third question explored school leaders' perceptions regarding the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. The scores ranged from 1.15 to 5.62, which indicates school leaders' perceptions are negative to somewhat positive. The fourth

question investigated the relationship between the training and experience of school leaders and their attitudes towards including students with disabilities. Based on the results from the data, there was a distinct negative correlation between training and experience and attitudes. The fifth question focused on whether a relationship exists between the attitudes of school leaders and their perceptions of the most appropriate placement. The data revealed that there was no significant relationship between the attitudes of school leaders and their perceptions of the most appropriate placement. As a result, the attitudes of school leaders are not directly related to their perceptions of the most appropriate placement. The sixth concern seeks to determine if there is a relationship between the demographic variables associated with school leaders and their perception of the most appropriate placement. Only one out of the six variables was statistically significant. This suggests that the most appropriate placement can be predicted based on the number of students with disabilities with Individual Education Plans in the general education classroom for at 75% of the school day.

Table 2

Studies Examining Principals' Attitudes Toward the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Authors	Participants	Design	Instrument	Results
Praisner (2003)	408 Elementary School Principals	Quantitative	Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS)	1. Principals had neither a positive or negative attitude; skewed more towards a positive attitude.

Table 2 (continued)

				<p>2. Positive principal experiences with individuals with disabilities; the more positive their attitude toward inclusion.</p> <p>3. Placement decisions were made based on the type of disability.</p>
Boyle and Hernandez (2016)	54 Catholic School Principals	Quantitative	Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS)	<p>1. Principals had a neutral attitude, a more positive attitude than a negative one towards inclusion.</p> <p>2. Roughly half of the principals provided professional development to teachers in inclusionary practices.</p>
Ball and Green (2014)	130 School Leaders	Quantitative	Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS)	<p>1. School leaders have limited experience with special education and inclusion.</p> <p>2. Attitudes are slightly negative.</p>

Table 2 (continued)

				<p>3. School leaders support placement decisions based on the disability category.</p> <p>4. Increased training and experience result in more negative attitudes.</p> <p>5. School leaders' attitudes are not directly related to perceptions of the least restrictive environment.</p> <p>6. Placement decisions are based on the number of students with IEP's in the general education setting.</p>
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Note. Summary of research examining principals' attitudes toward inclusion.

Importance of School Leadership

School leadership has been well documented in regards to effective teaching and learning for more than three decades (Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 2003a; Gates, Ross, & Brewer, 2001; Green, 2005; Leithwood, 1994). The link between principal effectiveness and student achievement has been studied as well (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996, Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) concluded that only classroom instruction has a greater effect on learning

than school leadership. Further, the Wallace Foundation has also conducted rigorous research in the area of school leadership. Two notable findings suggest, “the real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass and creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal” (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2).

Student achievement and teacher quality have been a continued concern of educational researchers (Darling-Hammond, 2000). As a result, the focus on educational leadership as it relates to student success is gaining traction. For example, the NCLB accountability provisions shift the roles and responsibilities of school leaders. The provisions also require states to identify “schools needing improvement” as well as “distinguished schools.” Both of the designations are based on student outcomes thus increasing the demands of school accountability and the expanding role of the principal (Provost, Boscardin, & Wells, 2010).

The Role of the Principal. Over the last 25 years, policy changes have moved the emphasis on compliance and procedures to a focus on accountability for student outcomes. The shift places a greater responsibility on both principals and teachers (Burdette, 2010). Principals are pivotal to changes required in schools for them to become more effective and inclusive for all students (Crockett, 2002; Dyson, Farrell, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2004). Recent studies indicate students with disabilities who spend up to 80% of their day in the general education classroom have increased from 34% in 1990 to 61% in 2011 (McLeskey et al., 2012). In the current era of accountability, it is paramount that principals transform school buildings into places that

support students with disabilities and exhibit the use of standards-based instructional strategies by teachers (Boscardin, 2005).

As a greater emphasis is placed on students with disabilities making academic gains, inclusion has been seen as the answer. This has not proven to be the case as many students with disabilities continue to lag behind their grade age peers in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Recent case studies have focused on effective inclusive schools (Hehir & Katzman, 2012; McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011). The findings from the case studies suggest three best practices that should be developed and followed: (1) strong, active principal leadership to ensure that teachers share core values and an institutional commitment to developing an effective inclusive school, (2) a data system that monitors student progress, and (3) a school-based system of learner-centered professional development to improve instruction (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015).

Instructional Leadership. Over the last thirty years, a number of instructional leadership models have been presented and analyzed; however, none of the models are specific to special education (Andrew & Sodder, 1987; Duke, 1987; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Yet, in the current era of accountability, it is paramount that principals transform school buildings into places that support students with disabilities and exhibit the use of standards-based instructional strategies by teachers (Boscardin, 2005). Effective inclusive programs depend on the principal's ability to lead, manage, delegate, and foster a positive learning environment (Idol, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 1994). Bays and Crockett (2007) conducted a study that focused on principals in nine elementary schools. The findings suggest that principals provided instructional leadership

via three processes. They include: (1) observation and evaluation of teachers, (2) supervision by wandering through the building, and (3) open dialogue and informal conversations with teachers around the work.

The principals' ability and readiness levels are tested in regards to leading inclusive schools and addressing the unique instructional needs of students with disabilities. As a result, leadership programs over the last twenty years have adjusted their curriculum but not to the extent necessary to address leading special education programs appropriately (Angelle & Bilton, 2009; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Powell, 2010). This problem continues to resurface despite leadership programs being aligned with standards that serve as the framework and guide for the development of most leadership preparation programs (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). Further, challenges continue even after initial preparation programs have been completed. Principals lack knowledge of special education and need professional development opportunities, both in-service and pre-service, in the following areas: (a) internship, (b) mentoring, (c) leadership academies, and (d) strategies that improve efforts to support diverse student populations including those with disabilities (Burdette, 2010).

Principals' Knowledge of Special Education

In response to the increase in demand evident over the last ten years and the accountability measures put forth by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2004, a number of universities and colleges have made needed changes to their leadership curricula (Acker-Hocevar, Cruz-Janzen, & Wilson, 2009). This shift has challenged leaders to address laws governing special education practices and procedures. More specifically, leaders are

required to focus on collaborative practices such as mainstreaming, co-teaching, consultation, and various instructional practices (McLaughlin, 2009).

Principals struggle with leading special education programs because they lack the necessary training required (Petzko, 2008). As a result, gaps exist between special education knowledge and skills required to direct special education programs in schools (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). Principals understand the importance of special education policies, procedures, and concepts. However, the role of the principal and their knowledge base about special education should include the following:

1. Principals must understand the core special education legal foundations and entitlements. They should understand the intent or rationale of specific procedures. Simply following rules without understanding leads to cookie-cutter programs and pro forma compliance, not high quality special education.
2. Principals need to understand that effective special education is truly individualized and matches instruction to the learning characteristics of students with disabilities.
3. Principals must understand that special education is neither a place nor a program but a set of services and supports tailored to the needs of individual students so that they can progress in the general education curriculum.
4. Principals must know how to meaningfully include all students with disabilities in standards, assessments, and accountability requirements.
5. Principals need to know how to create the conditions within their schools that support effective special education practices and to finally integrate special education into aspects of school improvement (McLaughlin, 2009, p. 4).

Christensen, Siegel Robertson, Williamson, and Hunter (2013) conducted a study focused on preparing special education leaders. The findings suggest that principals need better training in matters related to special education. For example, 88.9% of the principals that participated in the study expressed that there was a deficiency as it relates to knowledge concerning how to modify and adapt the general curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners. Second, participants indicated there was a need for knowledge

of legal proceedings regarding discipline and special education students. Third, principals indicated that properly addressing testing options along with accommodations is a reason for pause. Eighty-one percent believed the knowledge about testing options should be taught in principal preparation programs. Further, school leaders will likely struggle if they have limited knowledge of NCLB and IDEA. The aforementioned results are consistent with previous studies researchers have performed (Bowlby, Peters, & Mackinnon, 2001; Zaretsky, 2003). Principals' knowledge and preparation regarding meeting the needs of diverse learners is pivotal.

Principals' Preparation Related to Inclusion

Principals are required to address the needs of all students; however, many are ill-prepared to address the needs of those who struggle in school and students with disabilities (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Pazey & Cole, 2013). Lasky and Karge (2006) completed an examination of 205 principals and found that 87% of the principals believed that formal special education training was moderately to very important. The following year Garrison-Wade, Sobel, and Fulmer (2007) conducted a similar study. Forty percent of the participants lacked special education law knowledge, 28% lacked the confidence in their abilities to mentor and support, and 28% lacked the ability to manage resources (i.e. developing schedules, planning, and demanding paperwork).

