

INCLUSIONARY PRACTICES: IMPACT OF ADMINISTRATORS' BELIEFS ON
PLACEMENT DECISIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

School leaders are charged with responding to the challenges presented by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the education of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The idea of least restrictive environment moves schools from educating students with disabilities in special education to regular education classrooms, from special education schools to neighborhood schools. Providing inclusive settings poses many obstacles and challenges to school based administrators and in their capacity school leaders can either alleviate or generate barriers for the process; they can inhibit or inspire school personnel to accept the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Furthermore, their attitudes are critical in the design and implementation of programs and practices in their schools. Principals' attitudes can either promote or discourage the inclusion practices in their schools. The purpose of this study was to examine the factors related to school based administrators' attitudes toward inclusive education and the relationship of these attitudes on the placement of students with disabilities.

The Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) developed by Praisner (2000) was used to collect data from 175 school based principals in a large urban district in the southeastern part of the United States. The results of the study indicate a relationship does exist between principal's attitude toward inclusion and decisions pertaining to student placement. The study also found that those principals with positive experiences with students with disabilities also demonstrated beliefs of serving students with disabilities in less restrictive settings than those principals with negative experiences with students with disabilities.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are requiring school districts and school officials to reevaluate how students with disabilities are being served in schools (Kluth, Villa, & Thousand, 2002). NCLB increased the demand on schools to demonstrate student achievement for all students and increased accountability for school leaders (Darling – Hammond, 2002). IDEA requires that children with disabilities be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Hardin & Hardin, 2002). The idea of LRE moves schools from educating students with disabilities in special education to regular education classrooms, from special education schools to neighborhood schools (Praisner, 2000). This new vision for special education is generally referred to as inclusion. Inclusion has become a vital piece of the reform initiative to improve the delivery of services to students with disabilities by focusing on the placement of these students in the general education setting. Advocates of inclusion believe that all children should actively participate in their neighborhood schools and communities, but for this to happen, school environments need to be restructured to accommodate the diverse needs of all students (Frattura & Capper, 2006). In order for schools to become more successful in including students with disabilities, attitudinal, organizational, and instructional changes must take place (Vernon-Dotson, 2008). Research suggests that the principal’s role is pivotal in the special education process; however, few school leaders are well prepared for this responsibility (Dettmer, Thurston, & Duck 2005). Administrators must set standards and guidelines for teachers and hold them accountable for the standards in order for children with disabilities to have an equal opportunity for an appropriate education (McGraw, 1998). In schools where administrators’ support is strong, the inclusion program is very successful (Chalmers & Faliede,

1996). Therefore, the success of an inclusion program relies on the principal demonstrating behaviors that send a clear message that children with disabilities can be successful in the general education classroom (Praisner, 2003).

Problem Statement

School leaders are charged with responding to the challenges presented by IDEA and the education of students with disabilities in the LRE. Building administrators have had to become familiar with special education laws and policies in order to effectively make decisions related to both regular and special education programs. Furthermore, administrators have had to assume various roles and responsibilities in order to establish and maintain a successful inclusion environment (Poetter, T. S., et. al., 2001). Leaders who have guided or provoked their organizations to change have developed a shared vision with their co-workers and communicated that vision through their actions (Haberman, 1999). Successful inclusion programs are led by administrators that understand the necessary supports required to build an environment that believes in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Furthermore, their attitudes are critical in the design and implementation of programs and practices in their schools. Principals' attitudes can either promote or discourage the inclusion practices in their schools (Praisner, 2000). Successful inclusion programs have school personnel who are receptive to the principles and demands associated with inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000). As schools move towards more inclusive practices more students with disabilities will be educated in the general education classroom. It is imperative that building administrators identify and convey a vision which reflects the belief that all children can learn

and have a right to be educated with their peers in age appropriate general education classrooms (Fullan, 2003).

Background

Since the beginning of time educators have struggled how to best serve students with disabilities. In 1975 Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) later renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, forever changing how students with disabilities are educated. Prior to the passage of this landmark legislation, few students with disabilities were educated alongside their non-disabled peers. Services for students with disabilities were provided in separate classrooms or in special and private schools. IDEA increased government's role in education and increased awareness of the services and programs related to the education of students with disabilities (Mackay & Burgess, 1997). This legislation guaranteed that all children with disabilities have a right to a free, appropriate public education and to the maximum extent appropriate in the LRE unless the nature or severity of the disability cannot be served satisfactorily (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Badley, 2001). The mandate for LRE created a movement towards inclusion. The philosophy in inclusive schools encourages the collaboration of general education and special education teachers to create a framework able to meet the needs of all students. This movement toward inclusion has created many challenges for educators.

IDEA and its implications for the education of all students pose some unique challenges for school building administrators. Administrators became responsible for decisions related to the identification, placement and instruction of students with disabilities. Patterson, Marshall & Bowling (2000) found that school administrators faced challenges in the area of exceptional

education due to the increased accountability, ambiguous definition of LRE and inclusion, the need for collaboration among regular and special education teachers and balancing the challenges rooted in special education with other administrative challenges including budgetary and facility issues. In addition, principals were faced with conflicts from various groups as to the value of inclusive education. Although IDEA mandates educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, many disagree with the practice (Smith, 2000). Some argue that inclusion consumes too much time, reduces time on tasks for all students, and standards must be lowered to accommodate students with disabilities (Hehir, 2003). School based leaders are expected to take on leadership roles in the area of special education and not only respond to the challenges and concerns associated with educating students with disabilities but also provide the needed support for successful inclusion to staff members and community members.

The Principal's Role in Inclusion

In the past, the management of special education policies and programs has been the responsibility of district level administrators. Responsibility for managing the programs and supports necessary for successful inclusion has shifted to the school principal (Patterson & Bowling, 2000). The success of these programs is largely dependent on the school administrator (Praisner, 2000). School administrators are expected to assume leadership in the area of special education despite minimal training and experience (Praisner, 2000). In order to be perceived as an effective leader and to deal with the many challenges imposed by IDEA, school based administrators must possess knowledge of special education law, programming, and supports needed for successfully educating and including students with disabilities in the general education setting (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004). Furthermore, coping with the legal requirements,

parental demands, and ethical considerations of the inclusion effort has become a part of many administrators' job description. As instructional leaders and agents of change, principals must possess the knowledge and skills in effective instruction, assessment, and discipline in order to provide support and feedback to teachers, foster collaborative dialogue, and have a clear vision that results in all stakeholders' commitment to the success of the school (Villa, Thousand, Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

As inclusion becomes more popular, the challenges faced by school principals increase and their involvement become critical to the success of the implementation. Principals play a vital role in creating an educational climate that supports and values inclusion because the attitudes of school personnel reflect that of the school principal (Dyal & Flynt, 1996). The degrees to which administrators support innovative programs and practices are often determined by their attitudes and values (Praisner, 2003). Research supports school principals' attitudes toward the education of children with disabilities influences the success of inclusive programs. Bateman & Bateman (2001) found the behaviors of school leaders significantly impacted the implementation of inclusion at their schools. Brendenson, (1996) concluded that administrators' beliefs and values are directly linked to their performance and decision-making. As the leader of the school, the principal controls human and natural resources, the flow of communication, and what is implemented in schools (Nanus, 1992). Research has suggested that principals' attitudes are a significant factor in the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes. Praisner, (2000) found elementary principals who possessed more positive attitudes toward inclusion are more likely to place students in a least restrictive environment. Domencic (2001), found principals' attitudes toward including students with physical and academic disabilities were related to levels of inclusive placement. Although there has been some research regarding

the importance of principals' attitudes toward inclusion, very little has been done to identify the influences that develop attitudes toward inclusion or determine the impact principals' attitudes have on placement perceptions.

The educating of students with disabilities in the general education classroom has transformed the role of the school principal and caused some educational leaders to question their ability to effectively serve students with disabilities (Bruskewitz, 1998). Although federal and local legislation and mandates influence many of the principal's decisions related to the education of children with disabilities and the programs that serve them, some researchers agree that the leadership style a principal exhibits can have greater influences on the academic and social climate of the school. Krajewski & Krajewski (2000) suggested the success or failure of an inclusion program relies greatly on the school principal. The researchers argued that a principal must value and believe in the importance of inclusion and help teachers transform this vision of inclusion into tangible programs and services. One such leadership style was developed by Robert Burns. Burns bases his theory of transformational leadership on Kohlberg's stages of moral development and Weber's theory of leadership and authority. Transformational leadership is a leadership style where one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality (Burns, 1978).

Transformational leaders raise the bar by appealing to higher ideals and values of followers. In doing so, they may model the values themselves and use charismatic methods to attract people to the values and to the leader. Burns believed that an appeal to social values encourages people to work collaboratively towards common goals. Leaders who have transformed or provoked their organizations to change began with developing a shared vision with their co-workers, and valued the organization's personnel (Haberman, 1999). Principals who genuinely believe that the

school's mission is achieving academic success for all communicate this value to their internal and external audiences. They collaborate with others to develop effective learning communities. They ensure that staff members have the support and resources needed to perform their jobs well (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Fullan (2003) stressed the importance of administrators identifying and articulating a vision that reflects the beliefs that all children can learn and have a right to be educated with their peers.

Rationale

Sailor and Roger (2005) wrote of the disconnect that exists between the purpose of special education and its practice. Over the years this practice has evolved into a very sophisticated educational structure more often separate from the general education system. It is the principal's role and responsibility to ensure these structures come together. Bateman and Bateman (2001) agree inclusion necessitates collaboration and shared responsibility among regular and special educators. An abundance of research exists regarding the principal's role regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. Currently little research exists on current attitudes of school based administrators regarding inclusion, the indicators that predict those attitudes, and the basis of those attitudes. Center, Ward, Parmenter, and Nash (1985) studied principal attitude toward mainstreaming and found the importance of principal's attitude to the successful implementation of mainstreaming students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Praisner's (2000) investigation of the relationship between principals' characteristics, training, experience, school characteristics and their attitudes toward inclusion found attitudes toward inclusion are extremely important. Praisner concluded that it is the

principal and his or her perception of students with disabilities that will influence the school's inclusion efforts.

“A principal's positive attitude is a critical factor in creating a climate of acceptance for all students and programs for his or her school” (Praisner, 2000, p.20).

Livingston, Read, and Good (2001) concluded that principals are most effective in implementing special education initiatives. Their study of inclusion in rural Georgia schools found that principals with personal experiences with students with disabilities are more likely to consider inclusion. Praisner (2000) also concluded that the attitudes of elementary principals regarding inclusion impact the decisions they made with regards to inclusive settings.

The movement toward inclusion has placed new demands on school leaders as they must not only be knowledgeable about programs and services for students with disabilities but also provide support to their teachers. Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) discuss two studies by Cline (1981) and Davis (1980) that examined principals' attitudes toward mainstreaming. The researchers concluded for mainstreaming to be successful principals need to have an understanding of children with disabilities and expectations of success in mainstreaming the students. Cline (1981) suggested that principal training and in-service on students with disabilities would enhance mainstreaming initiatives. Praisner (2003) stressed the need for principal preparation programs to address inclusion as part of the required training for principals. Even though the national trend toward more inclusive practices has resulted in a call for major changes in teacher education programs, few states require special education competence, knowledge, or coursework for administrators (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000).

The limited studies in the literature that address principals' attitudes and beliefs toward inclusion indicate that principals' attitude greatly impact inclusion and that principals lack the

formal training and knowledge in special education needed to provide training and support to teachers. Praisner's study (2000) concluded attitudes toward inclusion are extremely important and should be considered when hiring and evaluating school principals. Both the increase in the number of students with disabilities being included in regular education classrooms and the increase in the number of out-of-field teachers being hired to teach in public schools require principals to lead staff in successfully implementing best practices for educating students with disabilities. McLaughlin (1991) believed that if principals had the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for implementation of inclusion, change would occur in their attitudes toward educating students with disabilities. If inclusion is to be implemented in schools, arming principals with the skills and knowledge necessary to in act such change is crucial (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Principals play an instrumental role in implementing inclusion programs; therefore it is important to study how principals' attitudes toward inclusion guide their decisions.

Purpose of the Study

School administrators play a crucial role in the academic success of all students. Successful inclusive schools operate within a structure where administrators and teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusion and are supportive and committed to the education of students with disabilities (Praisner, 2003). The purpose of this study was to examine the factors related to school based administrators' attitudes toward inclusive education and the relationship between these attitudes and the placement of students with disabilities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Is there a correlation between principal's attitude towards inclusive education and student placement decisions?
2. Is there relationship between school based principals' hypothetical placement decisions and principal's actual placement decisions at their school site?
3. Are school principals' attitudes toward inclusive education related to personal demographics, professional experiences and formal training?

