

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES
TOWARD INCLUSION OF SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS
IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING

A DISSERTATION

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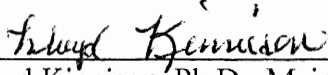
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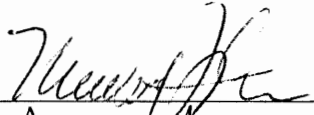
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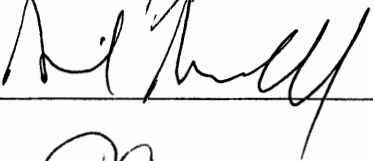
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jerri De' Lane Harris entitled "Elementary School Assistant Principals' Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Special Needs Students In The General Education Setting." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Special Education.

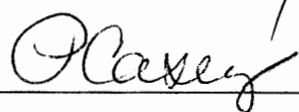


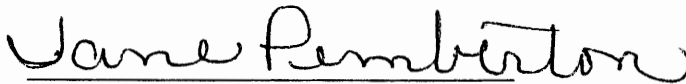
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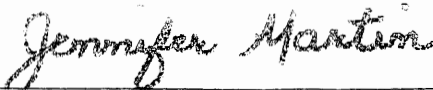






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DEDICATION

To God, for creating and blessing me. I never could have made it without him.

To my parents, Jerry and Rubye, for being the BEST parents on this side of heaven.

Thank you for your unwavering support, encouragement, and love.

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ABSTRACT

JERRI DE'LANE HARRIS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION OF SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING

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The purpose of this study was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and recommended instructional arrangement related to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. The following six questions guided the study:

- (1) Are the attitudes of the elementary school assistant principals more positive or negative in relation to the inclusion of special education students in the general education setting?
- (2) Is there a relationship between the elementary school assistant principals' knowledge of special education law and their attitudes toward inclusion?
- (3) Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with autism?
- (4) Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with serious emotional disturbance?
- (5) Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with specific learning disabilities?

- (6) Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with mental retardation?

The study involved a quantitative survey that measured the elementary school assistant principals' attitude and recommended instructional arrangement related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

The findings of this study revealed that the elementary school assistant principals responded convolutedly in regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. There were relationships found between the elementary school assistant principals' knowledge of special education law, and their attitudes toward inclusion. Additionally, relationships were found between the elementary school assistant principals' years of teaching regular education, years of teaching special education, and training in inclusive practices.

When recommending the appropriate instructional arrangement for students with disabilities, the elementary school assistant principals' recommendations varied. The elementary school assistant principals recommended that students with autism, mental retardation, and serious emotional disturbance be placed in more restrictive settings for most or all of the school day; however, for students with specific learning disabilities, the elementary school assistant principals recommended that these students receive regular classroom instruction with support and resources.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT.....	v
LIST OF TABLES	x
 Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004	2
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)	3
Inclusion and the Assistant Principal	4
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Assumptions.....	10
Limitations	11
Significance of the Study	11
Summary	12
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	13
The History of Inclusion	14
Inclusion and Court Cases	15
Inclusion, Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEIA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB).....	18
Inclusion and Students with Autism	19
Inclusion and Students with Serious Emotional Disturbance	20
Inclusion and Students with Specific Learning Disabilities	22
Inclusion and Mental Retardation	23
Parents' Attitudes Regarding Inclusion.....	26
Teachers' Attitudes Regarding Inclusion.....	29

Principals Attitudes Toward Inclusion.....	31
Inclusion and the Assistant Principal.....	34
III. METHODOLOGY	37
Participants.....	37
Setting	38
Population and Sample	39
Instrumentation	39
Design and Procedures.....	39
Participant Permission	39
Survey	40
Duration of Study.....	40
Research Questions	41
Data Analysis	41
IV. RESULTS	43
Data Collection	43
Demographic Characteristics of the Elementary School	
Assistant Principals.....	44
Research Question One.....	47
Research Question Two	62
Research Question Three	66
Research Question Four.....	67
Research Question Five	68
Research Question Six	69
Summary	72
V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE	
RESEARCH.....	73
Discussion	73
Research Question One.....	73
Research Question Two	75
Research Question Three	76
Research Question Four.....	77
Research Question Five	78
Research Question Six	79
Conclusions.....	82
Limitations	83
Future Research	84