Angelle and Bilton (2009) found that 53% of the principals in their study had not taken any course work in the area of special education and highlighted the lack of formal training principals receive via principal preparation programs. Most recently, Pazey and Cole (2013) revealed that special education has been overlooked in leadership preparation programs. This oversight has occurred even though there is an emphasis on

the importance of preparing school leaders to meet the needs of every student through standards that guide most leadership preparation programs (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

In 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers released the Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL) to ensure school leaders are equipped to address student achievement and set higher expectations for each student (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015). The standards were first developed in 1996 and then revised in 2008. The previous installments of the standards were based on empirical research conducted during that time frame (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The current standards are student centered and were developed to assist principals to lead inclusive schools and ensure students with individual needs are met and realized (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015).

The ISSLC 2008 standards consist of six components and the PSEL 2015 has ten. Table 3 depicts the comparisons between ISSLC 2008 and PSEL 2015 and how they are aligned. There are four common themes between ISSLC 2008 and PSEL. They are as follows: (a) equity, (b) talent development, (c) leadership capacity, and (d) academic systems. However, the PSEL standards are more specific and focus on “why” leadership is required, such as “to promote each student’s academic success” or “to strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices” (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015). In the past, principals focused more on being in compliance with federal laws, policies and procedures, or program requirements as needed to educate students with disabilities. Today, principals are required to extend further than compliance only issues and focus on building instructional capacity for

student outcomes (Burdette, 2010). In the next chapter, the methodology used for this study is presented.

Table 3

Comparison Between ISSLC 2008 and PSEL 2015

ISLLC 2008	PSEL 2015
1. Vision	1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values 10. School Improvement
2. School Culture and Instructional Program	4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment 5. Community of Care and Support for Students* 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel* 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
3. Operations, Management, and Resources	5. Community of Care and Support for Students* 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel* 9. Operations and Management
4. Collaboration with Faculty and Community	8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community*
5. Ethics	2. Ethics and Professional Norms 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness*
6. Political, Social, Legal, Cultural Context	3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness* 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community*

Note. Comparisons between ISSLC 2008 and PSEL 2015 and how they are aligned.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes of rural, urban, and suburban public school principals in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Further, the study sought to determine the relationship, if any, between demographic variables associated with principals and their attitudes regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities. This chapter outlines the research design used to conduct the study and discusses the population sample, data collection, test reliability and validity, instrument, and the data analysis utilized.

Design of the Study

The researcher used a quantitative design to measure the attitudes of elementary and secondary public school principals in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. This study used a survey initially developed by Praisner (2000) but was modified by Ball and Green (2014) to gather information from principals and assistant principals and to address changes in disability categories since the survey was initially developed. In this study the researcher used the survey modified by Ball and Green (2014) and added a section to determine whether schools were classified as rural, urban, or suburban. The researcher also extended the research of Ball and Green (2014) by including principals from several school districts as opposed to only one.

In this study, the quantitative method was used to address the research problem. Further, the underlying assumption associated with quantitative research stems from the researcher being able to gain, analyze, and interpret quantitative data, so that he or she can remain detached and objective (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). According to Glatthorn and Joyner (2005), the quantitative method is useful to describe characteristics of a designated population by directly examining selected samples of that population.

The correlational study sought to examine the relationships between: (a) the training and experience of principals and their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, (b) the attitudes of principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, and (c) the relationship, if any, between the demographic variables associated with principals and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

Protection of Human Subjects

This study adhered to all ethical standards and provisions outlined by the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (see Appendix B). All participants invited were provided written consent, informed that their information would remain confidential, and were given the levity to decline or remove themselves from the study at any time. In addition, all participants gave implied informed consent and approval by completing the online survey.

Population

The population of this study was comprised of elementary and secondary public school principals. Principals play a pivotal role in regards to effective teaching and

learning; however, the overall school structure may depend greatly on the attitudes and behaviors of those principals (Ajzen, 2005; Praisner, 2003). Further, principals impact and drive the implementation of programs needed to meet the specific and unique needs of students with disabilities (Lasky & Karge, 2006).

Participants

The participants in this study included 105 public school principals serving students from kindergarten through twelfth grade in a Grand Division of one Southeastern state. With permission granted from The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (see Appendix B), the researcher worked collaboratively with state core directors to gain access and garner permission from superintendents in the Grand Division. The directors emailed superintendents a letter requesting they allow principals to participate (see Appendix C). After agreeing to participate, the superintendents emailed the cover letter to their principals (see Appendix D). The email provided an overview of the study and a hyperlink to the survey instrument.

Instrument

The Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) was used to conduct the study. The PIS (see Appendix A) consists of a 4-part questionnaire. There are a total of 28 items based on the review of inclusion related research (Praisner, 2000). Section III contains ten items that originated from the Superintendents Attitude Survey on Integration (SASI) originally adapted by Stainback (1986) from the Autism Attitude Scale for Teachers.

For this study, the author used a modified version of the PIS (Ball & Green, 2014). This version of the survey allowed the researcher to incorporate the disability

categories outlined in IDEA (2004) and include assistant principals, as well. The researcher added a component to capture whether principals worked in rural, urban, or suburban schools. By modifying the tool, the researcher was able to collect information from principals about school types.

Section I of the questionnaire contained four questions used to gather demographic information as it relates to the population of the school. The information included: (a) number of students served, (b) average class size for all students, (c) the percentage of students receiving special education services and, (d) the percentage of students with disabilities who are currently included in the general education classroom for at least 75% of their day at school.

Section II of the questionnaire contained thirteen questions developed to gain information surrounding the training and experience of principals. This section was modified to include years as a principal and to allow for the 13 disability categories identified in IDEA (2004). By using the responses, a total training and experience score was calculated and used to determine the training and experience of principals.

Section III of the questionnaire contained ten items. The questions originated from the Superintendents' Attitude Survey on Integration (SASI) and were adapted by Stainback (1986) from the Autism Attitude Scale for Teachers. This portion of the survey focused on gathering information with respect to the attitudes of principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The questions were evenly distributed in terms of positive and negative tone (Praisner, 2000). The responses provided an attitude score and that subsequent score was used to calculate and measure the attitudes of principals toward inclusion.

Section IV of the questionnaire was designed by Praisner. This section measured principals' attitudes relative to the most appropriate placement for students in all disability categories. This particular section had to be adapted to include the 13 disability categories outlined in IDEA (2004). After the responses were collected, a total inclusive score was calculated and used to determine the attitudes of principals regarding the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the PIS was substantiated in a previous work published by Praisner (2000). Since Praisner's original study, the instrument has been used in various studies across the country (Ball & Green, 2014; Boyle & Hernandez, 2016; Farris, 2011; Williams, 2015). In reference to section III of the PIS, Stainback (1986) conducted an analysis of reliability by computing a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient with a split half-correction factor on the original survey. The reliability coefficient was 0.899. In this study, Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the PIS. Cronbach's alpha for training and experience was .827; for attitudes toward inclusion ($\alpha = .761$); and for attitudes relative to the most appropriate placement ($\alpha = .863$) with an overall reliability coefficient of .824.

The content validity of the initial PIS was determined by the judgment of experts. The questionnaire items were presented to a panel of four university professors from LeHigh University with experience integrating students with disabilities and/or educational leadership experience. The panel reviewed and thoroughly evaluated the questions to ensure that the content validity of the questions measured the variables related to the attitudes of principals (Praisner, 2000). In addition, the survey was piloted

with nine school leaders to improve the clarity and gauge the content validity of the survey instrument (Praisner, 2000). The modifications made to the survey by the researcher for this study are believed to have no impact on either the reliability or the content validity of the initial instrument.

Data Collection

Upon receiving approval to proceed with the study, a cover letter (see Appendix C) was sent to superintendents of schools via the Northwest and Southwest state core directors in the Grand Division asking for permission to survey principals in their districts. Directions for completing the online questionnaire and consent forms were sent to principals. Principals were asked to complete and submit the survey within two weeks of receipt. An email reminder was sent after the first week and the third week. The surveys were closed after a period of one month.

Data Analysis

The correlational and descriptive analysis of the data was complete using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to investigate the attitudes of principals relative to their training and experience, and attitudes of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. Section I and Section II of the survey contained seventeen questions. For all questions, numerical values were assigned to the data. Descriptive statistics was used to obtain frequencies, percentages and means relative to various variables of age, gender, years of experience as a principal, years of teaching experience in special education, years of experience teaching in a general education setting, number of special education credits, and number of in-service hours.

To answer the research questions presented in this study, the following analyses were used:

Question 1. To identify the training and experience of principals relative to educating students with disabilities, responses from questions 3–13 of Section II of the PIS were reviewed using descriptive statistics.

Question 2. To identify the attitudes of principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, responses from Section III of the PIS were reviewed using descriptive statistics. For the purpose of this study, items 1–10 from Section III were analyzed. Of these items, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 10 were reverse coded.

Question 3. To identify the attitudes of principals regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities, responses from Section IV of the PIS were reviewed using descriptive statistics.

Question 4. To investigate the relationship between the training and experience of principals and their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, Likert-type responses from Sections II and III were placed on an interval scale and analyzed using Pearson's Correlation. The Likert scale items were developed by taking the composite score from four or more items used in the study. Then, the composite scores were analyzed via an interval measurement scale (Boone & Boone, 2012).