Significance of the Study

Mandates directing that all students with disabilities be educated in LRE are not fully implemented. Schools have continued to struggle to meet both the intent and the spirit of federal laws pertaining to the education of students with disabilities (Dipaolo and Walther-Thomas, 2003). As a result of IDEA, inclusion has emerged as one of the most controversial reform movements in education. The ambiguity of the law as it relates to inclusion has caused many interpretations of the practice leaving the decision of how students with disabilities will be served to the local agency. Providing inclusive settings poses many obstacles and challenges to school based administrators and in their capacity school leaders can either alleviate or generate barriers for the process; they can inhibit or inspire school personnel to accept the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Research in the field of inclusion has identified administrative support for teachers facing the challenges of educating students with disabilities as a crucial support necessary for the successful implementation of inclusion programs (Krajewski & Krajewski, 2000). This study was intended to look at the convergent

factors of principals' attitudes according to their personal demographics, professional experiences, and formal training and how these factors might impact principal's attitudes toward inclusive practices in their schools. The results of the study could be used by district administrators, staff developers and university leaders in developing curriculum to assist school based leaders in the implementation of inclusion in their schools. This research contributed to the scholarly literature pertaining to principals' attitudes toward inclusion.

Definitions

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

1. *Attitude* – A complex mental state involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2008).
2. *Inclusion* – Inclusion is defined as a service delivery model in which there is a commitment to meet the educational needs of special education students within the regular classroom to the maximum extent appropriate (Praisner, 2000).
3. *General or Regular Education* - A set of educational experiences which a child would receive in a school or school district were that child to enter school at kindergarten and proceed through school without being labeled handicapped or in need of special services (Lilly, 1998).
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 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997).
5. *Mainstreaming*- The selective placement of special education students in one or more regular education classes where assumptions are made regarding student earning the opportunity to be mainstreamed and his or her ability to “keep up” with coursework (Stout, 2001).
 6. *School Administrators* – Those individuals who hold state certification or licensure in the field of educational leadership (Standard for School Leaders’, 1996).
 7. *Special Education* – IDEA defines special education as specifically designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability provided at no cost to the parents (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997).
 8. *Students with disabilities*- The definition from IDEA states that students with a disability are those having been diagnosed as having one of the following handicapping conditions: mental retardation, hearing impairments, speech or language impairments, visual impairments, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities, and who because of those impairments need special education and related services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997).

Assumptions

This study assumed that school based administrators' attitudes towards inclusion would determine how they chose to allocate services and how successful initiatives to include children with disabilities would be within their school. The study also assumed respondents answered honestly the questions used to measure their attitudes towards the inclusion of special needs students in the regular education setting. The researcher assumed that the instrument used is valid and that the sample would represent the total national population.

Limitations

A possible limitation of the survey was that the study was limited to a large urban district in the state of Florida. Administrators in this study included the population of building level principals working in the district during the 2009-2010 school year and may not represent the true characteristics of the population. Since participation was limited to inclusion efforts in one large urban district, the results cannot be generalized to administrators in other districts. Another limitation was that participation was voluntary and could affect the total number of respondents. Another possible limitation of the study was the survey instrument. The Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) was used to measure administrators' attitudes toward inclusion and was limited by the reliability and validity of the instrument. Furthermore, the survey relied on self reporting, environmental factors, and respondents' state of mind impacting how respondents interpreted and responded to the questions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this literature review was on the attitudes, training and beliefs of principals at both the elementary and secondary level towards special education students being included in the general education classrooms. The history of special education, inclusive movement, principal role and involvement, principal training and principal attitude are discussed through current contemporary literature.

History of Special Education

It was not long ago that many inequities and injustices existed with respect to the education of children with disabilities. Up until the 1970's many of these children were excluded from educational opportunities; others received insufficient and inappropriate services (Martin, Martin and Terman, 1996). These inequities pressed parents to lobby and file suit for better educational opportunities for their children resulting in the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (Brown, 2007). EAHCA provided federal funding for initiatives geared towards the education of children with disabilities. The EAHCA renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) guaranteed free and appropriate educational opportunities for all school age children with disabilities. The new mandates required children with disabilities all have Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) and be educated in the least restrictive environment as much as possible. The least restrictive environment (LRE) provision of IDEA requires students with disabilities be educated in regular classrooms unless the nature and severity of the disability are such that needs cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Etscheidt & Bartlett, 1999). The intent of LRE was to move the focus of educating students with disabilities from just receiving educational services to ensuring they have the supports necessary to achieve

in the most appropriate setting (Hardin & Hardin, 2002). The reauthorization of IDEA in subsequent years expanded the funding of programs for persons with disabilities, gave students with disabilities and their parents a meaningful role in the evaluation process, IEP meetings, and placement decisions (Praisner, 2000).

IDEA has affected every school in the country and has changed the roles of all the individuals involved in the educational process (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001). Administrators must be knowledgeable of the many laws and statutes pertaining to Special Education in order to understand the importance of including students with disabilities in regular education. Reviewing the intent and language of the IDEA will assist principals in not only shaping school based policies and evaluating programs and their implementation but also in making informed decisions about placement, assessment, and service delivery models (Kluth, Villa, & Thousand, 2002).

Despite the laws' emphasis on least restrictive environment, many students are still being segregated from their peers. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) seeks to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students and close the achievement gap between various subgroups of students, including those with disabilities, by imposing new requirements for standards, assessments, accountability, and parental involvement. The new legislation recommitments to the education of children by ensuring that all children have a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education.

The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) are forcing school districts and school officials to reevaluate how students with disabilities are being served in schools (Kluth, Villa, & Thousand, 2002). While the two federal

laws that govern the education of children with disabilities do not require inclusion; both require that a significant effort be made to find an inclusive placement.

Inclusion Movement

In 1986, The Regular Education Initiative reported on the state of special education programs in the United States. The report concluded that the separate special education programs were ineffective and discriminatory and regular educational services indicated far better results in student achievement when compared to separate educational settings (Nussbaum, 2004). There was a call to merge the special education system and the regular education system into one (Bookhart, 1999). The legal preference for LRE placements and the continued actions of advocates and lobbyists for individuals with disabilities provided momentum for the movement towards inclusive education (Hehir, 2003). As the movement towards inclusive schools began, difficulties began to arise in defining inclusion, because it meant different things to different people (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Praisner, 2003). The researchers stated that for some it meant mainstreaming, but for others it meant the reorganization of the teaching and learning process, as well as the redefining of roles and relationships between all of the individuals involved in the educational process. Stainback & Stainback (1990) provided the following definition:

An inclusive school is one that educates all students in the mainstream. It also means providing all students within the mainstream, appropriate, educational programs that are challenging yet geared to their own capabilities as well as any support and assistance they and/or their teachers may need to be successful in the mainstream. But an inclusive school goes beyond this. An inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs is accepted, supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community while educational needs are being met. (Steinback & Steinback, 1990, p.3)

Advocates for full inclusion point to the many benefits of inclusive education supported by research. A number of research studies have revealed positive effects for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Schlee (2003) found when comparing students with disabilities in a special education environment to those in an inclusive environment, those in the inclusive setting made more academic progress. Students in the inclusive setting were exposed to a more rigorous curriculum and spent more time on task than those students in self-contained classrooms. Inclusion in the regular classroom enables previously excluded students to be successful in the general education program; it can give those previously excluded students a chance to make friends and build relationships with a more representative group of their peers (National Institute for Urban School Improvement, nd). The most significant benefit attributed to inclusive practices seems to be social development. In a three year study of inclusion programs at the elementary level both low performing general education students and students with disabilities experienced improvements in social skills and all of the students experienced increases in self-esteem related to self and their accomplishments (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000). The general education setting provides increased opportunities for social interactions with non disabled peers and the forming of relationships (Barnett & Monda, 1998). Ryndak, Downing, Jacqueline, & Morrison, (1995) studied the impact of inclusion of students with severe/profound disabilities. The researchers found that these students experience acceptance, increase social interactions, develop friendships, and achieve positive academic and learning outcomes in inclusive settings. The integration of students with disabilities has positive effects on non-disabled peers as well. Salend (2005) found that students without disabilities experience growth in social cognition and gain a greater understanding and acceptance of students with disabilities. Advocates of inclusion point to the benefits of increased diversity awareness and

tolerance as well as an increased willingness to help others (Driscoll, 2005). Additionally, it was shown that inclusion has no adverse impact on the education of students without disabilities (Sharpe, York & Knight, 1994).

Throughout the past ten years more general education and special education professionals have collaborated to assist students with disabilities in the general education classroom as a result of the federal law IDEA. As educators employ new instructional strategies both principals and teachers report district and state-level challenges with respect to inclusion, ensuring access of all students to general education curriculum, and placing students in the least restrictive environment (Roach & Salisbury, 2000). These challenges inhibit principal's ability to include children in the general education classroom (Villa & Thousand, 2000). Administrators must be prepared and equipped to deal with these growing challenges of inclusive education.

Principal Role and Involvement

As inclusion becomes the norm for meeting the needs of students with disabilities, administrators' involvement becomes critical as the role of the principal has expanded to design, lead, manage and implement programs for all students (Sage & Burello, 1994). If building principals are involved and informed, inclusive programs have a much higher chance of success. Morgan & Demchak (1996) found that if principals are involved in the planning and implementation the transition to inclusion will be a successful change process. Principal involvement included the identifying the number of students to be included, impact on students with and without disabilities, specific needs of students with disabilities, strategies and supports necessary for successful inclusion, roles of educational personnel, training and staff development needs of all stakeholders, and potential costs and resources. Unfortunately, few principals have

the necessary preparation to be able to carry out such responsibilities (Praisner, 2000). Morgan and Demchak (1996) also found the attitudes of school personnel and students toward inclusion frequently mirror those of the administrator.

Moore (2006) found the role of and supports offered by the school principal contribute greatly to the success of exceptional student education. The study identified the sources and components of organization support needed to implement inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. The primary resources identified in the study were funding, special curriculum, and adaptive technology. Time for training, and hiring of additional personnel to assist the students were the two organizational supports found to have been significant in the success of inclusion.

The Lighthouse Project successfully included students with disabilities in elementary, middle and high school general education classes (Whitworth, 1999). Whitworth found seven steps that must be present if a school is to successfully move from exclusive to inclusive practices; they are (a) the school must have someone who assumes leadership role, (b) a common vision where all stakeholders have a clear understanding of why inclusion is being implemented, (c) sufficient time is given to the process of planning inclusion, there must be a collaborative climate within the school, (d) clear, concise communication is practiced, (e) stakeholders must be flexible and capable of adapting and changing to meet the needs of children and (f) training must be provided to faculty and staff on inclusive practices (Whitworth, 1999). Burello (1992) examined the role of instructional leadership in principals in relation to the management of special education programs. A framework consisting of seven areas of instructional management (community, beliefs and experience, institutional context, principal's routine behaviors, instructional climate, instructional organization and student outcomes) was used to examine the

instructional leadership behaviors of five principals. The results of the study depict the influences on principal's behavior toward students with disabilities, the principal's role in inclusion of special education students, principals as reactive rather than proactive in service delivery, and principal's reliance on central office special education staff.

Dipaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) examine principals' roles and their influence on school based special education services. Emerging research has established a significant relationship between special education teacher attrition and school leadership. The principal's role has evolved from building manager to instructional leader. A study involving 32 schools implementing inclusive practices for students with disabilities found that administrative leadership was the most influential predictor of positive teacher attitudes about the process (Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin, 1993).

Dipaola & Walther-Thomas cite several studies that outline effective leaders who are committed to the success of all students through collaboration and communication and investing time to devise policies and procedures that facilitate classroom support. Furthermore, they highlight research that has demonstrated that principals who focus on instructional issues, depict administrative support for special education and provide high quality professional development for teachers produce enhanced outcomes for students at risk for school failure and for students with disabilities. The extent of administrative support affects the extent to which teachers develop and implement interventions designed to improve student performance. Gersten (2001) found that building level support from principals and educators had strong effects on almost all critical aspects of special education teachers working conditions. However research suggests few school administrators are well prepared to provide special education leadership (Monteith, 2000). The authors note a publication produced by CEC based on five major elements of school-

organization, curriculum and instruction, professional development, climate and assessment designed to help principals implement IDEA effectively. Administrators that have a clear understanding of the needs of students with disabilities, IDEA, and the challenges that educators who work with students with disabilities face are better equipped to provide appropriate support. Effective leaders understand the importance of well designed learning and working environments and can facilitate the development of appropriate student placements and specialist assignments that represents student and classroom support needs accurately.