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Demographic Information.....	44
2. Educational Levels and Experience of the Assistant Principals	45
3. Total Number of Students in the Assistant Principals' Elementary School	46
4. Number of Special Education Students in the Elementary School Building.....	47
5. Attitudes Toward Inclusion.....	48
6. Means and Standard Deviations of Attitudes Toward Inclusion Items	51
7. Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between Attitudes Toward Inclusion Items.....	53
8. Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Age, Years of Teaching Regular Education, Years of Teaching Special Education, and Training in Inclusive Practices.....	58
9. Knowledge of Special Education Law.....	62
10. Knowledge of Special Education Terms.....	63
11. Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Understanding of Special Education Law and Terms.....	64
12. Instructional Arrangements for Students with Autism	67
13. Instructional Arrangements for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities	68
14. Instructional Arrangements for Students with Serious Emotional Disturbance	69
15. Appropriate Placement for Students with Mental Retardation	70
16. Summary of Instructional Arrangements.....	71

REFERENCES	85
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APPENDICES

A. Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects.....	104
B. Survey.....	106

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The key to successful inclusion is the implementation of instructional approaches and methods that meet the unique needs of the included students with disabilities in the classroom. As federal regulations emerged in response to research, most educators have adopted an inclusive philosophy toward educating students with special needs (Brennan, 2005). The recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) in 2004 has broadened the leadership responsibilities of the school administrators (including elementary school assistant principals) to ensure the provision of inclusive education for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The role of the elementary school assistant principal is instrumental in the success or failure of the inclusive philosophy. In order for inclusion to be successful, the elementary school assistant principal must create an effective school climate and support instruction (Jahnke, 2001).

The elementary school assistant principals play a critical role in shaping the educational climate that provides opportunities for interactions between nondisabled and disabled students (Dyal, Flynt, & Walker, 1996). When inclusive policies are implemented in schools, the success or failure of the policies will depend on the administrators. With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act IDEIA and the increasing number of students identified as needing special education, the role of the elementary school assistant principal is changing.

The topic of inclusion in the field of education has become an academic buzz word (Brennan, 2005). According to Praisner (2000), inclusion is defined as a service delivery model designed to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities within the regular classroom to the maximum extent appropriate. Inclusion allows for full access of the social and educational opportunities with their non-disabled peers. Inclusion implies that students with disabilities are children first and their disabilities come second. According to Almog (2008), inclusion is based on philosophical, social, and educational principles that value diversity and recognize the right of every student to study and experience a sense of belonging. Inclusion does not mean the physical placement of students with special needs in the general education setting. Inclusion should be perceived as a continuing process that is dependent on the reconstruction and reorganization of instructional strategies and curriculum.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004

The legal mandate driving inclusive education in the United States is Public Law 94-142, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004. Although the specific terms inclusion and inclusive education cannot be found in IDEIA, the definition of least restrictive environment (LRE) is a key requirement of the law. LRE provided the initial legal impetus for creating inclusive education. The law states that:

to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEIA 2004, p. 3)

According to the same legislation, least restrictive environment (LRE) for a student is defined as the balance between an individual child's needs for extraordinary treatment and limitations on their right to be educated in a normal environment (Turnbull, 1982). Therefore, the LRE mandate has been a leading force in the design and implementation of inclusive education.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) (NCLB) is the most far-reaching attempt by the federal government to alter American public education (Beaver, 2004). On January 8, 2002, then President George Bush signed the NCLB. The Department of Education describes this act as the most important federal reform in more than three decades (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a). This act holds schools accountable for all student academic success including students with disabilities by hiring highly qualified teachers for every classroom, testing all students in grades three through twelve in the subject areas of reading, math, and science (students are required to demonstrate proficiency levels in basic subject matter areas measured by standardized tests); and offering transfers

to better schools to students attending low-performing schools. (U.S. Department of Education 2002b). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law also requires students with disabilities to participate in district and state assessments to help ensure schools, school districts, and states are held accountable for the achievement of students with disabilities.