Question 5. To investigate the relationship between the attitudes of principals and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, Sections III and IV were analyzed using Pearson's Correlation. To perform the correlation, the Likert-type responses in Section III were placed on an interval scale (Boone & Boone, 2012).

Question 6. To investigate the relationship between the demographic variables associated with principals and their attitudes with regard to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, responses from Section I, questions 1 and 2 from Section II, and responses from Section IV were analyzed using a multiple regression. In addition, a point-biserial analysis was utilized to determine if a relationship exists between principal's gender and their attitudes with regard to the most appropriate placement.

Summary

In short, this chapter provided both a description of the research design and strategies. Additionally, the chapter also examined collection procedures and specific methods of analyses. The population of the study was comprised of principals from one Grand Division of a Southeastern State. All data was compiled and analyzed using SPSS and the results were reviewed in order to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study of the attitudes of rural, urban, and suburban principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. This chapter is organized into four distinct components: (a) a presentation of the demographic data, (b) a reliability analysis, (c) the results of the data analyses, and (d) a summary of the results.

The main purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes of public school principals in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. An additional purpose in the study was to determine the relationship, if any, between demographic variables associated with principals and their attitude relative to the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities.

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (see Appendix B) and public school superintendents in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state (see Appendix C) granted permission for the researcher to conduct the research. The target population consisted of rural, urban, and suburban public school principals serving students in grades kindergarten through twelfth.

Purposeful sampling was used in the study. This sampling type was chosen to allow the researcher to rely on his judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study regarding the attitudes of principals and how their attitudes impact the delivery of service for students with disabilities attending public schools in one Grand

Division of a Southeastern state. The instrument used in the study was a questionnaire developed by Praisner (2000), entitled the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS). The questionnaire was modified to include assistant principals and the current 13 disability categories specified in IDEA 2004 for the Ball and Green 2014 study (see Appendix A).

Demographics

A survey link using Qualtrics was sent to principals in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state. There are 404 principals in the Grand Division. A total of 116 principals responded to the survey for a return rate of 29%. A total of 105 participants were selected to participate in the study based on the full completion of the survey administered. This total represented 26% ($N = 105$) of all principals in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state.

Using the PIS, principals were asked to answer questions pertaining to: 1) the approximate number of students in their buildings, 2) the average class size for all students, 3) the approximate percentage of students with IEPs, excluding gifted students, and 4) the approximate number of students with IEPs included in general education classrooms for at least 75% of their school day, excluding gifted students. Principals were also asked to provide their age and gender. The values for the demographics are presented in Tables 4-8.

Regarding the number of students enrolled in the participants' schools, 10.6% ($N = 11$) of participants reported having 0-250 students; 33.7% ($N = 35$) reported having 251-500 students; 29.8% ($N = 31$) reported having 501-750 students; 13.5% ($N = 14$)

reported having 751-1000 students; and 12.5% ($N= 13$) reported having 1000 or more students. Table 4 presents the data regarding the number of students enrolled in the participants' schools.

Table 4

Approximate Number of All Students in Building

Percentage of Students with IEPs	<i>N</i>	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0-250	11	10.6	10.6
251-500	35	33.7	44.2
501-750	31	29.8	74.0
751-1000	14	13.5	87.5
1000 or more	13	12.5	100.0
Total	104	100.0	

Note. Number of students enrolled in schools and total percentages.

In terms of the average class size for all students, 72.4% ($N = 11$) of participants reported an average class size of 20-29 students; 17.9% ($N = 18$) of the participants reported an average class size of 30-39 students; 10.5% ($N = 11$) of the participants reported an average class size of 10-19 students; and none of the participants reported an average class size of 0-9. Table 5 presents the data regarding the average class size for all students reported by the participants.

Table 5

Average Class Size for All Students

Average Class Size	<i>N</i>	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0-9	0	0	0
10-19	11	10.5	10.5

Table 5 (continued)

20-29	76	72.4	82.9
30-39%	18	17.1	100.0
Total	105	100.0	

Note. Average class size for all students and total percentages.

Regarding the number of students with IEPs assigned to the participants' schools, excluding gifted students, 28.6% ($N = 30$) of the participants reported 6-10% of their students had IEPs; 27.6% ($N = 29$) reported 11-15% of their students had IEPs; 21.9% ($N = 23$) reported 16-20% of their students had IEPs; 11.4% ($N = 12$) reported 21% or more of their students had IEPs; and 10.5% ($N = 11$) reported 0-5% of their students had IEPs.

Table 6 presents the data regarding the percentage of students assigned to the participants' schools with IEPs, excluding gifted students.

Table 6

Percentage of Students with IEPs (Excluding Gifted Students)

Percentage of Students with IEPs	N	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0-5%	11	10.5	10.5
6-10%	30	28.6	39.0
11-15%	29	27.6	66.7
16-20%	23	21.9	88.6
21% or more	12	11.4	100.0
Total	105	10	

Note. Total percentage of students with IEPs.

Regarding the approximate number of students with IEPs included in regular education, 48.6% ($N = 51$) of the participants were assigned to schools in which 81-

100% of their students with IEPs were included in regular education; 24.8% ($N = 26$) were assigned to schools in which 0-20% of their students with IEPs were included in regular education; 15.2% ($N = 16$) were assigned to schools in which 61-80% of their students with IEPs were included in regular education; 6.7% ($N = 7$) were assigned to schools in which 21-40% of their students with IEPs were included in regular education; and 4.8% ($N = 5$) were assigned to schools in which 41-60% of their students with IEPs were included in regular education. Table 7 presents the data regarding the approximate number of students with IEPs included in regular education in the participants' schools.

Table 7

Number of Students with IEPs Included in Regular Education

Number of Students with IEPs	<i>N</i>	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0-20%	26	24.8	24.8
21-40%	7	6.7	31.4
41-60%	5	4.8	36.2
61-80%	16	15.2	51.4
81-100%	51	48.6	100.0
Total	105	100.0	

Note. Number of students with IEPs and the total percentages.

In terms of the age of the participants in the study, 59.0% ($N = 62$) of the participants were 41-50 years of age; 21.9% ($N = 23$) were 31-40 years of age; 17.1% ($N = 18$) were 51-60 years of age; 1% ($N = 1$) were 61 or older; and 1% ($N = 1$) were 20- 30 years of age. Table 8 presents the data regarding the age of the participants in the study.

Table 8

<i>Age</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
20-30	1	1.0	1.0
31-40	23	21.9	22.9
41-50	62	59.0	81.9
51-60	18	17.1	99.0
61 or older	1	1.0	100.0
Total	105	100.0	

Note. Age and total percentages.

Relative to gender, 56.2% ($N = 59$) of the participants in the study were females and 43.8% ($N = 46$) were males. Eighty-nine percent ($N = 93$) of the participants reported that their schools had specific school-wide plans to deal with crises involving students with disabilities and 11.4% ($N = 12$) reported that their schools did not have specific school-wide plans. While 70.5% of the participants ($N = 74$) reported that their school's mission statement included a vision for the inclusion of students with disabilities, 29.5% ($N = 31$) reported that their school's mission statement did not include a vision for the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

Question 1. What is the training and experience of principals relative to educating students with disabilities?

In order to identify the training and experience of principals relative to educating students with disabilities, responses from questions 3-13 of Section II of the survey are

presented using descriptive statistics. Regarding full-time regular education teaching experience, 39.0% ($N = 41$) of participants had 7-12 years of experience; 21.9% ($N = 23$) had 19 or more years of experience; 18.1% ($N = 19$) had 1-6 years of experience; 16.2% ($N = 17$) had 13-18 years of experience; and 4.8% ($N = 5$) had no experience. Table 9 presents the data regarding the years of full-time regular education teaching experience reported by the participants.

Table 9

Years of Full-time Regular Education Teaching Experience

Years of Experience	<i>N</i>	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0	5	4.8	4.8
1-6	19	18.1	22.9
7-12	41	39.0	61.9
13-18	17	16.2	78.1
19 or more	23	21.9	100.0
Total	105	100.0	

Note. Years of full-time regular education teaching experience and percentages.

With respect to full-time special education teaching experience, 74.3% ($N = 78$) of the participants reported that they had no full-time special education teaching experience; 12.4% ($N = 13$) reported 1-6 years of full-time special education teaching experience; 9.5% ($N = 10$) reported 7-12 years of full-time special education teaching experience; 2.9% ($N = 3$) reported 13-18 years of full-time special education teaching experience; and 1.0% ($N = 1$) reported 19 or more years of full-time special education teaching experience. Table 10 presents the data regarding the years of full-time special education teaching experience reported by the participants.

Table 10

Years of Full-time Special Education Teaching Experience

Years of Experience	<i>N</i>	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0	78	74.3	74.3
1-6	13	12.4	86.7
7-12	10	9.5	96.2
13-18	3	2.9	99.0
19 or more	1	1.0	100.0
Total	105	100.0	

Note. Years of full-time special education teaching experience and percentages.