State and federal court cases have paved the way for students with disabilities to be educated in inclusive settings. Successful and competent inclusion programs take patience, perseverance and time (Wood, 1998). It is important for administrators to attempt to educate all children in their home school in the regular education classroom before considering placement in other settings. Administrators must find ways to provide the necessary support to educate all children who will need assistance and modifications in the curriculum.

Principal Training

Implementing the least restrictive environment philosophy places new demands on public school personnel. NCLB places new demands on principals and holds them accountable for the educational outcomes of all students including students with disabilities. Research has found that many principals lack formal training in special education and were reluctant to assume new responsibilities related to special education due to their lack of training (Aspedon, 1992). Valesky & Hirth (1992) discuss the importance of principals having solid knowledge in special education law in order to avoid future litigation and loss of funding. Monteith (1998) surveyed 120 administrators enrolled in graduate programs at South Carolina State University and found

that the majority of administrators had no formal training in special education. Further, they felt that an effective school leader needed special education training and would be interested in special education professional development. In order for inclusion to be successful, principals must command an understanding of special education in order to implement procedural requirements effectively and to provide appropriate educational services to students with disabilities. Collins and White conducted a federally funded study in 2002 examining pre-service education programs for school administrators. The study examined the challenges school principals face when dealing with inclusionary practices at their schools. The study recommended that special education skill and knowledge areas be integrated into principal preparation programs.

Lasky & Karge (2006) examined the formal training of 205 principals in various school districts in southern California. Their results clearly call for a need for increased training of principals in the area of special education during pre-service administration programs as well as on the job training.

A study conducted by Magnone (2007), surveyed public school principals, superintendents, and education law attorneys regarding their perceptions pertaining to school law education for principals. The study addressed which areas of school law are essential to the principal, what sources of school law information are available, continuing education and graduate level opportunities available, and which settings for continuing education are most convenient and effective. The study found substantial agreement in the respondents' perceptions of the four essential areas of school law that were critical. The areas of which a principal needs to have knowledge are suspensions/expulsions of students, personnel dismissal, student harassment and Exceptional Children.

As more schools become inclusive, new responsibilities emerge requiring a different type of skill set and training (Praisner, 2000). Collins and White (2002) worked on a 3-year federally funded project aimed at preparing future principals in the knowledge and skills necessary to lead and manage building-based special education programs with an emphasis on inclusive practices involving students with emotional and behavioral disorders. The project's four part curriculum included specialized course work, leadership institutes, school-based internships, and project portfolios. Results of the program indicate the participants were enriched by the experience and exited the program prepared to address leadership situations related to special education issues. Sirotnik and Kimball (1994) studied 23 principal preparation programs and derived that special education was not adequately addressed. Course work, knowledge acquisition, and legal information related to special education were minimal. Goor, Schwenn, and Boyer's (1997) research points to the core beliefs in each and every child's capacity to learn, each and every teacher's capacity to learn, and in honoring the work that must provide the framework for principals to accept children with disabilities and include them in general education classrooms.

Principal Attitude

As the instructional leader, the principal has direct influence over the programs and resources implemented in the school. Research has pointed to the importance administrators' attitude has toward inclusionary education. Iovannone (1996) surveyed 638 educators to explore their attitudes toward full inclusion of students with severe disabilities in the general education class. The study aimed to analyze the differences in their attitudes in relation to several variables identified in the literature as influencing educator's feelings toward inclusion of students with severe disabilities. Results revealed that educators who held elementary or multilevel positions,

who had more in-service training in the area of special education, who had more experience with students with diverse severe disabilities, and who were involved with inclusive programs for the longest period of time exhibited significantly higher scores on the indicators related to positive attitudes toward inclusion. Early studies by Brinker, Thorpe, & Horne (1985) found school staff exhibited largely negative attitudes toward inclusion that could be attributed to lack of training, resources, knowledge and personal experiences with students with disabilities. In 1993, Weiner and Norton conducted a study of school principals and their attitude toward inclusion. The researchers found that although the principals were supportive of the philosophy of inclusive education, they had a great deal of reservations about its actual implementation. They reported significant concerns about the academic benefits, parent concerns from both students with and without disabilities and increased teacher needs. In addition, principals noted the loss of direct services to students with disabilities, amount of time needed to change program models, need for training and establishing the needed supports in the general education classroom as areas of concern. Wisniewski & Alpher (1994) found mixed support for the concept of inclusion by school principals. Another study conducted by Guzman (1994) examined the leadership factors that resulted during the planning and implementation of a neighborhood school for special needs students with mild and moderate disabilities. Guzman found that principals should offer ongoing structured support and professional development on specific skills and knowledge. It was recommended that central office administrators are included on school based teams and participate in the “daily reality” of the schools.

Geter’s study of 550 Georgia principals’ attitudes toward inclusion found no significant differences between high school and elementary principals’ attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The study also found no significant

difference between high school and elementary principals' attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with regards to principals' gender and training in special education (Geter, 1998). In 1998, Barnett surveyed principals across the state of Illinois. The study involved gathering information from 115 randomly selected principals regarding definitions, leadership styles and effectiveness in the implementation of inclusionary practices. Barnett found no clear definition among the participants but most principals viewed inclusion appropriate for students with mild disabilities. The findings raised issues regarding principals' understanding of inclusionary practices and how prepared they are to lead and support inclusive education.

Another study by Inzano (1999) investigated the attitudes of school principals in the state of New Jersey toward inclusive education. The results of the survey found that neither years of experience as a principal nor location of school had an effect on principals' attitude toward inclusion. The study also found that principals were in favor of including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Levy's study of 124 elementary principals in New York City investigated their attitudes toward the restructuring of programs towards inclusive education. Results indicated that age was a variable that influenced support for principal attitudes but gender, teaching experience, years as an administrator, years of inclusion experience, and training in special education had no significant relationship to principals' attitudes toward inclusive education (Levy, 1999).

Praisner (2000) surveyed 408 principals to investigate the relationship regarding attitudes toward inclusion, training and experience, and placement perceptions. Results of the study indicated that only twenty percent of the principals' attitudes are positive. Positive experiences with students with disabilities and exposure to special education concepts contributed to more

positive attitude toward inclusion. In addition, principals with more positive attitudes and/ or experiences are more likely to place students in least restrictive environment (Praisner, 2000). The results of her study point to the importance of inclusionary practices that give principals positive experiences with students of all types of disabilities as well as provide principals with specific training on special education and inclusionary practices. To ensure the success of inclusion, principals need to exhibit behaviors that promote the integration, acceptance, and success of students with disabilities in regular education classes. The decision to develop an inclusive school depends largely on leaders' values and beliefs (Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993). Center, Ward, Parmenter, and Nash (1985) also studied principal attitude towards mainstreaming. Their study found that principals who had special education training had more positive attitudes toward inclusion than principals with more on the job experience and no special education training.

Martin (2004) examined the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of principals in terms of inclusive strategies, support for change and the relationship between these variables and level of inclusion. Major findings of the study indicated few significant differences between higher and lower inclusive schools. Data on perceptions, beliefs, and attitude revealed limited use of co-teaching even in highly inclusive schools. This is significant because training in the co-teaching model is provided for all staff and administrators. However, principals in highly inclusive schools supported inclusion through release time, financial support for training, provided common planning time for general and special education teachers and promoted co-teaching as a model for inclusive practices. The researcher concluded that the principals are instrumental in determining whether inclusion is implemented in their schools and the extent to which it is accomplished.

Duquette (2004) conducted a study investigating the attitudes of middle school principals toward inclusion of students with disabilities in South Carolina. The results of the study indicate although many principals' attitudes demonstrated support for inclusion programs not many were actually implementing full or partial inclusion programs. The majority of the students were receiving services through pullout or resource delivery models. Another study conducted by Hesselbart (2005) surveyed 37 principals and assistant principals in rural Northwest county in Ohio. The study investigated the relationship regarding attitudes toward inclusion with other variables such as teaching experience, regular and special education teaching experience, and placement preferences. The results of the study indicated that nearly half of the principals surveyed had a positive attitude toward inclusion, and nearly the same percentage was unsure. Analysis of data the only strong correlation with attitude was placement; the higher the attitude score, the less restrictive the placement of the student with disabilities. Results suggested principal preparation programs need to include more coursework dealing with special education.

Hunter (2006) studied the attitudes of secondary school principals in a large urban district. The survey administered examined the relationship between attitude and various associations between attitude, experience, and placement. The survey collected 13 potential predictor variables. Principals were asked to rate experiences with children with disabilities and to provide hypothetical placements for different disability categories. The results suggest the importance of good inclusion practices that will ensure principals have positive experiences with students with disabilities. Hunter recommended further investigations to refine the variables associated with positive experiences and attitudes. Horrock's study of principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with autism in the regular education setting found that the most significant factor in predicting both a positive attitude toward inclusion and higher

recommendations of placements for children with autism was the principals' belief that children with autism could be included in a regular education classroom (Horrock, 2006). Ramirez studied the attitudes of elementary school principals in the state of Texas. The results indicated that demographic factors, training, and experience did not have a statistically significant affect on principals' attitudes toward inclusion; however, the study did find that principal's special education experience had a statistically significant affect on attitudes toward inclusion. Brown (2006) investigated the attitudes of administrators toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and factors influencing those decisions. The study revealed a significant difference in attitude of the respondents towards inclusionary education based on gender, school level assignment, years of experience as an administrator and regular education teaching experience. Middle level administrators tended to have beliefs that special education students belong in special schools where all of their needs could be met. Administrators with fewer years of experiences agreed more with inclusion of students with disabilities. However the study did not find any significant in administrators' attitude toward inclusion relative to job category, special education teaching experience and student enrollment. Washington (2006) examined how certain factors contribute to the attitudes of South Carolina middle school principals' attitudes regarding full inclusion of students with disabilities. Results of the study indicate that the participants have positive attitudes regarding inclusion; however, those participants with formal training in special education had statistically significant more positive attitude regarding the inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom.

Studies have demonstrated the importance of principal attitude toward inclusive education. Positive perceptions and feelings encourage appropriate policies and supports necessary for successful inclusive programs.

Conceptual Framework

It has long been recognized that effective principals are capable instructional leaders and skilled site-based managers (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Their leadership is pivotal for the improvement of educational opportunities for all students, especially those with unique learning needs. The literature on leadership has indicated that principals' attitudes and beliefs influence their behaviors (Fullan, 2003; McCormick, 2000). A high correlation of attitudes to behavioral intentions has been confirmed in many studies. Bandura (1977) developed the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) which describes the interrelationship between behavior, environmental factors, and personal factors and their influence on actions. According to SCT, the learner acquires knowledge as his or her environment converges with personal characteristics and personal experience. New experiences are evaluated in comparison with the past; prior experiences help to subsequently guide and inform the learner as to how the present should be investigated. This study will investigate whether there is a relationship between administrator's experience, training, and attitudes and the level of inclusion in schools. Social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1986). This study will seek information pertaining to training and beliefs about inclusion and compare these to the actions applied at schools with regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. In the SCT model, the interaction between the person and behavior involves the influences of a person's thoughts and actions. The interaction between the person and the environment involves human beliefs and cognitive competencies that are developed and modified by social influences and structures within the environment. The third interaction, between the environment and behavior, involves a person's behavior determining the aspects of their environment and in turn their behavior is modified by that environment. "Most

human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.” (Bandura). Social cognitive theory is helpful for understanding and predicting both individual and group behavior and identifying methods in which behavior can be modified or changed. According to Bandura, expectations such as motivation, performance, and feelings of frustration affect behavioral reactions. “What people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave” (Bandura, 1986, p. 25). For this reason, how people behave can often be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their capabilities than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing. This study will seek to understand if administrators’ beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion translate into inclusive settings for children with disabilities. Previous investigations have shown that peoples' behavior is strongly influenced by their confidence in their ability to perform that behavior (Bandura, Adams, Hardy, & Howells, 1980). McCormick and Martinko (2004) proposed a leadership model based on Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory. The model suggests that leader causal reasoning processes affect leader perceptions of goals, self-efficacy, and leadership task schema that, in turn, affect the leader's selection of strategies and enactment of behaviors.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) looks to explain the relationship between attitudes and actions. TRA was first proposed in 1975 by Ajzen and Fishbein. The researchers reasoned a person's voluntary behavior is predicted by his/her attitude toward that behavior and how he/she thinks other people would view them if they performed the behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). According to Ajzen and Fishbein, in order to gain deeper understanding of the factors influencing behavior, it is required to look for the determinants of the attitudinal and normative components. As they explained, those determinants are beliefs individuals hold about

themselves and their environment, in other words, information individuals have about themselves and the world in which they live. Therefore, beliefs are viewed as underlying a person's attitudes and subjective norms, and they ultimately determine intentions and behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This study will ascertain information pertaining to attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and compare these to the actions applied at schools with regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

In summary, the Social Cognitive Theory attempts to explain how individual's thoughts, beliefs, and feeling affect how they behave. The Theory of Reasoned Action states an individual's attitudes and intentions are the most immediate factors influencing his/her behavior. This study investigated which factors influence principals' attitudes and beliefs toward inclusive education and if there is a relationship between these attitudes and student placements at their schools.