Inclusion and the Assistant Principal

Ensuring appropriate educational opportunities for students with special needs is one of the most crucial challenges facing schools today. Nothing has affected public education more than the education of special needs children (Boyd & Parish, 1996). Inclusion for special needs students came to the forefront of educational dialogue during the 1980s (Will, 1984). For more than a quarter of a century, schools have been challenged to meet federal laws regarding the education of students with disabilities (Turnball & Cilley, 1999).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) specifies that students with disabilities must have access to general education. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) creates additional provisions to ensure that no children, especially those with the greatest learning needs, are neglected in standards-driven learning environments. With the recent reauthorization of the IDEIA, there are increased expectations for school administrators to enact educational reforms to ensure the provision of inclusive education for students with disabilities, calling for an increase in the leadership role of the elementary school assistant principal.

For the last 40 years, the assistant principalship has been deemed a necessary position in schools. The first substantial data about the assistant principalship was a survey conducted by the National Education Association (NEA) in 1970. The NEA report (1970) indicated that the assistant principalship originated in Boston in 1867. The superintendent practiced having an assistant take charge in his absence. Due to complexities and responsibilities, the principal required assistance in managing the school.

The assistant principalship was introduced as an administrative position during the 1940s and 1950s (Lindley, 1998). The assistant principal position has been without a consistent, well-defined job description and a delineation of duties. From the beginning, the assistant principalship has been an entry-level position for aspiring principals (Creedon, 1970). The assistant principal position in its earliest form dealt with extracurricular activities, distributing textbooks, and monitoring attendance (Lachiondo, 1985).

According to (Dyer, 1991; Lachiondo, 1985) assistant principals were often ignored and maligned. They were considered as someone who takes some of the burdens off the principal, dealing mostly with attendance, discipline, and extracurricular activities. The traditional leadership roles of assistant principals have changed since the 1980s. The role of the assistant principal is no longer low level managerial and less clerical (Kindsvatter & Tasi, 1971).

The role of the elementary school assistant principal is more complex and requires expertise in many areas when working to achieve school goals (Lindley, 1998). The leadership role of the elementary school assistant principal has increased due to recent demands placed upon schools. Only recently has the role of the assistant principal been seen as a valuable asset to the school's organization (Marshall, 1992). Panyako and Rorie (1987) stated that today's assistant principals must possess necessary leadership and interpersonal skills when working with their staff to accomplish school goals, and supervising and communicating effectively with students, parents, and community.

The elementary school assistant principal's role has expanded to include monitoring curriculum and instruction, conducting teacher evaluations, coordinating district and statewide testing, attending meetings for students with disabilities, collaborating with the general and special education teachers in regards to students with special needs in the inclusive setting, and developing activities for staff development. Finally, Calabrese (1991) reported that in effective schools, the elementary school assistant principals are dynamic, enthusiastic, creative, and caring. Thus, the elementary school assistant principal has a major influence on the school's daily operations.

Statement of Problem

The recent reauthorization of IDEIA has broadened the leadership responsibilities of the elementary school assistant principal to ensure the provision of inclusive education for students with disabilities in the general education setting. The elementary school assistant principal is instrumental in the success of inclusive practices of the elementary

school. The focus of this study was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and recommended instructional arrangements related to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. The results of this study will provide insight on how elementary school assistant principals' attitudes will affect the inclusive philosophy in schools and classrooms across the state of Texas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes related to inclusion and the recommended instructional arrangements of special needs students in the general education setting. This study analyzes specific demographic characteristics of the elementary school assistant principals related to their attitudes toward the implementation of inclusive practices and the recommended instructional arrangements of students with disabilities.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were examined:

1. Are the attitudes of the elementary school assistant principals more positive or negative in relation to the inclusion of special education students in the general education setting?
2. Is there a relationship between the elementary school assistant principals' knowledge of special education law and their attitude toward inclusion?
3. Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with autism?

4. Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with serious emotional disturbance?
5. Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with specific learning disabilities?
6. Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with mental retardation?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used:

Attitude -A manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one's disposition or opinion.
(Guralnik, 1986).

Autism - A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3 that adversely affects a child's educational performance (Knoblauch and Sorenson, 1998).

Inclusion - A service of delivery model designed to meet the educational needs of special education students within the regular classroom to the maximum extent appropriate. Inclusion allows for the full access of the social and educational opportunities with their non-disabled peers (Praisner, 2000).

Mental Retardation –“Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behaviors and manifested during the

development period that adversely affects a child's educational performance"

(Knoblauch and Sorenson, 1998. p. 3).

No Child Left Behind (2002) - This act holds schools accountable for student academic success by: hiring highly qualified teachers for every classroom, testing all students in grades three through twelve in the subject areas of reading, math, and science (students are required to demonstrate proficiency levels in basic subject matter areas measured by standardized test), and offering transfers to better schools to students attending low-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education 2002b).

Serious Emotional Disturbance - A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics displayed over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers
- Inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances
- A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (Knoblauch and Sorenson, 1998).

Specific Learning Disabled - A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological

processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. This term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. This term does not include children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, mental retardation, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (Knoblauch and Sorenson, 1998).

Students with Disabilities – “The definition from the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA states that students with a disability are those having “mental retardation, hearing impairments deafness, speech or language impairments, blindness, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who because of those impairments need special education and related services.” (Praisner, 2000, p.32.

Assumptions

This study assumed that the attitudes of elementary school assistant principals would influence either the success or failure of the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. This study also assumed that the elementary school assistant principal would recommend the instructional arrangement of students with

disabilities in the inclusive setting. This study assumed that the participants would honestly respond to the survey instrument.

Limitations

This research was a study of convenience. This study was conducted using only elementary school assistant principals from one metropolitan school district in North Central Texas. Since cultures and attitudes in elementary schools differ from state to state, the findings may only be generalized to geographic locations where similar attitudes and cultures exist. Therefore, this sample may not represent the true characteristics of the total population.

Another possible limitation may be the size of the sample and the recruiting of participants. Another potential limitation is related to the randomization of the study. Results may be affected by the number of responses and voluntary participation. Although there are some possible limitations, this study will produce significant findings that may contribute to the research of elementary school assistant principals and their attitudes related to the inclusion and recommended instructional arrangement of special needs students in the general education setting.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and the recommended instructional arrangements of special needs students in the general education setting. The attitudes of the elementary school assistant principals toward the inclusion of special needs students in the general education classroom may

negatively or positively affect the practice of inclusion in their schools and classrooms. This study was intended to further understand how attitudes and characteristics of the recommended instructional arrangement of elementary school assistant principals could be useful in effectively and efficiently implementing the inclusive practice at their campuses. Information gained through this study on inclusion and the recommended instructional arrangement may lead to significant implications for the use of inclusion of special needs students in general education setting across the state of Texas.

Summary

Inclusion is a philosophy, a process, and an outcome that offers children with disabilities opportunities to learn, play, and live in the community with their relatives and friends who do not have disabilities. Inclusion is becoming increasingly recognized in classrooms. Therefore, examining the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and the recommended instructional arrangement of special needs students in the general education setting may provide greater insight into the success of inclusion. The purpose of this study was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and recommended instructional arrangement related to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. Information gathered through this study may have implications for inclusion to increase the academic and social success of students with disabilities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of inclusion is based on the premise that children with exceptional abilities and backgrounds benefit both academically and socially in a learning environment with their non-disabled, achieving peers (Turnball, Turnball, Shank, and Smith (2004). There is no single inclusion approach. There are various inclusion delivery models that have been designed for the gifted as well as the non-gifted students with exceptional needs. In a very broad sense, inclusion represents a philosophy that promotes the participation of children with disabilities in all aspects of school and community life.