Relative to experience as a principal, 31.4% ($N = 33$) of participants had been a principal for 11-15 years; 30.5% ($N = 32$) had been a principal for 6-10 years; 21.9% ($N = 23$) had been a principal for 0-5 years; 11.4% ($N = 12$) had been a principal for 16-20 years; and 4.8% ($N = 5$) had been a principal for 21 years or more. Table 11 presents the data regarding the participants' years of experience as a principal as reported by the participants.

Table 11

Years as a Principal

Years	<i>N</i>	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0-5	23	21.9	21.9
6-10	32	30.5	52.4
11-15	33	31.4	83.8

Table 11 (continued)

16-20	12	11.4	95.2
21 or more	5	4.8	100.0
Total	105	100	

Note. Years as a principal and percentages.

Formal training courses include teacher preparation courses at both the undergraduate and graduate education level. Regarding special education credits in formal training, 49.5% ($N = 52$) of the participants reported having 1-9 credits in formal training; 19.0% ($N = 20$) reported having no credits in formal training; 15.2% ($N = 16$) reported having 10-15 credits in formal training; 13.3% ($N = 14$) reported having 22 or more credits in formal training; and 2.9% ($N = 3$) reported having 16-21 credits in formal training. Table 12 presents the data regarding the approximate number of special education credits in formal training that were reported by the participants.

Table 12

Number of Special Education Credits in Formal Training

Special Education Credits	<i>N</i>	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0	20	19.0	19.0
1-9	52	49.5	68.6
10-15	16	15.2	83.8
16-21	3	2.9	86.7
22 or more	14	13.3	100.0
Total	105	100.0	

Note. Number of special education credits in formal training and percentages.

In-service training refers to training provided to assist practicing principals in the development of skills in inclusive practices. Regarding the number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices reported by the participants, 43.8% ($N = 46$) reported having 25 or more hours; 25.7% ($N = 27$) reported having 1-8 hours; 20.0% ($N = 21$) reported having 9-16 hours; 9.5% ($N = 10$) reported having 17-24 hours; and 1.0% ($N = 1$) reported having no in-service training hours in inclusive practices. Table 13 presents the data regarding the number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices that were reported by the participants.

Table 13

Number of In-service Training Hours in Inclusive Practices

In-service Training Hours	<i>N</i>	%	<i>Cumulative %</i>
0	1	1.0	1.0
1-8	27	25.7	26.7
9-16	21	20.0	46.7
17-24	10	9.5	56.2
25 or more	46	43.8	100.0
Total	105	100.0	

Note. Total number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices and percentages.

Regarding the areas included in the formal training courses reported by the participants, special education law was the content most commonly reported with 89.5% ($N = 94$) of the principals having had at least 10% of their training within that specific area. As for the remaining areas, 84.8% ($N = 89$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on the characteristics of students with disabilities. Eighty-

two percent ($N = 86$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on behavior management for students with disabilities; 66.7% ($N = 70$) of participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on crisis intervention, and 60% ($N = 63$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on fostering teacher collaboration. Fifty-nine percent ($N = 62$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on supporting and training for inclusion; 58.1% ($N = 61$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on academic programming; 35.2% ($N = 37$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on teambuilding; 30.5% ($N = 32$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on life skills training; 27.6% ($N = 29$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on the change process; 27.6% ($N = 29$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on field based inclusion experiences; 24.8% ($N = 26$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on eliciting parent and community support for inclusion; 15.2% ($N = 16$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on family intervention training; and 12.4% ($N = 13$) of the participants indicated that at least 10% of their training focused on interagency cooperation. All the areas of formal training are not mutually exclusive. The participants had the opportunity to select all that apply. Table 14 presents a graphical summary of the data as it relates to the content areas that the participants reported were included in 10% or more of their formal training.

Eighty-four percent ($N = 88$) of principals were not certified to teach special education and 16% ($N = 17$) were certified to teach special education. Seventy-two

percent ($N = 76$) of the participants reported having a personal experience with an individual or individuals with a disability outside the school setting and 28% ($N = 29$) reported that they did not have a personal experience with an individual or individuals with a disability outside the school setting.

Regarding the type of experience with students among the various disability categories, the participants reported more positive experiences with students with speech or language impairments, specific learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, other health impairments, and autism. However, the participants reported a more negative experience with students with traumatic brain injuries, deaf-blindness, and emotional disturbance. Figure 1 presents a summary of the data regarding the type of experience the participants reported having with students within the different disability categories.

Table 14

Areas Included in Formal Training with at Least 10% of Content

Content	N	%
Special Education Law	94	89.5
Characteristics of Students with Disabilities	89	84.8
Behavior Management	86	81.9
Crisis Intervention	70	66.7
Fostering Teacher Collaboration	63	60
Supporting and Training for Inclusion	62	59.0
Academic Programming	61	58.1
Teambuilding	37	35.2
Life Skills Training	32	30.5
Change Process	29	27.6

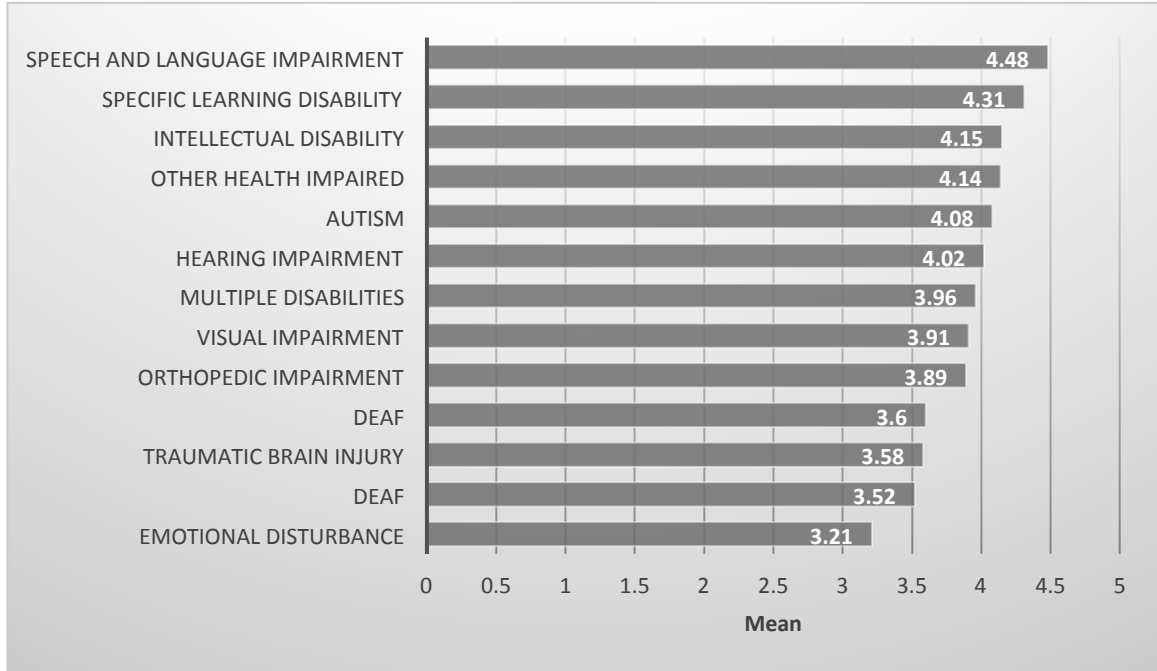
Table 14 (continued)

Field Based Inclusion Experiences	29	27.6
Eliciting Parent and Community Support for Inclusion	26	24.8
Family Intervention Training	16	15.2
Interagency Cooperation	13	12.4

Note. Formal training and percentages with at least 10% of content.

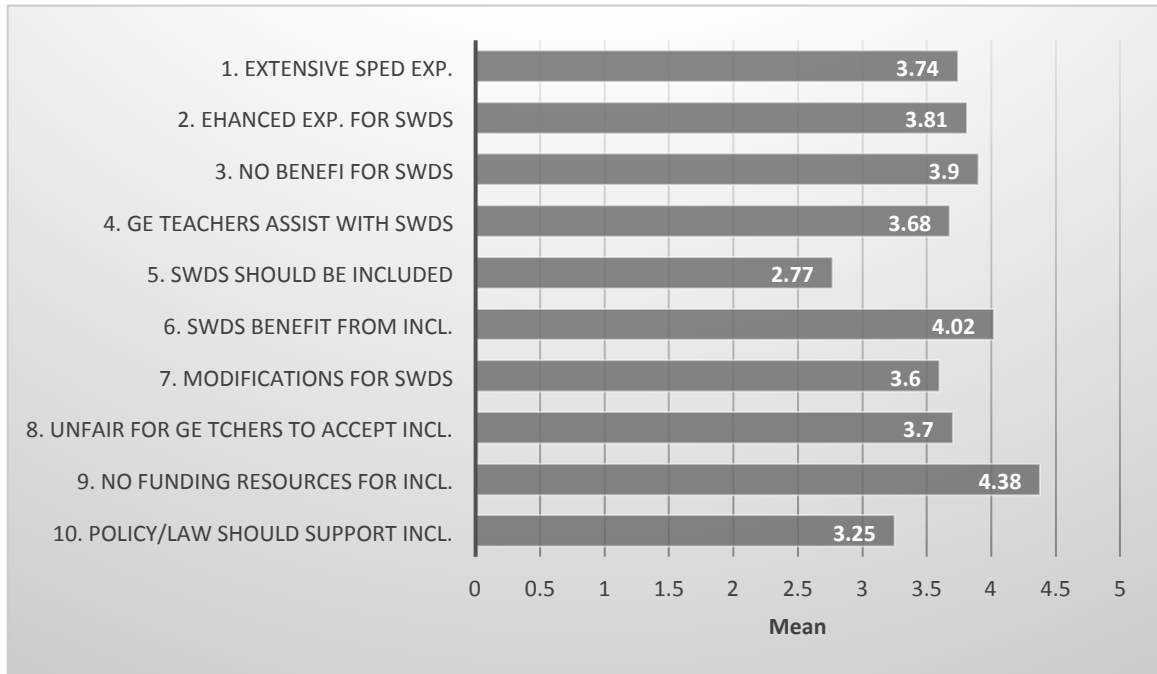
Question 2. What are the attitudes of principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting?