Summary

The movement toward inclusive education has many more students with disabilities attending their neighborhood schools and the numbers are growing. School leaders must be adequately prepared to lead the charge for more inclusive schools. Studies investigating principals' attitudes toward inclusion have demonstrated mixed results due to the numerous definitions of inclusion, sampling techniques and by the amount of experience individuals have with inclusive education. There is a lack of clear evidence describing the attitudes of school principals toward educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom and how these attitudes relate to placement decisions. Furthermore, many of the studies surveyed principals and other school based administrators regarding hypothetical placements of students

with disabilities, none of the studies investigated whether there was a relationship between principals' hypothetical placements to actual school placements. The mixed results of past studies and lack of additional research indicated further examination of principal attitudes was necessary.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

School administrators play a crucial role in the academic success of all students. Successful inclusive schools operate within a structure where administrators and teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusion and are supportive and committed to the education of students with disabilities (Praisner, 2003). This chapter describes the study that examined if there was a correlation between the factors related to school based administrators' attitudes toward inclusive education and the placement decisions of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding, predicting, and changing human behavior (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1986). The Social Cognitive Theory attempts to explain how individual's thoughts, beliefs, and feelings affect how they behave. This study sought information pertaining to training and beliefs about inclusion and compared these to the actions applied at schools with regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The Theory of Reasoned Action states that an individual's attitudes and intentions are the most immediate factors influencing his/her behavior. This study investigated which factors influence principals' attitudes and beliefs toward inclusive education and how these attitudes impact student placements at their schools. This chapter includes a description of the procedure used, the population, and the sample size, the description of the instrument and the descriptive statistics.

Problem Statement

IDEA requires that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment to the extent possible. School principals continue to grapple with the issue of LRE and the move to more inclusive settings for students with disabilities (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Although some research has been conducted regarding the importance of principal's attitudes toward inclusion, the research has been scarce in the area of identifying the factors that influence their attitudes toward inclusion and their impact on placement decisions. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study was to identify which factors influence principals' attitudes and beliefs toward inclusive education and how these attitudes are related to student placement decisions.

Research Design

The researcher used a quantitative descriptive design to measure the attitudes of school based principals toward including students with disabilities in the general education classroom and their effect on placement decisions. Quantitative research is inclined to be deductive and tend to produce results that can be generalized. Descriptive designs are a formal, objective systemic process designed to gain more information about a particular characteristic within a particular field of study (Burns and Grove cited by Cormack 1991). A descriptive study may be used to develop theory, identify problems with current practice, justify current practice, make judgments or identify what others in similar situations may be doing. This design is useful when studying human subjects in real world situations where events have already occurred (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Survey was chosen to investigate this topic primarily because it could generate quantitative data that could be examined using scientific analysis. It is thought that in gaining, analyzing and interpreting quantitative data, the researcher can remain detached and objective.

This study attempted to test Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and The Theory of Action Response with regards to inclusive education. Survey data were collected and analyzed to determine if certain factors were related to school based administrators' attitudes toward inclusive education and how their attitudes impact placement decisions. In addition, hypothetical placement data were analyzed to determine if there was any relationship with actual school based placement decisions.

Population and Sample

The target population consisted of school based principals in the Southeastern United States. The sample population for this research included school based principals from a large urban school district in the state of Florida. The urban district is one of the largest districts in the United States and serves over 180,000 students in a variety of settings including inner-city, suburban and rural areas. The district has over 180 regular-attendance schools as of the 2009-10 school year. The district also has four dedicated ESE schools as well as a hospital/homebound program, and dozens of alternative education centers. (Encarta Electronic Encyclopedia, 2008).

As of the 2009-2010 school year there were 180 school based principals serving approximately 181,000 students of whom 29,000 were identified as having exceptionality. This study surveyed school based principals from a large urban district representing schools with enrollments varying in size from less than 260 to over 4000 students. The instrument measured principals' attitudes toward inclusion and factors that may influence their decision to include students with disabilities in regular education settings.

Data Collection

The following procedures were used to collect quantitative data for the research study. A letter was submitted to the Superintendent of a large urban district in the Southeastern United States requesting permission to conduct the study. Once approval was received from the district, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, *The Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS)*, the Superintendent's approval to conduct the research, an optional form to request the results of the study, and a self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed to school based principals in the district using Dillman's Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2000). The surveys were coded to protect the respondent's identity and to provide a means for follow-up to those who do not respond within the prescribed time and to aid in the data analysis for research question 2 where hypothetical placement data were compared to actual placement data. The first mailings were sent via U.S. Postal Service to 176 principals. Principals were given two weeks to complete and return the survey. School based principals who had not returned surveys at the end of two weeks received a second cover letter and survey. If the survey was not returned following the second mailing, a third mailing was sent with a new cover letter and a copy of the instrument.

Description of the Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a questionnaire designed to examine whether demographics, program issues, training and experience affect principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and how these attitudes impact placement decisions. The questionnaire was based on a survey, developed by Cindy L. Praisner (2000), entitled *The Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS)*. The survey was revised to fit the investigator's research questions. The revised questionnaire was presented to a small panel of

experts within the field of special education and educational administration. The panel reviewed and evaluated the questions' validity for measuring the variables that may relate to the attitudes and perceptions of elementary school principals, as well as the amount of time required to complete the survey.

The questionnaire is divided into four sections: demographics, training and experience, attitudes towards inclusion, and principals' ideas on placement. Section I of the survey is designed to gather basic information such as gender, age, size of student population, types of disabilities and percentage of students identified with disabilities within the school, and special education programs at the school site. Section II of the questionnaire contains 13 questions designed to gather data on variables that could potentially influence a school based administrator's attitude toward inclusion. Praisner (2000) chose the questions based on a review of inclusion literature to ensure test validity. The final question in this section is seeking information regarding the types of experiences school based administrators have had with individuals with different disability categories. School based principals were asked to rate their experiences from negative to positive or no experience. An overall experience score was calculated based on an aggregation of the categories. Section III contains 10 items from the Superintendent's Attitude Survey on Integration (SASI) adapted by Stainback (1986). For each statement related to an aspect of inclusion, the respondents were asked to respond using a five point Likert scale with categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A total Attitude score was calculated and used to measure principals' attitudes toward inclusion. Stainback addressed the issue of validity through a panel of experts and the reliability coefficient for these series of questions was reported as .8999. Section IV contains items aimed at getting a better understanding of a principal's beliefs on the appropriate placement of special education

students within their school. Section IV lists all the possible disability categories for special education students and what placements school based administrators think might be most appropriate for these students. For each disability category, the respondents are asked to indicate which of the six placement options he or she believes is most appropriate. The placement options range from most restrictive – special school, to least restrictive – general education classroom. Based on the responses an Inclusive score was determined.

Content validity of the original PIS was determined by expert judgment. After developing the questionnaire, Praisner had it reviewed by a panel of four professors with experience in the area of inclusive education and educational administration from Lehigh University. The panel reviewed and evaluated the questions' validity for measuring variables that may relate to the attitudes and perceptions of school based administrators toward inclusion. The validity of the initial instrument rests with the panel of experts that reviewed and piloted the survey as well as the research performed by Praisner. The revised version of the PIS by the researcher was used by all participants in this study. Since Praisner's (2000) original study *The Principals and Inclusion Survey* has been used in other studies across the country.

A cover letter was developed to explain the study and the process for completing the survey. The cover letter was attached to the survey. The cover letter included a statement regarding confidentiality of the responses.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0. Section I and Section II of the survey contained questions 1-17. For questions 1- 11 and 15, numerical values were assigned to the demographic data. Descriptive statistical analysis was

used to obtain frequencies, percentages and means relative to the different variables of gender, age, school level assignment, years of experience as an administrator, years of teaching experience in exceptional education, and years of experience teaching in general education. Question 12 yielded more than one answer and each category was given a one for yes and two for no. Questions 13 -16 yielded a yes or no response. Yes responses were coded with a 1 and no responses were coded with a 0. Question 17 required respondents to rate their experiences with different categories of disabilities using a Likert scale ranging from -2 (negative experience) to 2 (positive experience). A total experience score was calculated ranging from -22 to 22. Section IV of the survey asked respondents to indicate which placement they believed to be most appropriate for students with the identified disability. For ten different types of disabilities, participants were asked to provide the placement that they believe would be the most appropriate for students with the given disability. Respondents were given six choices, ranging from most inclusive to most restrictive. The most inclusive choice was given a score of 6; the most restrictive choice a score of 1. Scores for the ten areas were summed to form a single dependent variable ranging from 10 (least overall inclusive) to 60 (most overall inclusive).

Data pertaining to the actual placement of students with disabilities were solicited from the district. In order to compare hypothetical placement decisions to actual placement decisions, the individual disability responses were categorized into a 1-3 scoring scheme, categorically.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Is there a correlation between principal's attitude towards inclusive education and student placement decisions?

2. Is there relationship between school based principals' hypothetical placement decisions and principal's actual placement decisions at their school site?
3. Are school principals' attitudes toward inclusive education related to personal demographics, professional experiences and formal training?

Research Question #1

The relationship between attitude towards inclusive education and educational placement decisions was tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation coefficient. The first variable of interest was Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Students with Special Needs, Section III of the survey. Participants were asked to respond to 10 Likert scale-based questions asking about attitudes of inclusion. Individual items with which the respondent strongly agreed received a score of 5; items with which the respondent strongly disagreed received a score of 1. A maximum score of 50 would indicate the greatest degree of inclusiveness and the minimum score of 10 would represent the lowest degree of inclusiveness.

The second variable of interest was Most Appropriate Placement for Students with Disabilities. For ten different types of disabilities, participants were asked to provide the placement that they believe would be the most appropriate for students with the given disability. Respondents were given six choices, ranging from most inclusive to most restrictive. The most inclusive choice was given a score of 6; the most restrictive choice a score of 1. Scores for the ten areas were summed to form a single dependent variable ranging from 10 (least overall inclusive) to 60 (most overall inclusive).

Research Question #2

The relationship between hypothetical placement and actual placement for students of different disability types was tested through a series of chi-square tests for independence. The

test was applied to the two categorical variables, hypothetical placement and actual placement, to determine whether there was a significant association between intent and action among the respondents. The actual placement data was ascertained from the district. Schools were given a numerical identifier and data was reported using this identifier. These identifiers were matched to the codings assigned to each survey. Coding of the surveys allowed for the comparison of the two data. Respondents were asked to indicate which of the six placements they believed to be most appropriate for each disability category. The six choices ranged from full time regular education with support (least restrictive setting) to special education services outside regular school (more restrictive setting). The six choices were grouped into three larger groupings: Regular Classroom, Resource Room, and Separate Class. These larger groupings were created to correspond with actual data collected from the schools regarding actual placement decisions for these students.

Due to small and zero-size cell counts, the resource room and separate classroom categories were further combined into a single category, leaving two categories: Regular and Resource/Separate. This was done only because of small cell sizes that would hinder analysis.

Research Question # 3

This research question examined the differences in principal attitudes toward inclusive education among individuals with different personal demographics, professional experiences, and levels of formal training. Additionally, due to prior research, there was a desire to control for the effects of being at different school levels (elementary or secondary) as well as the level of inclusiveness as indicated by a school having a strong vision statement explicitly including students with disabilities.

To answer the question Are school principals' attitudes toward inclusive education related to personal demographics, professional experiences and formal training, a series of ANCOVA tests were run to test for these differences in attitudes of inclusiveness. In each case, the dependent variable was the overall inclusion attitudes score, a continuous variable for which outlier and normality checks were already conducted as a part of Research Question 1. Two dichotomous variables were used in all ANCOVA analyses as well. One was an indicator for elementary or secondary level of a school, while the other was the yes/no response to a survey question asking, "Does your school's mission statement include a vision for the inclusion of student with disabilities?" These two variables were suitable for initial eligibility as covariates, as binary or continuous variables are most appropriate for this role.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the results of the statistical tests that were performed on the data. Chapter 5 discusses the results of this study, conclusions, and recommendations for further research as indicated by this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors related to school based administrators' attitudes toward inclusive education and the correlation between these attitudes and the placement decisions of students with disabilities. Data collected examined the relationship between demographics, training and experience, attitudes towards inclusion, and principals' ideas on placement. Additionally the study examined whether hypothetical placement decisions had any relationship to actual placement decisions of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

Methodology

A modified Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) was mailed to 176 school based principals in a large urban district in the southeastern United States. Instructions and procedures for completing the survey were explained in the mailing. Once the surveys were received, they were examined and checked for completion. The data were then analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0. Data collected determining principal's attitude toward inclusion and their placement decisions relative to individual disabilities were analyzed to determine whether there was a correlation between these two variables. In order to determine if there was a relationship between principal's hypothetical placement decisions and their actual placement decision an analysis was done to compare the data received via the survey and the data collected by the school district regarding actual placements of students with disabilities.