The inclusion philosophy states children and young adults with disabilities should be served whenever possible in the general education classroom setting. These inclusion settings should be supported by trained personnel, and the needs of the individual student should be met. The planning and delivery of the inclusion model is the shared responsibility of the general and specially trained instructional staff. According to Salisbury (1991), the inclusion setting should be driven by the philosophy that the diverse needs of all children should be accommodated to the maximum extent possible within the general education curriculum. Public schools across America are currently attempting to implement various inclusive approaches. These approaches vary from state to state, school to school, and classroom to classroom. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of

these inclusion delivery models, emphasis should be placed on examining the students' academic outcomes and social-behavioral outcomes.

The History of Inclusion

Special education in the United States began in 1823 in the state of Kentucky. The state of Kentucky established a state school for people who were deaf. After this school was established, special classes were developed to remove incorrigible children from the regular education classroom so the other students left in the classroom without disabilities would benefit (Rudd, 2002). Lipsky and Gartner (1997) reported that some schools went so far as to keep the retarded children in basements where their classes were held.

Rudd (2002) concluded that prior to 1975 most children with disabilities were not encouraged to attend some public schools. Their parents had very little authority in their children's educational matters and were told by school personnel that their children were uneducable and untrainable prompting many parents to educate their disabled children on their own. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is considered to be the first civil rights legislation for individuals with disabilities. This law required access to public buildings for people with disabilities. This law also set the stage for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA provided equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in public education.

The passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, had a major impact on education. In essence, this act gave all children with

disabilities ages 6 through 21 access to free public education. The most recent reauthorization of IDEA (2004) occurred during the Bush administration. This amendment was written to involve students with disabilities more in the general education curriculum. It also offered new protections to students and parents when dealing with the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and required students with disabilities to take part in state and local assessments. The Reauthorization of 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; P.L. 108-446): links IDEIA with No Child Left Behind (2002). The No Child Left Behind Act was created to ensure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency (Nolan, 2004).

Inclusion and Court Cases

The concept of disability rights in education did not occur overnight (Nolan, 2004). The quest for equality in education dates back as early as 1954 with the civil rights movement. There are many court cases that facilitate educating the disabled. Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) was one major case that impacted the United States Supreme Court.

This case concerned the separate but equal provision concerning racially segregated education (Nolan, 2004). The court ruled that the segregated facilities diminished educational opportunities, and reduced interaction with those of other backgrounds and ethnicities. These findings ultimately ended segregation in the public schools. This court case was later used by advocates to end segregation in public schools

for children and adolescents with disabilities. Some cases have made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court.

Two such cases were made in Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia. These were the first two judicial decisions affecting the educational lives of children with disabilities. The first case was the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) vs. the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (also known as PARC vs. Penn., 1972). This case was brought by PARC and 13 children with mental retardation.

This class action suit was filed against the state of Pennsylvania alleging that Pennsylvania denied these children with mental retardation access to the public schools (Nolan, 2004). A consent decree settled this lawsuit. In this decree, the state of Pennsylvania was prevented from applying, denying, or postponing access to public education for children with mental retardation. The decree also guaranteed that the state would identify all school-aged children with mental retardation and place them in a free public program of education appropriate to their capacity. Finally, the court concluded it would be highly desirable to educate children with mental retardation in programs most similar to those of children without disabilities.

In the second case, the 1972 District of Columbia case involved the parents and guardians of seven children with disabilities from Washington, DC. In this case, these seven children with disabilities were not permitted to attend public schools. This case was settled by a direct judgment against the District of Columbia School Board. The court

ruled that the District of Columbia schools must provide all children, regardless of the severity of their disabilities, a publicly funded education.

There were other judicial decisions that support inclusion. One important least restrictive environment (LRE) court decision included the case of the Sacramento City Unified School District v. Holland. This was the first court case to present a judicial definition of inclusion (Martin, 1992). Rachel Holland was a special education student with moderate mental retardation.