To identify the attitudes of principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, responses from Section III of the PIS were analyzed using descriptive statistics. To answer research question 2, items 1-10 on the survey were analyzed. Of these items, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 10 were reverse coded. Responses on the individual items revealed that participants rated items 9, 6, 3, and 2 the highest and rated items 10 and 1 the lowest. Figure 2 presents a graphical summary of the data regarding the attitudes of the participants towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting.



Note. 1 = Negative experience, 2 = Somewhat negative experience, 3 = No experience, 4 = Somewhat positive experience, 5 = Positive experience

Figure 1. Type of Experience for Each Disability Category. This figure provides a graphical summary of the data regarding the type of experience the respondents detailed having with students within the various disability categories.



Note. The higher the score, the more positive the attitude toward inclusion.

1 = Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with severe/profound disabilities in a school setting.

2 = Schools with both students with severe and profound disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with severe/profound disabilities.

3 = Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school.

4 = A good regular educator can do a lot to help a student with a severe/profound disability.

5 = In general, students with severe/profound disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.

6 = Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with severe/profound disabilities.

7 = Regular education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with severe/profound disabilities.

8 = It is unfair to ask/expect regular teachers to accept students with severe/profound disabilities.

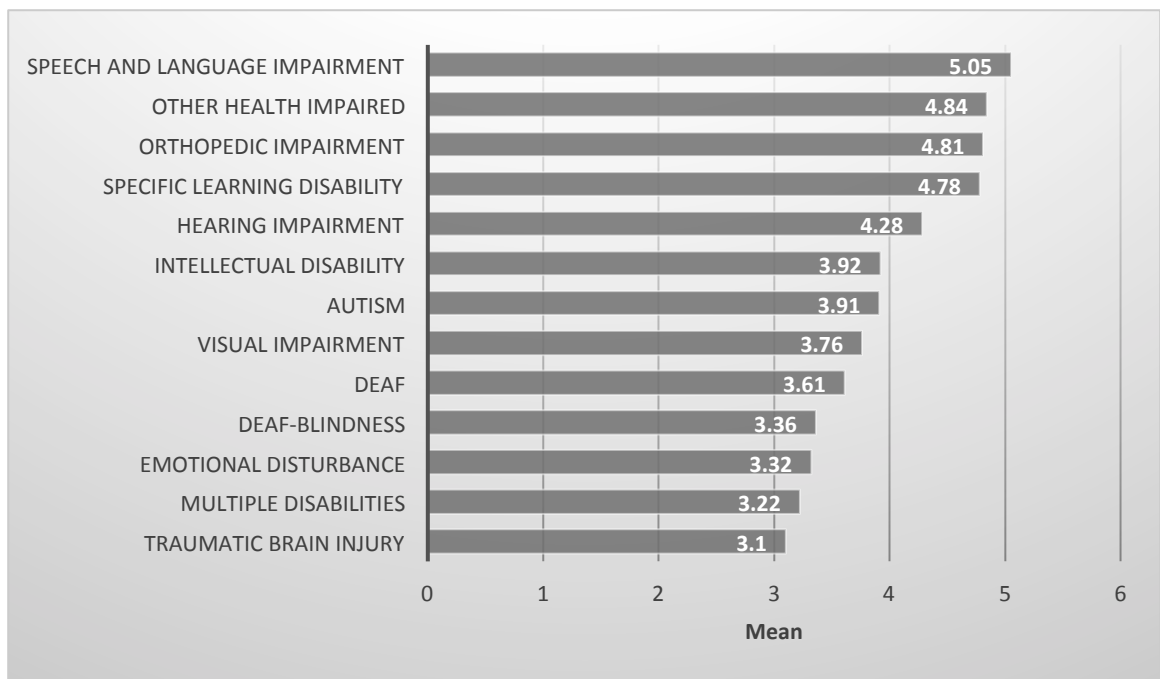
9 = No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with severe/profound disabilities.

10 = It should be policy and/or law that students with severe/profound disabilities are integrated into regular educational programs and activities.

Figure 2. Attitudes toward Inclusion of Students with Disabilities. This figure presents a graphical summary of the data regarding the attitudes of participants towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Question 3. What are the attitudes of principals regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities?

To identify the attitudes of principals regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities, responses from Section IV of the PIS were reviewed using descriptive statistics. After the review was completed, the results indicated that principals perceived that students with speech or language impairments, other health impairments, and specific learning disabilities should be placed in the most inclusive educational environments, whereas students with deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, and multiple disabilities should be placed in the least inclusive educational environments. Figure 3 depicts a graphical summary of the data regarding the participants' attitudes relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.



Note. 1 = Special education services outside regular school, 2 = Special class for most or all of the school day, 3 = Part-time special education class, 4 = Regular classroom instruction and resource room, 5 = Regular classroom instruction for most of day, 6 = Full-time regular education with support

Figure 3. Most appropriate Placement for Students with Disabilities. The figure provides a graphical summary of the data related to the participants' attitudes relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

Question 4. What is the relationship between the training and experience of principals and their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting?

To investigate the relationship between the training and experience of principals ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .584$) and their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .610$), Likert-type responses from Sections II and III were placed on an interval scale and analyzed using Pearson's Correlation. According to Boone and Boone (2012), Likert scale items are created by calculating a mean composite score from four or more Likert-type items and should be analyzed at the interval measurement scale.

A Pearson's Correlation analysis revealed a weak positive correlation, $r = .284$, $N = 105$, $p = .003$, two-tails. Principals with experience and training reported a weak positive attitude toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. As the training and experience of principals increased, there was a corresponding increase in their positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. A coefficient of determination (r^2) of .08 means that 8% of the variance in the attitudes of principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting can be explained by the training and experience of principals.

Question 5. What is the relationship between the attitudes of principals and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities?

To investigate the relationship between the attitudes of principals ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .610$) and their attitude relative to the most appropriate placement for students with

disabilities ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.074$), Sections III and IV were analyzed using Pearson's Correlation. To perform the analysis, the responses from Section III were placed on an interval scale (Boone & Boone, 2012). Based on the analysis of Sections III and IV, there was a moderate positive relationship between the attitudes of principals and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, $r = .302$, $N = 105$, $p = .002$, two-tails. As principals' attitudes increased, there was a corresponding increase in their attitude with regard to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. A coefficient of determination (r^2) of .302 means that 9% of the variance in their attitude with regard to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities can be explained by the attitudes of principals.

Question 6. What is the relationship, if any, between the demographic variables associated with principals and their attitudes with regard to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities?

To investigate the relationship between demographic variables and principals' perception of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, two analyses were conducted. First, a multiple regression was used to examine if a relationship exists between the following: (1) the approximate number of all students in the school, (2) the average class size for all students, (3) the approximate percentage of students with IEPs in the school, (4) the approximate number of students with IEPs that were included in regular education classrooms for at least 75% of their school day, (5) age, and (6) perception of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. Second, a point-biserial analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between gender and the

perception of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. The analysis was used because gender is also considered a dichotomous variable.

The first analysis was not statistically significant, $F(5, 99) = 1.46, p = .211; r^2 = .069$. The average class size for all students was not significantly related to principals' attitude relative to the most appropriate placements for students with disabilities, $b = -.161, t = -.708, p = .481$. The approximate number of all students in the school was not significantly related to school principals' attitude relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, $b = .111, t = 1.74, p = .085$. The approximate percentage of students with IEPs in the school was not significantly related to principals' attitude relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, $b = -.105, t = -1.14, p = .258$. The approximate number of students with IEPs that are included in regular education classrooms for at least 75% of their school day was not significantly related to principals' attitude relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, $b = .099, t = .950, p = .345$. Age was not significantly related to principals' attitude relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, $b = .196, t = 1.26, p = .211$. Table 15 presents a graphical summary of the regression coefficients. The second analysis was used to determine if a relationship exists between gender ($M = 1.56; SD = .499$) and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities ($M = 4; SD = 1.07$). Based on the analysis of gender and of the most appropriate placement, there was no significant relationship between the gender of principals and their attitude relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, $r = -.147, N = 105, p = .134$; two tails was not statistically significant.