Finally, various factors including professional experiences and formal training were analyzed to determine if they were related to principal's attitude toward inclusion.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Is there a correlation between principal's attitude towards inclusive education and student placement decisions?
2. Is there a relationship between a school based principal's hypothetical placement decisions and actual placement decisions at their school site?
3. Are school principals' attitudes toward inclusive education related to personal demographics, professional experiences and formal training?

Population and Sample Demographic Characteristics

The population for this study was the public school principals in the southeastern region of the United States. Permission to conduct the study was granted by a large urban district in the state of Florida. Of the one hundred eighty school based principals in the district, one-hundred seventy six were selected to participate in the study representing elementary, middle and high schools. Four of the principals are in special schools consisting of only exceptional education students and were excluded from the study. In total, ninety-eight principals responded to the survey resulting in a 56% response rate. One survey was returned with a note indicating the principal did not wish to participate in the study. Of the ninety-eight respondents, 42 were men and 56 were women ranging in ages between 31 years of age and older.

School Demographics

Two percent (n=2) of the respondents school population was less than 250; 10.2% (n=10) of the respondents were in schools with student populations between 251 and 500, 40.8% (n=40)

of the respondents were in schools with student populations between 501 and 750; 23.5% (n=23) of the respondents were in schools with student populations between 751 and 1000; and 23.5% (n=23) of the respondents were in schools with student populations over 1000.

Respondents indicated through the survey that 38.5 (n=37) % had class sizes ranging between 10-19 students and 61.5% (n=59) had class sizes ranging between 20 -29. None of the respondents had class sizes less than 10 or more than 29. Two respondents did not respond to this question.

When asked about the percentage of students in their buildings with IEPs, 8% (n=7) reported that no more than 5% of the students had an IEP; thirty-three percent (n=29) reported between 6-10%; 34.5% (n=30) reported between 11-15%; 16.1% (n=14) reported between 16-20% and 8% (n=7) reported more than 21% of the students in their building had an IEP. Eleven principals did not respond to question 3 of the survey.

The last question related to the demographics of the school building addressed the number of students with IEPs that are included in regular education classrooms for at least 75% of the day. 12.2% (n=11) of the respondents reported between 0-20% of students with IEPs spend at least 75% of their day in regular classroom settings; 5.6% (n=5) reported between 21 and 40% of students with IEPs spend at least 75% of their day in regular classroom settings; 5.6% (n=5) reported between 41 and 60% of students with IEPs spend at least 75% of their day in regular classroom settings; 23.3% (n=21) reported between 61 and 80% of students with IEPs spend at least 75% of their day in regular classroom settings; and 53.3% (n=48) reported between 81 and 100% of students with IEPs spend at least 75% of their day in regular classroom settings. Eight principals did not respond to question 4 of the survey.

Training and Experience

Section II of the survey addressed training and experience. To ensure validity of this section Praisner selected the content based on the review of inclusion literature identifying those factors which might relate to educator's attitudes toward inclusion. In addition, a panel of experts in the field of education reviewed the questions. Questions in this section collected data reflecting years of full time regular education teaching experience, special education teaching experience, years as a school principal, number and type of special education credits in their formal training and training in inclusive practices.

Teaching Experience

Most respondents to the survey 39.8% (n=39) had between 7-12 years regular education teaching experience. Only 1% (n=1) reported 0 years regular education teaching experience. 20.4% (n=20) reported between 1-6 years regular education teaching experience; 19.4% (n=19) reported 13-18 years regular education teaching experience and 19.4% (n=19) reported 19 or more years regular education teaching experience.

The majority of the respondents 70.5% (n=67) reported 0 years of full time special education experience. 22.1% (n=21) reported between 1-6 years of full time special education experience; and only 7.4% (n=7) reported between 7-14 years of full time special education experience. None of the respondents reported more than 14 years of full time special education experience. Three of the respondents did not answer this question.

Experience as a Principal

Thirty seven and eight tenths percent (n=37) of the principals had less than 6 years experience as a school principal; 26.5% (n=26) reported between 6-10 years experience as a school principal; 22.4% (n=22) reported between 11-15 years; 10.2% (n=22) between 16-20

years experience as a school principal; and 3.1% (n=3) reported more than 20 years as a school principal.

Formal Training

Ninety-eight of the principals responded to the number of special education credits in their formal training. Thirty and six tenths percent (n=30) of the principals reported receiving no formal training in special education; 45.9 % (n=45) reported 1-9 credits; 10.2 % (n=10) reported 10-15 credits; 3.1% (n=3) reported 16-21 credits and 10.2% (n=10) reported more than 21 credits in special education.

Principals were also asked to respond to the number of in-service training hours they had participated in the area of inclusive practices. Ninety seven principals responded and 36.1% (n=36) reported having more than 35 hours of in-service training; 7.2% (n=7) reported between 17-25 hours; 27.8% (n=27) reported between 9-16 hours; 24.7% (n=27) reported between 1-8 hours and 4.1% (n=4) reported having 0 credits hours in the area of inclusive practices.

The survey not only collected data pertaining to the number of hours of training but also as to the content of the training. Fourteen categories were listed as possible areas that were could have been included in their formal training in the area of special education. Principals were asked to mark all of the areas that were included in their formal training. These areas included characteristics of students with disabilities, behavior management classes for working with students with disabilities, academic programming for students with disabilities, special education law, life skills training, and crisis intervention. Teambuilding, interagency cooperation, family intervention training, change process, community and parental support for inclusion, fostering collaboration and training and supporting of teachers to handle inclusion were also areas the

principals could select to choose. The majority of the principals 79.6% (n=78) had training in the area of special education law and 74.5% (n=73) in the area of characteristics of students with disabilities. Surprisingly only 34.7% (n=34) of the principals received training in teambuilding and only 41.8% (n=41) in supporting and training of teachers with inclusion. Table 1 represents all of the topics and percentage of principals who participated in each area as part of their formal training.

Table 1 Individual Formal Training Courses*(n = 98)*

Years	Freq.	%
Characteristics of students with disabilities	73	74.5
Behavior management class	66	67.3
Academic programming	57	58.2
Special education law	78	79.6
Crisis intervention	62	63.3
Life skills training	15	15.3
Teambuilding	34	34.7
Interagency cooperation	11	11.2
Family intervention training	15	15.3
Supporting and training teachers	41	41.8
Change process	36	36.7
Eliciting parent and community support	15	15.3
Fostering teacher collaboration	49	50.0
Field based experiences	17	17.3

For the purpose of analyzing the data to answer the research questions, the researcher categorized the data by number of areas included in the trainings; 0-3, 4-8, and 9-14. Twenty-five and five tenths percent (n=25) of the principals received training in 0-3 of the areas; 53.1%

(n=53) received training in 4-8 of the areas; and 21.4% (n=21) received training in 9-14 of the areas.

Vision for Inclusion

The principals were asked if their school's mission statement included a vision for the inclusion of students with disabilities. Sixty four principals reported not having a statement regarding inclusion in their school's mission statement. Only 31 principals reported having such a statement.

The final question in Section II sought to collect information regarding the types of experiences school based principals have had with individuals with different disabilities. Respondents were asked to rate their experiences with students of different categories of disabilities using a Likert scale ranging from -2 (negative experience), -1 (somewhat negative experience), 0 (no experience), 1 (somewhat positive experience) to 2 (positive experience). An overall experience score was calculated based on an aggregation of the categories ranging from -22 (very negative experiences) to 22 (very positive experiences).

Section III of the survey gathered data pertaining to principals attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special needs. Participants were asked to respond to 10 Likert scale-based questions asking about attitudes of inclusion. A single continuous variable ranging from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 50 was formed. Individual items with which the respondent strongly agreed received a score of 5; items with which the respondent strongly disagreed received a score of 1. Some items were negatively worded and were hence "reverse coded" numerically to ensure that when all 10 items were added, the maximum score of 50 would represent the greatest degree of inclusiveness and the minimum score of 10 would represent the

lowest degree of inclusiveness. For the attitude score, the responses had a mean of 41.95 (out of 50) and a standard deviation of 4.96.

Section IV of the survey collected data pertaining to principal's beliefs toward the most appropriate placement for students with different disabilities. For ten different types of disabilities, participants were asked to provide the placement that they believe would be the most appropriate for students with the given disability. Respondents were given six choices, ranging from most inclusive (Full-time regular education with support) to the least inclusive (Special education services outside regular school). The most inclusive choice was given a score of 6; the least inclusive choice a score of 1. Scores for the ten areas were summed to form a single dependent variable ranging from 10 (least overall inclusive) to 60 (most overall inclusive). For placement, the mean was 44.69 (out of 60) and the standard deviation was 9.27.

Research Question #1

The relationship between attitude towards inclusive education and educational placement decisions was tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation coefficient. The two variables of interest were gathered via survey. The first variable, Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Students with Special Needs, was determined by asking participants to respond to 10 Likert scale-based questions asking about attitudes of inclusion. A single continuous variable ranging from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 50 was formed. Individual items with which the respondent strongly agreed received a score of 5; items with which the respondent strongly disagreed received a score of 1. Some items were negatively worded and were hence "reverse coded" numerically to ensure that when all 10 items were added, the maximum score of 50 would

represent the greatest degree of inclusiveness and the minimum score of 10 would represent the lowest degree of inclusiveness.

The second variable, Most Appropriate Placements for Students with Disabilities, was determined from data collected from Section IV of the survey. For ten different types of disabilities, participants were asked to provide the placement that they believe would be the most appropriate for students with the given disability. Respondents were given six choices, ranging from most inclusive (Full-time regular education with support) to the least inclusive (Special education services outside regular school). The most inclusive choice was given a score of 6; the least inclusive choice a score of 1. Scores for the ten areas were summed to form a single dependent variable ranging from 10 (least overall inclusive) to 60 (most overall inclusive).

Because this measure can be easily influenced by outliers, the two dependent variables were examined graphically and through summary statistics to check for outliers, using the boundaries of the 25th percentile minus 1.5 times the interquartile range ($Q1 - 1.5 \times IQR$) and the 75th percentile plus 1.5 times the interquartile range ($Q3 + 1.5 \times IQR$). Using these criteria, one low-scoring observation (below 28.5) was removed from the inclusion attitudes variable and two low-scoring observations (at or below 18) were removed from the placement variable.

Since Pearson's Product-Moment correlation assumes a normal distribution, this assumption was checked as well for each variable. Skewness and kurtosis values fell within the acceptable ranges of -2 and 2 (-.55 and .17, respectively, for inclusion attitudes; -.50 and -.02, respectively, for placement) and the variables were deemed acceptably normal.

Pearson's Product-Moment correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the relationship between the two variables. A total of 92 observations had valid responses for both variables and were used in the calculation. There was a significant positive correlation ($r = .35, p$

< .01) between the inclusion attitudes and placement variables. As respondents displayed an increasingly inclusive attitude toward students with special needs, the inclusiveness of their hypothetical placements of these students in the classroom environment increased as well. Although descriptive statistics are not part of the correlation calculation, it is of interest that, on average, respondents demonstrated fairly high levels of inclusive attitudes, as a whole. For the inclusion attitudes, the responses had a mean of 41.95 (out of 50) and a standard deviation of 4.96. For placement, the mean was 44.69 (out of 60) and the standard deviation was 9.27.

Research Question #2

The relationship between hypothetical placement and actual placement for students of different disability types was tested through a series of chi-square tests for independence. In Section 4 of the survey, respondents were asked about their hypothetical placements of students with specific types of disabilities. The six choices were grouped into three larger groupings: Regular Classroom, Resource Room, and Separate Class. These larger groupings were created to correspond with actual data collected from the schools regarding actual placement decisions for these students.

Due to small and zero-size cell counts, the resource room and separate classroom categories were further combined into a single category, leaving two categories: Regular and Resource/Separate. Once again, this was done only because of small cell sizes that would hinder analysis.

Nine of the disability types from the survey could be matched with the actual data collected from schools. Six out of these nine disability types were analyzed with the chi-square analysis;

three were simply provided with descriptive statistics due to extremely small (or missing) cell counts.