Rachel attended special education classes for four years, and then her parents requested that she be placed in a full-time regular education class. The school district denied her parents' request. There were mediations and appeals. The Court adopted a LRE standard. The decision as to whether a child should be educated in a regular classroom setting all, part, or none of the time is a necessary inquiry into the needs and abilities of the child, and does not extend to a group or category of handicapped children (Partin, 1992). The Court ruled that Rachel and her peers would benefit from this inclusive placement.

The most current language of the federal mandate concerning inclusive education comes from the Amendments to the IDEA. IDEA requires children with disabilities be educated in regular classrooms unless the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. This means that schools have a duty to try and include students with disabilities in the regular general education classes.

Inclusion, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), and No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

The reauthorized of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) was signed into law December 3, 2004 and requires that students with disabilities be educated in the regular education classroom (Savich, 2008). The provisions of the act became effective July 5, 2005. It provided the initial legal impetus for creating inclusive education.

IDEIA mandates that:

“Each state must establish procedures that assure that: to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled unless the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.” (Savich, 2008, p. 16)

When Congress reauthorized IDEIA, effort was put forth to align this law with the NCLBA (Cole, 2006). Many stakeholders believed the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) was the most significant piece of legislation that affects the education of students with disabilities since the passage of IDEA in 1975 (Cole). NCLB was enacted to “ensure all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education” (Savich, 2008). NCLB was aligned with the philosophy of the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Cole, 2006). The NCLB Act sets higher expectations for students with disabilities. It calls for greater inclusion and less exclusion (Savich, 2008). Both IDEIA and NCLB have a multitude of

requirements, expectations, and mandates for states and school districts as they relate to students with special needs (Cole, 2006).

Inclusion and Students with Autism

The Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 1997 included children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in the general education classroom (Simpson, Boer-Ott, & Smith-Myles, 2003). Autism Spectrum Disorders are medical conditions that are considered a lifetime disability (Godnek, 2008). These disorders include Autistic Disorder, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Rett Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Asperger's Syndrome. Other characteristics often associated with Autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. Autism was added as a separate category of disability in 1990 under P.L. 101-476. (Knoblauch and Sorenson, 1998).

Children and youth with ASD often exhibit irregular patterns of cognitive and educational strengths and deficits, including splinter skills and isolated discontinuous abilities (Jordan, 1999; Simpson, 2001). Children and youth with ASD are also characterized as having significant deficits in basic areas of functioning, including social interactions, communication, learning, and behavior thus contributing to the challenges of educators serving them (Happe, 1998; Quill, 1995; Zager, 1999). According to the pioneers Kanner and Asperger, persons with ASD were described as perplexing and mystifying individuals. For decades, this legacy has continued. Persons with autism-

related disabilities remain an intriguing mystery to many professionals (Klin, Volmar, & Sparrow, 2000). School professionals have reported that they consider themselves to be less capable of serving students identified as having ASD (Spears, Tollefson, & Simpson, 2001).

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, ASDs are believed to affect an estimated one in every 150 American children (Godek, 2008). The number of students diagnosed with ASD is on the rise. Children diagnosed with ASD need individualized education plans to meet their unique social and communication needs in the federally mandated LRE. Connecting these factors, the implementation of an inclusionary model of service, provide little argument that students with ASD present significant educational challenges.

Inclusion and Students with Serious Emotional Disturbance

The inclusion of students diagnosed with serious emotional disturbance (SED) has been a prominent and contentious issue for decades (Simpson, 2004). Historically, students with SED were served in specialized, self-contained schools and classrooms. As of the late 1970s, students with emotional and behavioral problems received most, if not all, of their services in special classrooms and schools. These students received minimal interactions with non-disabled peers (Simpson, 2004). Students with SED are an especially difficult group to successfully integrate in the general education setting when full inclusion is the objective (Kauffman and Hallahan, 1995; Lewis, Chard, and Scott, 1994; Zionts, 1997).