Table 15

Regression Coefficients

Predictor Variable	R	R ²	Adj. F	F	B	SE B	β	t	
			R ²						
Average class size for all students students in school	.262	.069	.021	1.46	-.161	.228	-.079	.481	
Approximate number of all students					.099	.104	.108	.345	
Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in the school					.111	.064	.175	.085	
Approximate number of students with IEPs that are included in regular education					-.105	.092	-.115	.258	
Age					.196	.155	.125	.211	

Note. Model was found not to be statistically significant in any demographic area.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to present data related to current attitudes of principals in one Grand Division of a Southeastern state relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Further, this study examined the effect of various demographic variables and the training and experience of principals on the placement of students with disabilities through the use of correlational analyses. The results indicate that many principals were not certified in special education and had 11-15 years of experience as a principal. The results of the study also indicate that principals had favorable attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities and perceived students with speech or language impairments, other health impairments, and specific learning disabilities should be placed in the most inclusive educational environments.

Based on the results of this study, there was a significant positive relationship between the training and experience of principals and their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. As the training and experience of principals increased, there was a corresponding increase in their positive attitudes. There was also a significant relationship between the attitudes of principals and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. As principals' attitudes increased, there was a corresponding increase in their attitude relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

In conclusion, this chapter provided the data analyses, findings, and addressed the six research questions posed by the researcher. Chapter 5 will summarize the findings and present conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Special education has evolved over the years and there has been an increase of students with disabilities being educated alongside their grade age peers in the general education classroom (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; McLaughlin, 2009; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). This shift will challenge principals and require them to spend additional time involved in special education related activities (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Currently, the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA) mandates students be provided the necessary supports and services required for them to access the general education setting and be educated alongside their non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment. However, many students with disabilities are still not afforded the opportunity to actively participate with their grade age peers to the maximum extent appropriate (Philpott, Furey, & Penney, 2010).

During the past two decades, there have been studies conducted to examine the relationship between attitudes and the delivery of service options for students with disabilities (Farris, 2011; Galano, 2012; Lindsey, 2009; Ramirez, 2006). Ultimately, principals must continue to widen their knowledge base in reference to meeting the needs of diverse learners (McLaughlin, 2009). This research was conducted to add to the body of literature that addresses principals' attitudes toward inclusion. The results from the study may assist school districts and universities as they continue to grapple with inclusive practices and provide insight surrounding professional development training,

special education coursework, pre-service training, and practicum experience opportunities for principals to effectively manage special education programming.

This chapter restates the specific purpose of the study, reviews the methodology used in the study, summarizes the findings, and presents conclusions and recommendations. The researcher also includes some final thoughts at the end of the chapter as well.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes of principals relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Additionally, the study sought to determine the relationship, if any, between demographic variables associated with principals and their attitude regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities. Researchers have concluded that principals' attitudes are critical to improving the inclusive academic environment and outcomes for students with disabilities (Avissar, Reiter, & Leyser, 2003; Horrocks, White, & Roberts, 2008; Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010). Ultimately, it is imperative that school leaders identify and require a standard that reflects the belief that all children can learn and are entitled to be educated with their grade level peers in a least restrictive environment (Fullan, 2003b).

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the training and experience of principals relative to educating students with disabilities?
2. What are the attitudes of principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting?

3. What are the attitudes of principals regarding the most appropriate placement of students with disabilities?
4. What is the relationship, if any, between the training and experience of principals and their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting?
5. What is the relationship, if any, between the attitudes of principals and the most appropriate placement for students?
6. What is the relationship, if any, between the demographic variables associated with principals and their attitudes relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities?

Review of the Methodology

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the University of Memphis Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects and school districts throughout one grand division of a southeastern state (see Appendix B). The population for this study consisted of 116 principals. A total of 404 principals had the opportunity to participate. The researcher emailed a survey via an anonymous link using Qualtrics. All principals completing the questionnaire were selected to participate in the study except for two assistant principals. The return rate was 26%.

A quantitative research design was used to measure the attitudes of principals relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Data was collected using a survey instrument initially developed by Praisner (2000) entitled the Principal and Inclusion Survey (PIS). The PIS was modified to include assistant principals and the 13 disability categories that were revised in IDEA (2004).

The study was correlational, as it sought to explore the relationship between: a) the training and experience of principals and their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, b) the attitudes of school principals towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, and c) the relationship, if any between demographic variables associated with principals and their attitudes relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

Discussion of the Findings

The study provided evidence in regards to the training and experience of principals and their attitudes relative to placing students with disabilities in the general education setting. The findings are supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 of this study. The relationship to the literature, conclusions, recommendations, and the researcher's assumptions are presented in this section of the paper.

The Training and Experience of Principals

The training and experience reported by the principals involved full-time regular education teaching experience, full-time special education experience, experience as a principal, number of special education credits in formal training, in-service training in inclusive practices, personal experience with individuals with disabilities, and experiences with students within various disability categories. Principals' training and experience were limited relative to special education and inclusive practices. Regarding special education credits in formal training, 19% of the principals reported having no special education credits. While 49.5% of the principals reported having some training in special education, this only encompassed one to nine credits. In addition, 74.3% of the

principals reported having no special education teaching experience, only 43.8% of the principals reported having 25 or more in-service training hours in inclusive practices, and 84% of the principals were not certified to teach special education.

Regarding experience with students and individuals with disabilities, 28% of the principals reported that they did not have a personal experience with an individual with a disability outside of the school setting. In terms of experience with students among the different disability categories, principals reported negative experiences or having no experience with students in the following categories: (a) traumatic brain injuries, (b) deaf-blindness, and (c) emotional disturbance.

These findings are consistent with research conducted by Burdette (2010), which indicate principals lack knowledge of special education and need professional development opportunities through in-service and pre-service in the following areas: (a) internship, (b) mentoring, (c) leadership academies, and (d) strategies that improve efforts to support diverse student populations including those with disabilities. Adding further support to the findings, Petzko (2008) found that principals struggle with leading special education programs because they lack the necessary training required. As a result, gaps exist between special education knowledge and skills required to direct special education programs in schools (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). Additionally, Lasky and Karge (2006) completed an examination of 205 principals and found that 87% of the principals surveyed believed that formal special education training was moderately to very important. The study also revealed that many school districts provide professional development opportunities, however the training is very limited and does not promote

team building and collaborative practices which are key components of inclusion (Lasky & Karge, 2006).

The Attitudes of Principals toward Inclusion

The analysis of the data revealed that the attitudes of principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting were predicated on the disability. Principals endorsed the following items: 1) no discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with severe/profound disabilities; 2) students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with severe/profound disabilities; 3) students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school; and 4) schools with both students with severe and profound disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experience of students with severe and profound disabilities.

Further, their attitudes toward placing students with severe and profound disabilities in the general education setting indicated that it should be policy and/or law that students with severe and profound disabilities are integrated into regular educational programs and activities. Also, the data revealed that principals believed students with severe and profound disabilities should be placed in special education classes/schools specifically designed for them.

The mean total for attitudes toward inclusion was 3.68 out of 5 with a standard deviation of .610. This finding concurs with the results of a study conducted by Galano (2012), which found that over 96% of elementary principals in the study reported a moderate to strong positive attitude toward inclusion. In addition, Vazquez (2010)

conducted a study among 175 school principals in Florida. The results also revealed a positive attitude toward inclusion with a mean score of 41.95 out of 50.

In contrast to the findings of this study, Ball and Green (2014) found that school leaders' overall attitudes were slightly negative. The findings correlate with the study conducted by Praisner (2000), which concluded that a majority of school principals had either negative or conflicting attitudes toward inclusion. Further, Praisner (2000) contends principals agree with the idea of inclusion when it is not mandated or regulated. However, concerns arise with attitudes when principals are required to comply as opposed to participating on their own. According to Praisner (2000), this accounted for the number of attitude scores in the uncertain range in her study.

The Attitudes of Principals regarding the Most Appropriate Placement for Students with Disabilities

The mean total for attitudes of principals regarding the most appropriate placement was 4.0 out of 5.0 with a standard deviation of 1.074. Based on the data, principals for the most part were supportive of inclusive placements for students with disabilities. Yet those decisions were based on the type and perceived severity of the disability. Further, results indicated principals perceived that students with speech or language impairments, other health impairments, and specific learning disabilities should be placed in the most inclusive educational environments, whereas students with deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, and multiple disabilities should be placed in the least restrictive educational environments.

These findings are consistent with research conducted by Sanks (2009), which indicated principals believe students with behavioral disabilities and those with severe

disabilities should not be included in the general classroom setting. Further, Hsu (2010) found that perceptions of the appropriate placement differed as it relates to the severity of the disability. Respondents also indicated a more restrictive or segregated setting is warranted for students with moderate to severe disabilities. In a more recent study regarding the attitudes of school leaders, Ball and Green (2014) indicated differences in school leader attitudes toward placement were based on the various disability categories. Subsequently, school leaders believed students with emotional disturbance, deaf-blindness, intellectual disabilities, and multiple disabilities should be placed in the least inclusive educational environments (Ball & Green, 2014).