There was no significant relationship between the hypothetical placements of students with Specific Learning Disabilities and their actual placements, $\chi^2(1, n = 95) = 0.96, p > .05$. The effect size was $\Phi = .10$, which represented a small effect size (see Table 2).

Table 2 Analysis for Hypothetical and Actual Placements of Specific Learning Disabled
($n = 95$)

Hypothetical Placement	Actual Placement	
	Regular	Resource/Separate
Regular		
Count	66	2
% of Row	97.1	2.9
Std. Residual	0.1	-0.5
Resource/Separate		
Count	25	2
% of Row	92.6	7.4
Std. Residual	-0.2	0.8

Note. $\chi^2 = 0.96$, $df = 1$, $p = .33$, $\Phi = .10$. n

There was no significant relationship between the hypothetical placements of students with Intellectual Disabilities and their actual placements, $\chi^2 (1, n = 81) = 3.59$, $p > .05$. The effect size was $\Phi = .21$, which represented a small to moderate effect size (see Table 3).

Table 3 Analysis for Hypothetical and Actual Placements of Specific Learning Disabled

(*n* = 81)

Hypothetical Placement	Actual Placement	
	Regular	Resource/Separate
Regular		
Count	12	12
% of Row	50.0	50.0
Std. Residual	1.3	-0.9
Resource/Separate		
Count	16	41
% of Row	28.1	71.9
Std. Residual	-0.8	0.6

Note. $\chi^2 = 3.59$, *df* = 1, *p* = .06, $\Phi = .21$.

There was no significant relationship between the hypothetical placements of students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder and their actual placements: $\chi^2 (1, n = 59) = 2.03, p > .05$. The effect size was $\Phi = .19$, which represented a small to moderate effect size (See Table 4).

Table 4 Analysis for Hypothetical and Actual Placements of EBD*(n = 59)*

Hypothetical Placement	Actual Placement	
	Regular	Resource/Separate
Regular		
Count	21	4
% of Row	84.0	16.0
Std. Residual	0.5	-0.9
Resource/Separate		
Count	23	11
% of Row	67.6	32.4
Std. Residual	-0.5	0.8

Note. $\chi^2 = 2.03$, $df = 1$, $p = .15$, $\Phi = .19$.

There was no significant relationship between the hypothetical placements of students who were Hearing Impaired and their actual placements: $\chi^2 (1, n = 40) = 0.08$, $p > .05$. The effect size was $\Phi = .04$, which represented a nearly non-existent effect size (see Table 5).

Table 5 Analysis for Hypothetical and Actual Placements of Hearing Impaired Students

Hypothetical Placement	Actual Placement	
	Regular	Resource/Separate
Regular		
Count	26	4
% of Row	86.7	13.3
Std. Residual	0.0	0.1
Resource/Separate		
Count	9	1
% of Row	90.0	10.0
Std. Residual	0.1	-0.2

Note. $\chi^2 = 0.08$, $df = 1$, $p = .78$, $\Phi = .04$.

There was no significant relationship between the hypothetical placements of students who were Physically Disabled and their actual placements: $\chi^2 (1, n = 39) = 0.90$, $p > .05$. The effect size was $\Phi = .15$, which represented a small effect size (see Table 6).

Table 6 Analysis for Hypothetical and Actual Placement Physically Disabled

(n = 39)	Actual Placement	
	Hypothetical Placement	Regular
Regular		
Count	24	8
% of Row	75.0	25.0
Std. Residual	0.2	-0.3
Resource/Separate		
Count	4	3
% of Row	57.1	42.9
Std. Residual	-0.5	0.7

Note. $\chi^2 = 0.90$, $df = 1$, $p = .34$, $\Phi = .15$.

There was no significant relationship between the hypothetical placements of students who were Autistic and their actual placements: $\chi^2 (1, n = 62) = 0.05$, $p > .05$. The effect size was $\Phi = .03$, which represented a nearly inconsequential relationship (See Table 7).

Table 7 Analysis for Hypothetical and Actual Placement ASD

<i>(n = 62)</i>	Actual Placement	
	Hypothetical Placement	Resource/Separate
Regular		
Count	10	9
% of Row	52.6	47.4
Std. Residual	-0.1	0.1
Resource/Separate		
Count	24	19
% of Row	55.8	44.2
Std. Residual	0.1	0

Note. $\chi^2 = 0.05$, $df = 1$, $p = .81$, $\Phi = .03$.

Due to the extremely small cell counts, a chi-square test could not be run for the category of Visually Impaired, Speech and Language Impaired and Other Health Impaired. All but one Visually Impaired student was actually placed in a regular classroom. All Speech and Language impaired students were actually placed in a regular classroom, although not all students were hypothetically placed as such (72 in regular, 22 in resource/separate). All but two Other Health Impaired students were placed in a regular classroom. Table 8 summarizes the data for these three categories.

Table 8 Crosstabulations for Hypothetical and Actual Placement of Visually Impaired, Speech and Language Impaired, and Other Health Impaired

Hypothetical Placement	Actual Placement					
	Visual (<i>N</i> = 13)		Language (<i>N</i> = 94)		Other (<i>N</i> = 90)	
	Regular	Resource/ Separate	Regular	Resource/ Separate	Regular	Resource/ Separate
Regular						
Count	8	1	72	0	71	2
% of Row	88.9	11.1	100.0	0.0	97.3	2.7
Resource/ Separate						
Count	4	0	22	0	17	0
% of Row	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0

Research Question #3

This research question examined the differences in principal attitudes toward inclusive education among individuals with different personal demographics, professional experiences, and levels of formal training. Additionally, due to prior research, there was a desire to control for the effects of being at different school levels (elementary or secondary) as well as the level of inclusiveness as indicated by a school having a strong vision statement explicitly including student with disabilities. A series of ANCOVA tests were run to test for these differences in attitudes of inclusiveness. In each case, the dependent variable was the overall inclusion attitudes

score, a continuous variable for which outlier and normality checks were already conducted as a part of Research Question 1. Two dichotomous variables were used in all ANCOVA analyses as well. One was an indicator for elementary or secondary level of a school, while the other was the yes/no response to a survey question asking, “Does your school’s mission statement include a vision for the inclusion of student with disabilities?” These two variables were suitable for initial eligibility as covariates, as binary or continuous variables are most appropriate for this role.

Each ANCOVA test featured a different independent factor for which group differences in the dependent score were analyzed. With a total sample size n of 98, group sizes for these independent variables were tested to ensure having sufficient sample size for enough statistical power. Any groups of five observations or fewer were combined with the next closest group to prevent these issues of extremely small group sizes. The following independent factors were used, reflecting the final level groupings:

- Gender (personal demographic)—*this is self-explanatory*
- Years of full-time special education teaching experience (professional experience)—groups representing zero years, 1-6 years, and 7-12 years. (Survey Question 8)
- Approximate number of special education credits in formal training (formal training)—groups representing zero credits, 1-9 credits, 10-15 credits, and 16 or more credits. (Survey Question 10)
- Approximate number of in-service training hours (formal training)—groups representing 0-8 hours, 9-16 hours, 17-24 hours, and 25 or more hours. (Survey Question 11)
- Number of types of specific areas of special education-related formal training (formal training)—groups representing 0-3 types, 4-8 types, and 9-14 types. (Survey Question 12)

- Overall rating of experiences with students with disabilities (professional experiences) — groupings representing scores 10 or under (less than positive experience), 11-16 (somewhat positive experience), and 17-22 (positive experience).

Aside from normality, two other important assumptions that need to be met when running an ANCOVA include homogeneity of variances and a lack of multicollinearity. Homogeneity of variances was tested through Levene's test; an insignificant result indicates that the variances of the dependent variable within each subgroup are equivalent. All ANCOVA tests met this assumption. Multicollinearity is a phenomenon that occurs when a covariate is significantly related to an independent variable; this can lead to over-explanation of variability if such a covariate remains in the model. This assumption was tested by checking for interaction between each covariate and the independent variable and did not present any issues. ANCOVA analysis proceeded as planned.

Gender

Results for the ANCOVA test using overall inclusion attitudes score as the dependent variable, gender as an independent variable and the covariates school level and vision statement are located in Table 9. The ANCOVA test, $F(1, 89) = 0.80, p > .05, \eta^2 = .01$, indicated that when controlling for school level and mission, there were no significant differences in level of attitude toward inclusiveness of special education between men and women. The effect size, $\eta^2 = .01$, indicated that gender practically explained no variability in the dependent variable. The covariates were not significant either, but remained in the model as a part of the study's design.

Estimated marginal means and standard errors, evaluated at .44 for school level and .32 for mission, indicated that while men showed slightly higher levels of inclusion ($M = 42.58, SE = 0.78, n = 39$) than women ($M = 41.65, SE = 0.66, n = 54$), this difference was not significant.

Table 9 ANCOVA Gender and Inclusive Attitudes

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Gender	1	0.80	.01	.37
Mission	1	—	—	.99
School Level	1	0.29	.01	.59
<i>S</i> within-group error	89	(22.89)		

Note. Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square errors. *S* = subjects.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Special Education Experience

Results for the ANCOVA test using overall inclusion attitudes score as the dependent variable, special education experience as an independent variable, and the covariates school level and vision statement are located in Table 10. The ANCOVA test, $F(2, 86) = 0.46, p > .05, \eta^2 = .01$, indicated that when controlling for school level and mission, there were no significant differences in level of attitude toward inclusiveness of special education between administrators with different levels of years of special education experience. The effect size, $\eta^2 = .01$, indicated that special education experience explained almost no variability in the dependent variable. The covariates were not significant either, but remained in the model as a part of the study's design. Estimated marginal means and standard errors, evaluated at .42 for school level and .32 for mission, showed that those with over seven years of special education experience had higher levels of inclusive attitudes ($M = 43.25, SE = 2.01, n = 6$) than either those with no years of special education experience ($M = 41.93, SE = 0.60, n = 65$) or those with 1-6 years of special

education experience ($M = 41.16$, $SE = 1.08$, $n = 20$); however, none of these differences were significant.

Table 10 ANCOVA Special Education Experience and Inclusive Attitudes

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Special Ed Experience	2	0.46	.01	.64
Mission	1	0.01	—	.93
School Level	1	0.32	.01	.58
<i>S</i> within-group error	86	(23.24)		

Note. Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square errors. *S* = subjects.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Special Education Credits

Results for the ANCOVA test using overall inclusion attitudes score as the dependent variable, special education credits in formal training as an independent variable, and the covariates school level and vision statement are located in Table 11. The ANCOVA test, $F(3, 88) = 4.60$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .14$, indicated that when controlling for school level and mission, there was a significant difference in level of attitude toward inclusiveness of special education between administrators with different levels of credit in formal special education training. The effect size, $\eta^2 = .14$, indicated that special education credit level explained a reasonable level of total variability (14%) in the dependent variable. The covariates were not significant, but remained in the model as a part of the study's design.

Estimated marginal means and standard errors, evaluated at .44 for school level and .32 for mission, were tested post-hoc to determine which group or groups differed significantly from the others using the Least Significant Difference test. At the $p < .01$ level, those with zero credits

of formal training had significantly less inclusive attitudes ($M = 39.46$, $SE = 0.86$, $n = 29$) than those with 1-9 credits of formal training ($M = 42.63$, $SE = 0.68$, $n = 44$) or those with 16 or more credits of formal training ($M = 44.48$, $SE = 1.37$, $n = 11$). Additionally, at the $p < .05$ level, those with zero credits of formal training also had significantly less inclusive attitudes than those with 10-15 credits of formal training ($M = 43.68$, $SE = 1.46$, $n = 10$). No other groups differed significantly from one another; however, there was a trend that as levels of credits increased, so did inclusiveness score.

Table 11 ANCOVA Special Education Credits and Inclusive Attitudes

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Special Ed Credits	3	4.60**	.14	.01
Mission	1	0.51	.01	.48
School Level	1	0.30	.01	.58
<i>S</i> within-group error	88	(20.50)		

Note. Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square errors. *S* = subjects.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

In-Service Training Hours

Results for the ANCOVA test using overall inclusion attitudes score as the dependent variable, special education in-service training hours as an independent variable, and the covariates school level and vision statement are located in Table 12. The ANCOVA test, $F(3, 87) = 2.57$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$, indicated that when controlling for school level and mission, there were no significant differences in level of attitude toward inclusiveness of special education between administrators with different levels of special education in-service training hours. The effect size, $\eta^2 = .08$, indicated that despite the lack of significance ($p = .06$, specifically), special education

in-service training hours did explain some level of variability (8%) in the dependent variable. The covariates were not significant either, but remained in the model as a part of the study's design.