According to Walker, Ramsey, and Gresham (2004), children and youth with SED demonstrate significant deficits in several areas of functioning—including social interaction, academic performance, and behavior. These students with SED also have difficulties abiding by basic rules of conduct, relating inappropriately with others, and are unsuccessful with following and mastering school curriculum (Rosenberg, Wilson, Maheady, & Sindelar, 2003). For these reasons, there is little argument that students with SED present significant educational challenges. These challenges are often magnified when these students are educated in the general education setting (Simpson, 2004).

If not treated, children and youth with emotional disturbance tend to leave school before graduating, and their problems persist into adulthood. These problems are characterized as having inappropriate interpersonal and socially deviant behavior, which often results in criminal activity, incarceration, unemployment, work-related problems, poor marital adjustments and social relations (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Kauffman, 2005; Kehle, and Bray, 2004; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004).

A salient solution for this reform was the inclusionary delivery model of students with disabilities in the general education programs and classrooms. The rates of inclusion for students with SED have historically been significantly lower for students with SED (Kauffman, Lloyd, Hallahan, & Astuto, 1995; U. S. Department of Education, 1990-2003). Children and adolescents characterized with emotional disturbance are under diagnosed and underserved (Coutinho & Denny, 1996). However, data trends reflect an increased incidence of the disorder.

It is estimated that there are as many as 9,000,000 children in the United States with serious emotional disturbance (SED). This estimate is projected to rise within the next 50 years as the number of children with mental disorders climb from 20 % to nearly 50 %. The increase of incidence is due to environmental based factors such as: cultural deprivation, poor nutrition, drug abuse, single parent families, and victimization (Reddy, 2001). As we move toward inclusion, there remains a significant challenge to find ways to successfully include students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Children with emotional/behavioral disorders are the least welcomed in the general education setting (Guetzloe, 1994). Simply placing students with emotional/behavioral disorders in the general education setting is not sufficient enough to produce successful inclusion (Lewis, Chard, & Scott, 1994).

Inclusion and Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

A trend in recent school reform has been the movement to serve children with specific learning disabilities (SLD) in the general education classroom as an alternative to providing services in self-contained classes or pull-out programs (Sailor, 1991). This trend is consistent with the intent of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142). This act mandates that all children with handicaps be educated in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent possible. Published literature in the area of special education shows increased recommendations for inclusive educational programming (Hardie, 1993; Nathanson, 1992; Salisbury, 1991).

Inclusion is not a new practice for students with LD. As early as the 1970s, Kephart was advocating for a full continuum of services for students with LD. As early as 1969, a description of full inclusion services for students with LD appeared in literature (Serio & Todd, 1969). Schools have been educating students with LD in the general education setting for more than two decades (Zigmond & Baker, 1996).

Since the passage of PL 94-142, the Education of Children with Disabilities Act in 1975, public schools have been obliged to provide special education services and related services to students diagnosed with LD. Consistent with the law, schools have organized special education services to allow students with LD to receive appropriate instruction from a special education teacher and to participate to the maximum extent possible with the instruction being delivered to non-disabled peers in the general education classroom.

Inclusion and Mental Retardation

Mental retardation has been defined and will continue to be defined in various ways. In the state of Texas, mental retardation is defined as:

A student with mental retardation is one who:

- (A) “has been determined to have significantly sub-average intellectual functioning as measured by a standardized, individually administered test of cognitive ability in which the overall test score is at least two standard deviations below the mean, when taking into consideration the standard error of measurement of the test, and

(B) concurrently exhibits deficits in at least two of the following areas of adaptive behavior: communication, self-care, home living, social/interpersonal skills, use of community resources, self-direction, functional academic skills, work, leisure, health, and safety.” (IDEIA, 2008, p. 7)

People with mental retardation struggle to perform everyday types of behaviors that would be expected of people of similar age and from the same cultural backgrounds. The severity of mental retardation ranges from mild difficulties in dealing with everyday activities to extreme limitations in basic areas of functioning that make the person dependent on others for basic skilled nursing care. (World Health Organization, 2001).