The Relationship between the Training and Experience of Principals and their Attitudes toward Inclusion

The analysis of the data in this study revealed a weak positive relationship exists between the training and experience of principals and their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. This correlation suggests as training and experience increased, there was also a corresponding increase in their positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. Based on the data, the more training and experience, the more positive the attitudes of principals.

Supporting this finding, Praisner (2000) found that principals who had positive experiences with students with disabilities and prior experience with special education concepts had more positive attitudes toward inclusion. Adding further support, principals struggle with leading special education programs because they lack the necessary training required (Petzko, 2008). As a result, a gap exists between special education knowledge and skills required to direct special education programs in schools (Lashley & Boscardin,

2003). Christensen et al. (2013) found that principals need better training in matters related to special education. For example, 88.9% of the principals in the study reported that there was a deficiency as it relates to knowledge concerning how to modify and adapt the general curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners.

In contrast, Ball and Green (2014) found that a significant negative relationship exists between training and experience and principals' attitudes toward inclusion. The more training and experience principals acquire, the more negative their attitudes were towards inclusion. Avissar (2007) found that prior experience, tenure, and seniority negatively impacted principals' willingness to implement inclusive practices. Further, principals with more experience and time at work were less likely to support inclusion (Avissar, 2007).

The Relationship between the Attitudes of Principals and the Most Appropriate Placement for Students with Disabilities

A moderate positive relationship exists between principal attitudes and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. This correlation suggests that the attitudes of principals were directly related to their attitude relative to the most appropriate placement. Based on the data, as principals' attitudes increased, there was a corresponding increase in their attitude toward the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

Supporting this finding, Praisner (2003) found a significant positive correlation between principals' attitudes and inclusiveness. The results indicate that principals who have a positive attitude towards inclusion are more prone to place students with disabilities in more inclusive learning environments. Adding further support, Hesselbert

(2005) found a significant correlation between the attitudes of principals and their placement decisions. Based on the data, as principals' attitudes increased, there was a corresponding increase in their perception of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities (Hesselbert, 2005). Kuyini and Desai (2007) concluded that principals with more background knowledge regarding inclusion tended to provide additional support for inclusion in their schools. In a more recent study examining educators' attitudes toward inclusion, Neal and Cuevas (2016) found a statistically significant positive correlation between educators' attitudes toward inclusion and their view of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities ($p = .005$, $r = .439$).

In contrast, Ball and Green (2014) found that there was no significant relationship between attitudes of principals and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. The findings also indicate that the attitudes of principals are not directly related to their attitudes relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities (Ball & Green, 2014). However, principals are required by federal law to comply and meet the unique needs of the students they are responsible for on a daily basis.

The Relationship between the Demographic Variables Associated with Principals and their Attitude Relative to the Most Appropriate Placement for Students with Disabilities

With regards to principals and their attitude of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities, none of the six variables were associated with principals and their attitude. This finding suggests that demographic variables associated with principals

are not directly related to their attitude toward the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

Findings from the research conducted by Chandler (2015), add support to the finding of this study. According to Chandler (2015), age and gender demographic variables were not found to be statistically significant. This indicated no relationship exists between the variables and attitudes toward inclusion. Similarly, Horrocks et al. (2008) and Praisner (2003), found that gender was not a significant predictor of attitudes toward inclusion. Additionally, Sharma and Chow (2008) found that age was also not a significant predictor.

This conflicts with the research conducted by Ball and Green (2014), which found the approximate number of students with IEPs that were included in regular education classrooms for at least 75% of their school day was significantly related to the attitudes of principals relative to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. This finding indicates that the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities can be predicted by the approximate number of students with IEPs that are included in regular education classrooms for at least 75% of their school day (Ball & Green, 2014). Correspondingly, Chandler (2015) found a significant relationship between school enrollment and their attitudes toward inclusion. This finding suggests that in schools with smaller enrollment, principals could foster relationships with teachers, staff, parents, and students to increase support of inclusion.

Discussion of the Results

Results of this study revealed the following: 1) principals are limited in their training and experience relative to both special education and inclusive practices; 2) the

attitudes of principals are positive; 3) principals support inclusive placements for students with disabilities, however, there are marked differences based on their perception of each disability category; 4) the more training and experience principals have, the more positive their attitudes are; 5) the attitudes of principals are directly related to their attitudes toward the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities; and 6) the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities cannot be predicted based on demographic variables.

Finding 1. Findings from this research support the literature surrounding the importance of training and experience of principals relative to special education and inclusive practices (Galano, 2012; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Ramirez, 2006). In this study, the training and experience of principals was limited. Of the 105 principals participating, 27 reported having full-time special education teaching experience and only 17 reported having certification in special education. Additionally, 49.5% of the participants reported having only one to nine special education credits in formal training with regards to inclusive practices.

Lasky and Karge (2006) completed an examination of 205 principals of which 87% believed that formal special education training was moderately to very important. The following year Garrison-Wade, Sobel, and Fulmer (2007) conducted a similar study. Forty percent of the participants lacked knowledge of special education law, 28% lacked confidence in their abilities to mentor and support, and 28% lacked the ability to manage resources (i.e. developing schedules, planning, and demanding paperwork). Most recently, Pazey and Cole (2013) revealed that special education has been overlooked in leadership preparation programs. This oversight has occurred even though there is an

emphasis on the importance of preparing school leaders to meet the needs of every student through standards that guide most leadership preparation programs (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

Finding 2. The attitudes of principals in this study were positive statistically, however, principals reported that they were not in support of discretionary financial resources being allocated for the integration of students with disabilities, even those with severe and profound disabilities. They also felt that students with severe and profound disabilities were too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school. Conversely, they reported that students without disabilities could profit from contact with students with severe and profound disabilities. Further, they indicated schools with both students with severe and profound disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experience of students with severe and profound disabilities.

Finding 3. Principals are supportive of inclusive placement for students with disabilities. However, decisions principals make are often based on the severity or lack of severity students display prior to being placed or an inadvertent label the student may be assigned. Lindsey (2009) reported that mental retardation, multiple disabilities, autism, emotional disturbance and traumatic brain injury were all disability categories that required a more restrictive educational placement. The data in this study speaks to the decisions principals make with regard to certain disability types. For instance, principals perceived that students with speech or language impairments, other health impairments, and specific learning disabilities should be placed in the most inclusive environment. This finding may indicate principals need more specific training or professional development around inclusive practices.

Finding 4. A weak positive relationship exists between the training and experience of principals and their attitudes toward inclusion based on an analysis of the data. This correlation suggests the more training provided to principals the more positive their attitudes are towards inclusion.

Finding 5. An analysis of the data revealed that a moderate positive relationship exists between the attitudes of principals and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities in the general education setting. Ramirez (2006) concluded that principals tend to favor the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. This correlation suggests that the attitudes of principals are directly related to their attitude towards the most appropriate placement.

Finding 6. The demographic variables examined in this study include the following: 1) the approximate number of all students in the school, 2) the average class size for all students, 3) the approximate percentage of IEPs in the school, 4) the approximate number of IEPs in regular education, 5) age, and 6) gender. Based on the results from the study, the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities cannot be predicted by any of the demographic variables listed above. This finding implies that principals formulate their decisions in regards to placement based on other factors. However, this should not negatively impact the decisions principals make in the interest of students with disabilities surrounding placement in the most inclusive setting.

Implications for Practice

This research study's findings have several implications of significance as it relates to principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Additionally, it contributes to the literature on attitudes

principals possess and how those attitudes impact placement decisions for students with disabilities. Further, training and experience were examined in relation to placement decisions principals make regarding students with disabilities.

The training and experience of principals was limited. Principal preparation programs could provide support in this area; however, special education has been overlooked in educational leadership programs (Pazey & Cole, 2013). Even so, overall attitudes toward inclusion were positive and this study supported those findings as well. Yet, principals were reluctant to use discretionary financial resources for inclusion and felt lower incident disability types should be placed in more restrictive environments.

Principals were supportive of inclusive placements for students with mild and moderate disabilities. However, principals were more guarded when decisions involved students with mental retardation, multiple disabilities, emotional disabilities, and traumatic brain injury (Lindsey, 2009). More training regarding the inclusion of all disability types is warranted.

With regard to attitudes and placement, principals' attitudes impact the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. This study aligns with previous research (Galano, 2012; Ramirez, 2006) supporting the finding. The most appropriate placement is directly affected by principals' attitudes. Lastly, demographic variables were not considered a predictor of the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. Previous studies have indicated that gender was not a predictor with regards to placement (Chandler, 2015; Praisner, 2003). Horrocks et al. (2008) found that demographic variables had no impact on placement decisions. This implies principals make decisions without respect to demographic variables. More support may be needed

around the decision making process as it relates to placement. Universities might add classes in special education leadership, collaboration, and inclusive practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

The data from this study yielded some interesting findings that may lead to additional analysis and may also be helpful when addressing principals' attitudes toward inclusion and principals' training and experience relative to inclusion. This study did not include assistant principals, however, they play a pivotal role in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Assistant principals are a part of the administrative team and carry out many of the same functions as principals as it relates to inclusive practices. Additional attention should be spent examining assistant principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. Many assistants aspire to lead their own schools and with the proper training and experience they can provide greater support for students with disabilities whether they lead their own schools or stay in their current role.