Estimated marginal means and standard errors, evaluated at .44 for school level and .31 for mission, showed that those with 0-8 in-service training hours had lower levels of inclusive attitudes ($M = 39.97, SE = 0.90, n = 28$) than those with 9-16 in-service training hours ($M = 43.38, SE = 0.94, n = 25$), those with 17-24 training hours ($M = 42.66, SE = 1.90, n = 6$), or those with 25 or more training hours ($M = 42.66, SE = 0.81, n = 34$); however, none of these group differences showed significance through the ANCOVA test.

Table 12 ANCOVA In-Service Training and Inclusive Attitudes

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
In-Service Training	3	2.57	.08	.06
Mission	1	0.03	—	.86
School Level	1	0.04	—	.84
<i>S</i> within-group error	87	(21.69)		

Note. Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square errors. *S* = subjects.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Number of Areas of Formal Training

Results for the ANCOVA test using overall inclusion attitudes score as the dependent variable, number of areas of formal training in special education as an independent variable, and the covariates school level and vision statement are located in Table 13. The ANCOVA test, $F(2, 89) = 3.52, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$, indicated that when controlling for school level and mission, there was a significant difference in level of attitude toward inclusiveness of special education between

administrators with different number of areas of formal training in special education. The effect size, $\eta^2 = .07$, indicated that number of areas of formal training explained some level of total variability (7%) in the dependent variable. The covariates were not significant, but remained in the model as a part of the study's design.

Estimated marginal means and standard errors, evaluated at .44 for school level and .32 for mission, were tested post-hoc to determine which group or groups differed significantly from the others using the Least Significant Difference test. At the $p < .05$ level, those with 0-3 areas of formal training ($M = 40.38, SE = 0.96, n = 25$) showed significantly less inclusive attitudes than those with 9-14 areas of formal training ($M = 44.14, SE = 1.03, n = 21$). Those with 4-8 areas of formal training ($M = 41.87, SE = 0.68, n = 48$) did not differ significantly in attitude than those in the other groups.

Table 13 ANCOVA Number of Formal Training Areas and Inclusive Attitudes

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Number of Areas	2	3.52*	.07	.03
Mission	1	0.27	.01	.60
School Level	1	0.49	.01	.49
<i>S</i> within-group error	89	(21.73)		

Note. Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square errors. *S* = subjects.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Rating of Overall Experiences with Students with Disabilities

Results for the ANCOVA test using overall inclusion attitudes score as the dependent variable, overall rating of experiences with students with disabilities as an independent variable, and the covariates school level and vision statement are located in Table 14. Since this variable was originally continuous, it was placed into conceptually logical groupings to turn it into a categorical variable, a necessary action to serve as an independent variable in an ANCOVA analysis. The variable's values could range from -22 (highly negative experiences for all 11 questions) to 22 (highly positive experiences for all 11 questions), with zero serving as a neutral midpoint. If someone responded with all 1s (Somewhat Positive Experience), the respondent would have a total score of 11, and someone who answered at the maximum of all twos (Positive Experience) would have a total score of 22, the maximum. This is important to consider because it puts into perspective the concept of "what does this score actually mean" by dividing the total score by the number of questions (11) and being able to answer with a mean item endorsement score. In this dataset, nobody had a score below zero, so negative values were not an issue. Cut points were placed at 10 or under (less than positive experience), 11-16 (somewhat positive experience), and 17-22 (positive experience). Therefore, the first group was the 0-10 group, which meant that, on average, the respondent had somewhere between no experience and a somewhat positive experience. There was then a span of 12 (from 11 to 22, inclusive) to consider for the second group. It was important to consider group sizes when deciding upon appropriate divisions. Keeping just two groups would have led to a split of 24% in the 0-10 category and 76% in the 11-22 category, so the decision was made to divide the somewhat positive to positive experience category into a lower half (11 through 16) and an upper half (17 through 22), which led to more evenly dispersed groups. Four groups would have been excessive, as an even split in

the 0-10 category would have led to an extremely small group—for example, if the split was 0-5 and 6-10, the 0-5 category would have had 6 observations, which is not desirable from a practical perspective for comparing the responses among groups.

The ANCOVA test, $F(2, 89) = 3.17, p < .05, \eta^2 = .07$, indicated that when controlling for school level and mission, there was a significant difference in level of attitude toward inclusiveness of special education between administrators with ratings of experiences with students with disabilities. The effect size, $\eta^2 = .07$, indicated that rating of experiences explained some level of total variability (7%) in the dependent variable. The covariates were not significant, but remained in the model as a part of the study's design.

Estimated marginal means and standard errors, evaluated at .44 for school level and .32 for mission, were tested post-hoc through the least significant differences test (LSD) to determine which group or groups differed significantly from the others using the Least Significant Difference test. At the $p < .05$ level, those with a score of 10 or lower ($M = 40.15, SE = 1.00, n = 23$) showed significantly less inclusive attitudes than those with a score of 17-22 ($M = 43.57, SE = 0.92, n = 26$). Those who scored 11-16 ($M = 41.99, SE = 0.70, n = 45$) did not differ significantly in attitude than those in the other groups.

Table 14 ANCOVA Experiences with Students with Disabilities and Inclusive Attitudes

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2	<i>p</i>
Experience Rating	2	3.17*	.07	.05
Mission	1	0.11	.01	.75
School Level	1	0.67	.01	.42
<i>S</i> within-group error	89	(21.89)		

Note. Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square errors. *S* = subjects.

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

Summary

This chapter has presented the data collected using the self-reporting survey entitled Principals and Inclusion Survey, the statistical analysis performed for each of the three research questions, and the results of the statistical tests including supportive narratives and tables. Results of the study indicate there is a significant positive correlation between principal's attitude toward inclusion and beliefs about appropriate placements for students with disabilities. There was no significant relationship between principal's hypothetical placement decisions and actual placement decisions. Furthermore, when controlling for school level and mission, results indicate a significant relationship between formal training, professional experiences and principals attitude toward inclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECCOMENDATIONS

Problem Statement

This quantitative study was conducted to (a) investigate whether there was a correlation between principal's attitudes toward inclusion and their placement decisions as measured by the self-reporting survey entitled Principals Inclusion Survey; (b) investigate whether there was a relationship between school based principal's hypothetical placement decisions and their actual placement decisions as measured by the self-reporting survey entitled Principals Inclusion Survey; and (c) investigate whether school based principal's attitudes toward inclusion were related to personal demographics, professional experiences and formal training as measured by the self-reporting survey entitled Principals and Inclusion Survey.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The population for this study was public school principals in the southeastern region of the United States. A large urban district in the state of Florida was selected and asked to participate in the study. Permission was granted to contact the school based principals in the district. Of the one hundred eighty schools based principals, one-hundred seventy six elementary, middle and high school principals were selected to participate in the study. Four of the principals are in special schools consisting of only exceptional education students and were not included in the study. In total, ninety-eight principals responded to the survey resulting in a 56% response rate. These ninety-eight public school principals encompass the sample of participants for this study.

A modified Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) was mailed to 176 school based principals in a large urban district in the southeastern region of the United States. Principals received a letter (See Appendix B) explaining the purpose of the survey, consent, as well as instructions and procedures for completing the survey in the mailing. After two weeks a second cover letter (See Appendix C) and survey was mailed to the principals who had not returned surveys. If the survey was not returned following the second mailing, a third mailing was sent with a new cover letter (See Appendix D) and a copy of the instrument. In total, ninety-eight surveys were returned. Once the surveys were checked for completion, the data was analyzed using the SPSS 16.0.

Instrumentation

The Principals and Inclusion Survey (See Appendix A) is divided into four sections including demographics, training and experience, attitudes toward inclusion and hypothetical placements for students with disabilities. Section I of the survey is designed to gather information pertaining to the demographics of the sample. The questions gathered data regarding gender, age, size of student population, types of disabilities and percentage of students identified with disabilities within the school, and special education programs at the school site.

Section II of the questionnaire contains 13 questions designed to gather data on variables that could potentially influence a school based administrator's attitude toward inclusion.

Section III contains 10 items from the Superintendent's Attitude Survey on Integration (SASI) adapted by Stainback (1986). Principals were asked to respond to statements related to an aspect of inclusion using a five point Likert scale with categories ranging from strongly agree to

strongly disagree. A total Attitude score was calculated and used to measure principals' attitudes toward inclusion.

Section IV contains items aimed at getting a better understanding of a principal's beliefs on the appropriate placement of special education students within their school. Section IV lists all the possible disability categories for special education students and what placements school based administrators believe to be most appropriate for these students.

Data Analysis

The relationship between attitude towards inclusive education and educational placement decisions was tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation coefficient. Attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs, was determined by asking participants to respond to 10 Likert scale-based questions soliciting information about attitudes of inclusion. Most appropriate placements for students with disabilities, was determined from data collected by asking principals to indicate the placement they believe would be the most appropriate for students with a given disability.

The relationship between hypothetical placement and actual placement for students of different disability types was tested through a series of chi-square tests for independence.

The final research question examined the differences in principal attitudes toward inclusive education among individuals with different personal demographics, professional experiences, and levels of formal training. Due to prior research, there was a desire to control for the effects of being at different school levels (elementary or secondary) as well as the level of inclusiveness as indicated by a school having a strong vision statement explicitly including student with disabilities. A series of ANCOVA tests were run to test for these differences in attitudes of

inclusiveness. Each ANCOVA test featured a different independent factor for which group differences in the dependent score were analyzed. The following independent factors were used, reflecting the final level groupings: Gender was used as the sole personal demographic factor. Years of full-time special education teaching experience was used as the professional experience factor (Survey Question 8). Approximate number of special education credits in formal training, approximate number of in-service training hours and Number of types of specific areas of special education-related formal training were used as the formal training factors (questions 10-12).

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a correlation between principal's attitude towards inclusive education and student placement decisions?
2. Is there a relationship between a school based principal's hypothetical placement decisions and actual placement decisions at their school site?
3. Are school principals' attitudes toward inclusive education related to personal demographics, professional experiences and formal training?

Summary and Discussion of Findings

A summary and discussion of the findings for the data collected in response to the three research questions were as follows:

Research Question 1

Is there a correlation between principal's attitude towards inclusive education and student placement decisions?

Pearson's Product-Moment correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the relationship between the two variables attitude toward inclusive education and student placement decisions. A total of 92 observations had valid responses for both variables and were used in the calculation. There was a significant positive correlation ($r = .35, p < .01$) between the inclusion attitudes and placement variables. As respondents displayed an increasingly inclusive attitude toward students with special needs, the inclusiveness of their hypothetical placements of these students in the classroom setting also increased. Research conducted by Praisner (2000) found principals with more positive attitudes are more likely to place students in least restrictive environments. Hasselbart (2005) also found a strong correlation with attitude and placement decisions for students with disabilities; the higher the *attitude* score, the more inclusive the preferred placement of special needs students. The findings of this study also support the literature on leadership indicating that principals' attitudes and beliefs influence their behaviors (Fullan, 2003; McCormick, 2000).

Important to note is the fact that although the principals demonstrated fairly high levels of inclusive attitudes, as a whole, inclusion attitudes mean score was 41.95 (out of 50), questions dealing with students with severe disabilities and inclusion yielded lower ratings of agreement with regards to inclusiveness. Over 90% of the principals reported positive ratings to questions related to the education of students with disabilities by a regular education teacher in the general education setting and to questions relating to the benefits of inclusion for both students with and without disabilities (questions 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8). In contrast, when asked if students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school (question 3), only 64% of the principals responded with positive ratings, 25% were uncertain, and 11% disagreed. Villa, et al. (1996) reported similar findings in their study of administrator

and teacher perceptions of educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. A study conducted by Choate (1997) found that although a majority of the participants were in agreement with regards to the benefits of inclusion for all students, most of them agreed that students with severe disabilities should be served outside of the general education classroom. Also, the majority of principals in this study believed the most appropriate placement for students with mild disabilities was in the general education classroom. However, when asked about placement for students with emotional behavior disorders, less than 40% of the principals believed the students could be best served in the regular classroom setting. Results for students with Autism were similar; only 27% of the principals believed the regular classroom was the most appropriate setting. McKelvey (2008) studied the relationships between attitudes of school based administrators and inclusion of students with autism. McKelvey concluded there was a negative attitude toward inclusion of students with autism in the general education classroom.

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between a school based principal's hypothetical placement decisions and actual placement decisions at their school site?

The relationship between hypothetical placement and actual placement for students of different disability types was tested through a series of chi-square tests for independence. There was no significant difference between any of the hypothetical placement decisions and principal's actual placement decision. Nine of the disability types from the survey could be matched with the actual data collected from schools. Only six out of the nine disability types were analyzed with the chi-square analysis; descriptive statistics were provided for the disability types of visually impaired, speech language impaired and other health impaired due to extremely small or missing cell counts.

These results are in part supported by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975 & 1980) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). The Theory of Reasoned Action suggests that a person's behavior is determined by his/her intention to perform the behavior and that this intention is mainly influenced by attitudes and norms (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975 & 1980). TRA describes intention as the best predictor of behavior. This intention is determined by three things: their attitude toward the specific behavior, their beliefs about how people will view their behavior and their perceived ability to perform the given behavior. These predictors lead to intention. A general rule, the more favorable the attitude and the subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control the stronger should the person's intention to perform the behavior in question.

By focusing on attitudes and norms, TRA provides a framework for identifying and measuring the underlying reasons for a person's intent to behave a certain way (Montano & Kasprzyk, 2008). The more we understand about the attitudes and norms that influence intent, the more accurately our interventions can be designed to influence these in a desired direction — toward a more inclusive school.

Research Question 3

Are school principals' attitudes toward inclusive education related to personal demographics, professional experiences and formal training?

The ANCOVA produced significant findings for three of the six independent variables; credits in special education, formal training in inclusive education and professional experiences with students with disabilities. These results can be interpreted to mean that principals with these types of experiences tend to place students with disabilities in more inclusive settings than principals without these experiences. At the $p < .05$ level, principals with zero credits of formal training had significantly less inclusive attitudes than those with 1-9 special education credits or

those with 16 or more special education credits. Also, at the $p < .05$ level, principals with 0-3 areas of formal training in inclusive practices showed significantly less inclusive attitudes than those with 9-14 areas of formal training. These findings support past research conducted by Center et al. (1985) and Washington (2006) where participants with more formal training in special education had statistically more positive attitude toward inclusion but differ from studies conducted by Praisner (2000) and Ramirez (2003) where no significant difference was found in participants who had formal training in inclusive education.

This study found that professional experiences with students with disabilities had a significant effect on principal's attitude toward inclusion. At the $p < .05$ level, principals with profession experience scores of 10 or lower (scores ranged from -22 to 22) showed significantly less inclusive attitudes than those with score between 17- 22. These results support similar findings in other studies. Cox (2008) found significant relationship between professional experience and attitudes of principals toward inclusion; the more positive the experiences principals have with students with disabilities, the more positive their attitude to educate them in the general education setting. Praisner (2000) also found professional experiences with students with disabilities to be a significant factor in determining a principal's attitude toward inclusion.

According to Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) the interrelationship between behavior, environmental factors, and personal factors influence an individual's actions. The results of this study suggest that there is a relationship between principal's professional experiences with students with disabilities and attitude toward inclusion. Principals who indicated more positive experiences had more positive attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities.

The ANCOVA did not show significant relationship to the independent variables of gender, years of full-time special education teaching experience and number of in-service training hours in special education. These results contradict other studies where years of special education teaching experience and in service hours in special education were found to have a significant difference in principal's attitudes toward inclusion (Lindsey, 2009). The participants in Lindsey's study were predominately white females and only targeted middle school principals in the state of Tennessee. The difference in the target population's demographics and characteristics could account for the different results in the two studies.

A study conducted in the state of Mississippi revealed a significant difference in attitudes of school based administrators toward inclusion of students with disabilities based on gender. Brown, (2007) found female administrators displayed more positive attitudes toward inclusion than their male counterparts. Brown's qualitative study involved one elementary school in a suburban area and specifically addressed attitudes toward inclusion of students who have behavioral disorders in the general education classroom.

Conclusions

Recent mandates associated with No Child Left Behind have prompted more principals to address the issue of inclusion in order to improve the delivery of services to student with disabilities. Principals play an influential role in providing for inclusive opportunities for all students. Principal's attitudes toward inclusion are extremely important to the success of inclusion (Praisner, 2000). This research study sought to determine if; (a) there is a correlation between principal's attitude towards inclusive education and student placement decisions; (b) there is a relationship between a school based principal's hypothetical placement decisions and

actual placement decisions at their school site; and (c) school principals' attitudes toward inclusive education are related to personal demographics, professional experiences and formal training. Based on the related literature in educational leadership and special education, and the research findings of this study, it was concluded that:

1. There is a relationship between a principal's attitude toward inclusion and the decisions they make regarding the placement of students with disabilities. Principals with more positive attitudes toward inclusion were more likely to believe students with disabilities could be educated in less restrictive environments.
2. Although principals demonstrated fairly high levels of inclusive attitudes, and believe most students can be educated in the general education classroom, there was a belief by the majority of the principals that students with emotional behavior disorders and autism spectrum disorder are best educated in a separate classroom. Research conducted by Iovannone (1996) found similar results. Administrators, who had more experience with students with diverse severe disabilities, exhibited significantly higher scores on the indicators related to positive attitudes toward inclusion.
3. There was a relationship between principal's professional experiences with students with disabilities and more inclusive attitude toward inclusion. Exposure to positive experiences with students with disabilities needs to be provided to school based administrators. This finding is supported by other research conducted by Praisner (2000) and Hunter (2006) which indicated

positive experiences with students with disabilities had a positive effect on principal's attitudes toward inclusion.

4. Principals who received specific credits in the area of special education as part of their principal preparation programs displayed more positive attitudes toward inclusion.
5. Principals who received training in inclusive education demonstrated more positive attitudes toward inclusion. School districts need to provide multiple opportunities for principals to participate in effective training and staff development in the area of inclusive practices.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate principals attitudes toward inclusion play a role in the decisions they make regarding placement of students with disabilities. Principal's placement decisions were related to their attitude toward inclusion; the more positive their attitude, the more inclusive the placement. School districts should consider attitude when making placement decisions for school based administrators. Furthermore, professional development should focus on attitude development for aspiring leaders and school based principals.

Results from this study indicate special attention needs to be given to those students with more severe disabilities and efforts to include them in less restrictive environments. In particular those students with emotional behavioral disorder and autism were believed be more appropriately educated in a separate classroom. Research conducted by Iovannone (1996) found principals who had more experience with students with severe disabilities exhibited significantly higher scores on indicators related to positive attitudes toward inclusion. School districts should

provide opportunities for principals to participate in staff development focused on needed supports for these types of students to be educated in a less restrictive environment.

The findings from this study support that positive attitudes toward inclusion were related to experiences with individuals with disabilities. In order to change the perceptions of principals it is important to provide principals with positive experiences with students of all types of disabilities. Because there is a high correlation between attitude and behavioral intentions (Bandura, 1977) it is important to understand which factors influence a principals attitudes toward inclusion if we are to continue to provide successful inclusion programs.

Administrator preparation programs need to focus on inclusion as part of the course curriculum. This study has demonstrated that principals with specific credits in special education had significantly more positive attitudes than those principals who did not participate in special education courses as part of their program of study. Previous research indicates principals are not prepared to lead schools in the area of inclusion. The study conducted by Lasky & Karge (2006) also supported the recommendation to increase the trainings principals receive as part of their pre-service programs. The researchers called for specific courses addressing special education topics.

School districts need to incorporate staff development in the area of inclusive practices as part of the on-going professional development provided to school leaders. Results of this study indicate principals who received training in inclusive practices displayed more positive attitudes toward inclusion. Martin (2004) concluded that principals are instrumental in determining whether inclusion is implemented in their schools and the extent to which it is accomplished. Principals with more training in inclusive practices exhibited higher levels of inclusion in their buildings.

Implications for Further Research

1. Replicate this study to include principals from a larger sample from both urban and rural districts.
2. Replicate this study to include an interview with principals of schools with and without inclusive classrooms at their school site.
3. Examine if educational administration programs have an impact on principal's attitudes toward inclusion.
4. Examine school factors such as teacher training, resources, support, and their effect on principal's attitudinal tendencies toward inclusion.
5. Examine if inclusion of special education students affects standardized tests scores and Annual Yearly Progress of a class. Additionally, to study if inclusion has any effect on the test scores of students with and without disabilities in an inclusive classroom.
6. Examine secondary teacher's attitudes toward inclusion and the factors that influence their attitudes.
7. Examine the administrative supports needed for inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

APPENDIX A: PRINCIPALS AND INCLUSION SURVEY

Principals and Inclusion Survey

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

SECTION I – Demographic Information

The following information will 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 IEP's in your building: *(Do not include gifted)*
 0-5% 6-10% 11-15% 16-20% 21% or more
4. Approximate number of students with IEP's 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%
5. Your age:
 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61 or more
6. Gender: Male Female

SECTION II– Training and Experience

1. Years of full-time regular education teaching experience:
 0 1-6 7-12 13-18 19 or more
2. Years of full-time special education teaching experience:
 0 1-6 7-12 13-18 19 or more
3. Years as a school principal:
 0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21 or more
4. Approximate number of special education credits in your formal training:
 0 1-9 10-15 16-21 22 or more
5. Approximate number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices:
 0 1-8 9-16 17-24 25 or more

6. Mark the areas below that were included in your formal training such as courses, workshops and/or significant portions of courses **(10% of content of 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
7. Are you certified in special education? No Yes
8. Does your school have a specific plan to deal with crisis involving students with special needs? No Yes
9. 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
- | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self | <input type="checkbox"/> Immediate family member | <input type="checkbox"/> Extended family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighbor | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
10. Does your school's mission statement include a vision for the inclusion of students with disabilities? No Yes

11. 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
Intellectual Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Blindness/Visual Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Speech and Language Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Autism/Pervasive Development Disorder	<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"/>
Deaf/Hearing Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multi-handicap	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neurological Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotional Behavior Disorder	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Health Impaired	<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 disabilities in a school setting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with 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. An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. In general, students with 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 disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. General education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.	<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 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 disabilities are integrated into general 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. Please mark only one per section.

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

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 of most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Emotional Behavior Disorder

- 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 of most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Speech and 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 of 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 of most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Physical 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 of most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Blindness/Visual 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 of most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Deafness/hearing 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 of most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Multi-handicap

- 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 of most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

Autism/pervasive developmental disorder

- 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 of most of day
- Full-time regular education with support

APPENDIX B: INITIAL CONTACT LETTER



Dear Principal,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study titled Inclusionary Practices: Impact of Administrators' Beliefs on Placement Decisions. Whether you take part is up to you.

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors related to school based administrators' beliefs toward inclusive education and the impact of these attitudes on the placement of students with disabilities. The survey questionnaire is designed to examine whether demographics, program issues, training and experience affect principals' beliefs toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and how these beliefs impact placement decisions. The results of the survey will be very helpful in determining future trainings and support for school based administrators.

I am asking that you take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope. The survey should only take 15 minutes to complete. You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints you may contact me, Maria Vazquez, Graduate Student, College of Education (407) 459-0105 or Dr. Suzanne Martin, Ed D. in Education, College of Education at (407) 823-4260 or by email at martin@mail.ucf.edu.

Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It's only with the generous help of people like you that our research can be successful.

Sincerely,

Maria Vazquez

APPENDIX C: SECOND CONTACT LETTER



Dear Principal,

A few weeks ago you received a letter inviting you to participate in a research study titled Inclusionary Practices: Impact of Administrators' Beliefs on Placement Decisions.

If you have already completed and returned the survey to me, please accept my sincere thanks. If not, I have enclosed another copy of the questionnaire with this letter. I am asking that you take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope. The survey should only take 15 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It's only with the generous help of people like you that our research can be successful.

Sincerely,

Maria Vazquez

APPENDIX D: FINAL CONTACT LETTER



Dear Principal,

Over the last weeks I have sent you several mailings inviting you to participate in an important research study.

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors related to school based administrators' beliefs toward inclusive education and the impact of these attitudes on the placement of students with disabilities. The survey questionnaire is designed to examine whether demographics, program issues, training and experience affect principals' beliefs toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and how these beliefs impact placement decisions. The results of the survey will be very helpful in determining future trainings and support for school based administrators.

The study is drawing to a close and I am asking that you take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope. The survey should only take 15 minutes to complete.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints you may contact me, Maria Vazquez, Graduate Student, College of Education (407) 459-0105 or Dr. Suzanne Martin, Ed D. in Education, College of Education at (407) 823-4260 or by email at martin@mail.ucf.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It's only with the generous help of people like you that our research can be successful.

Sincerely,

Maria Vazquez

APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Maria Vazquez**

Date: **December 16, 2009**

Dear Researcher:

On 12/16/2009, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Initial Review
Project Title: Inclusionary Practices: Impact of Administrators' Beliefs on Placement Decisions
Investigator: Maria Vazquez
IRB Number: SBE-09-06366
Funding Agency: None

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Janice Turchin on 12/16/2009 02:02:13 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

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