Secondly, a comparison study should be conducted between elementary and secondary principals and their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Emphasis should be placed on students transitioning from elementary to secondary settings and what can be done to assist students with disabilities as they transition. Further, a qualitative study where the researcher conducts a focus group and asks principals questions surrounding their attitudes, training and experience, and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities.

Lastly, the attitudes of aspiring principals enrolled in principal preparation programs should be examined. Many principals lack the training and experience to

effectively run an inclusive program. Information gathered from the study can assist with restructuring specific classes to incorporate inclusive leadership practices and supports around co-teaching

Conclusions

Previous research studies suggest a relationship exists between principal training and experience and their attitudes. However, the results in this study support the fact that principals are limited in their training and experience relative to both special education and inclusive practices. Further, principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities were positive.

Although principals displayed positive attitudes, the most inclusive placement were driven by the disability categories related to students. Additionally, a relationship exists between principal training and experience and their attitudes. There also exists a relationship between principal attitudes and the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities. Lastly, the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities cannot be predicted based on demographic variables. Ultimately, further research surrounding training and professional development opportunities for principals relative to inclusion and their attitudes regarding the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities should be considered. Universities might add classes in special education leadership, collaboration, and inclusive practices.

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APPENDIX A

Principals and Inclusion Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine the opinions of elementary and secondary principals toward the inclusion movement and to gather information about the types of training and experience that principals have. There are no right or wrong answers so please address the questions to the best of your knowledge and provide us with what **you believe**.

Please put a check by your current position. _____Principal _____Assistant

Principal

Please put a check by your school district type. _____Rural _____Suburban _____

Urban

SECTION I- Demographic Information

The following information will be only be used to describe the population being studied.

1. Approximate number of all students in your building:

- 0-250 251-500 501-750 751-1000 1000 or more

2. Average class size for all students:

- 0-9 10-19 20-29 30-39 40 or more

3. Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building: *(Do not include gifted)*

- 0-5% 6-10% 11-15% 16-20% 21% or more

4. Approximate number of students with IEPs in your building that are included in regular education

classrooms for at least 75% of their school day: *(Do not include gifted)*

- 0-20% 21-40% 41-60% 61-80% 81-100%

SECTION II- Training and Experience

1. Your age:

- 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60
- 61 or more

2. Gender: Male Female
3. Years of full-time regular education teaching experience:
 0 1-6 7-12 13-18 19 or more
4. Years of full-time special education teaching experience:
 0 1-6 7-12 13-18 19 or more
5. Years as a principal **and/or** assistant principal:
 0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21 or more
6. Approximate number of special education **credits** in your formal training:
 0 1-9 10-15 16-21 22 or more
7. Approximate number of in-service training **hours** in inclusive practices:
 0 1-8 9-16 17-24 25 or more
8. Mark the areas below that were included in your formal training such as courses, workshops, and/or significant portions of courses (**10% of content or more**).

Characteristics of students with disabilities
Behavior management class for working with students with disabilities
Academic programming for students with disabilities
Special education law
Crisis intervention
Life skills training for students with disabilities
Teambuilding
Interagency cooperation
Family intervention training
Supporting and training teachers to handle inclusion
Change process
Eliciting parent and community support for inclusion
Fostering teacher collaboration
Field based experiences with actual inclusion activities

9. Are you certified in special education? No Yes
10. Does your school have a specific plan to deal with crisis involving students with special needs? No Yes
11. Do you have personal experience with (an) individual(s) with a disability outside the school setting, i.e. family member, friend, etc.? No Yes

If yes, please indicate relationship to you.

- Self Immediate family member Extended family member
 Friend Neighbor Other:

12. Does your school district’s mission statement include a **vision** for the inclusion of students with disabilities? No Yes

13. In general, what has your experience been with the following types of students in the school setting? Mark one level of experience for each disability category.

Disability Type	Negative Experience	Somewhat Negative Experience	No Experience	Somewhat Positive Experience	Positive Experience
Autism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deaf-Blindness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deafness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotional Disturbance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hearing Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intellectual Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multiple Disabilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Orthopedic Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Health Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific Learning Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speech or Language Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Traumatic Brain Injury	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visual Impairment (including blindness)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION III- Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Students with Special Needs

Please mark your response to each item using the following scale:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with severe/profound disabilities in a school setting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Schools with both students with severe and profound disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with severe/profound disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. A good regular educator can do a lot to help a student with a severe/profound disability.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. In general, students with severe/profound disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with severe/profound disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Regular education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with severe/profound disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. It is unfair to ask/expect regular teachers to accept students with severe/profound disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with severe/profound disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. It should be policy and/or law that students with severe/profound disabilities are integrated into regular educational programs and activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION IV- Most Appropriate Placements for Students with Disabilities

Although individual characteristics would need to be considered, please mark the placement that, in general, **you believe** is most appropriate for students with the following disabilities:

Autism

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Deaf-Blindness

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Deafness

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Emotional Disturbance

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Hearing Impairment

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day

Orthopedic Impairment

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Other Health Impairment

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Specific Learning Disability

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Speech Language Impairment

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Traumatic Brain Injury

- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day

- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support
- Intellectual Disabilities**
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support
- Multiple Disabilities**
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support
- Visual Impairment Including Blindness**
- Special education services outside regular school
- Special class for most or all of the school day
- Part-time special education class
- Regular classroom instruction and resource room
- Regular classroom instruction for most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Thank you for taking the time to answer all of the questions on this survey. I appreciate your assistance with this study!

APPENDIX B
Approved Institutional Review

Mail - kwhite1@memphis.edu

<https://outlook.office.com/owa/?realm=memphis.edu&path=/mail/search>

PRO-FY2018-625 - Initial: Approval - Exempt

irb@memphis.edu

Fri 6/8/2018 1:44 PM

To: Kendale White (kwhite1) <kwhite1@memphis.edu>; Reginald Leon Green (rlgreen1) <rlgreen1@memphis.edu>;



Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

June 8, 2018

PI Name: Kendale White
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Reginald Green
Submission Type: Initial
Title: Principals Attitudes Toward the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the General Education Classroom
IRB ID : #PRO-FY2018-625
Exempt Approval: June 8, 2018

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished or terminated, a completion form must be submitted.
2. No change may be made in the approved protocol without prior board approval.
3. Exempt approval are considered to have no expiration date and no further review is necessary unless the protocol needs modification.

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.

APPENDIX C

Superintendents Permission Letter

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Kendale M. White and I am writing to invite your principals to participate in a study examining their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. I am currently a middle school assistant principal and a doctoral student at the University of Memphis in the Department of Educational Leadership. With your permission, I would like to invite your principals to complete the survey for school leaders. They along with other principals throughout the grand division of West Tennessee are being invited to complete the survey. After receiving consent, I will email you a cover letter to forward to your principals detailing the research and also includes the survey link.

In the survey, principals will have the opportunity to provide feedback in regards to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities and how those students receive instructional support. The results from the survey will be kept completely confidential. The principals will not receive compensation, however, survey results will be used to provide you, participants and individual school districts with an additional knowledge base for understanding how principals' attitudes and perceptions impact placement decisions for students with disabilities and the instructional support they receive as a result. Further, the need for training in regards to inclusive practices will be explored as well. The survey should take about 10-15 minutes and their participation is completely voluntary. All participants must be 18 years old or older.

If you have additional questions or concerns about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can email me at kwhite1@memphis.edu or give me a call at 901-496-0212.

I hope you will allow your principals to participate in this important study.

Sincerely,

Kendale M. White
Assistant Principal/Doctoral Student

APPENDIX D

Principal Cover Letter

Dear Principal,

My name is Kendale M. White and I am writing to invite you to participate in a study examining principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. I am currently a middle school assistant principal and a doctoral student at the University of Memphis in the Department of Educational Leadership. You and other principals throughout the grand division of West Tennessee are being invited to complete the survey for school leaders.

In the survey, you will have the opportunity to provide feedback in regards to the most appropriate placement for students with disabilities and how those students receive instructional support. The results from the survey will be kept completely confidential. You will not receive compensation, however, survey results will be used to provide participants and individual school districts with an additional knowledge base for understanding how principals' attitudes and perceptions impact placement decisions for students with disabilities and the instructional support they receive as a result. Further, the need for training in regards to inclusive practices will be explored as well. The survey should take about 10-15 minutes and your participation is completely voluntary. All participants must be 18 years old or older.

If you have additional questions or concerns about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can email me at kwhite1@memphis.edu or give me a call at 901-496-0212.

I hope you will participate in this important study by completing the survey. The link is as follows: https://memphis.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_e2ngfhvf5fmMRkV

Sincerely,

Kendale M. White
Assistant Principal/Doctoral Student