Regarding intelligence, individuals with mental retardation have impairments in the learning processes, including memory, generalization, and motivation. In 1968, Dunn raised the question about efficacy of special classes for students with mild mental retardation. He presented a review of existing research that suggested the most appropriate education placement for students with mild mental retardation was in the general education setting. Educating students with special needs in general education classrooms with their non-disabled peers has gained recognition and support (Salisbury, Palombaro, & Hollowood, 1993).

In recent debates, students with mental retardation have been a concern. This concern also included the most appropriate placement for these students with special needs. Traditionally, students with mental retardation were mostly serviced in self-contained settings designed specifically for them (Polloway, 1984). For these special with

special needs, self-contained classrooms were the norm (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 1995).

The push to integrate students with disabilities was spawned by the need for opportunities for interaction between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, the hope of improved opportunities for social interaction, and the presumed academic performance of students educated in the mainstream (Stevens & Slavin, 1991; Roberts, Pratt, & Leach, 1991). In the 1980s, the Regular Education Initiative (REI) was introduced as a means of normalizing the lives of students with disabilities (Will, 1984). The REI refers to the placement of students with mild mental retardation into classes with their non-disabled peers (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989). The REI's original focus was with students with mild and learning disabilities (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1989; Will, 1984).

However, by the late 1980s, the REI's concept had expanded to call for the full inclusion movement of all students with disabilities in general educational programs. The full inclusion movement has been driven by the needs of students with Mental Retardation (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Snell & Drake, 1994). The REI and inclusion movement has necessitated both academic and social interaction between students with mental retardation and their non-disabled peers. (Phillips-Hershey and Ridley, 1996). Other advocates for students with intellectual disabilities believe that inclusive education, when adequately funded and supported by educators, enables all students to be treated

with dignity and that their unique contributions are recognized (Downing & Peckingham-Hardin, 2007; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2002).

Other supporters of inclusion cite that children with disabilities who are educated in the general education classes are more likely to be engaged with learning and to communicate effectively with their non-disabled peers and teachers (Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, & Smyth King, 2004; Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994). Other benefits of including students with mental retardation in the general education setting include increased academic skills for students with disabilities and opportunities for students with special needs to make choices and develop self-determination (Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 1999; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

Parents' Attitudes Regarding Inclusion

Parent advocacy has been a driving force in the movement toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education in many schools throughout the country (Soodak, 2004). The United States has a long, rich history of parent advocacy, resulting in groundbreaking changes in the education of students with disabilities. The Education Act for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was the culmination of a process that spanned many years. The voices of parents and their involvement in the education of their children concerning inclusion has been a positive force in education.

Parent participation is a vital component in the education of students with disabilities (Yssel, Engelbrecht, Oswald, Eloff, & Swart, 2007). The importance of

understanding or the attempt to understand the parent's position cannot be overemphasized. Parents are integral members of the multidisciplinary team responsible for evaluation and placement decisions mandated by the IDEIA of 2004. According to Soodak (2004), the movement toward inclusion must include parent perspectives because parents are one of the primary stakeholders in the success of inclusive education.

Research by Soodak and Erwin (2000) indicates that parents are effective partners in the inclusionary process only when they feel that they, along with their children, are accepted members of the school community. According to Garrick and Salend (2000), parents supported inclusion because it promoted acceptance, which is crucial to the child's social and emotional development. Studies have revealed that parents of children with disabilities believe that inclusion helped their children develop emotionally, academically, and socially. Other parent perceptions are that inclusion increased acceptance, opportunities to learn, and availability of good developmental models (Bailey & Winston, 1987; Bennett, Deluca, & Bruns, 1997; Guralnick, 1994).

In one study, Guralnick (1994) and colleagues examined the experiences of parents with children with disabilities. The parents identified several benefits for their children. The benefits included fostering their acceptance by their non-disabled peers, preparing them for the real world, and providing them with an interesting and creative environment that stimulates their learning. The parents also felt inclusion facilitated in their child's friendships and peer relationships.

Bennett, Deluca, and Bruns (1997) surveyed parents with children with disabilities and concluded that inclusion benefited their children. The parents perceived that inclusion provided their children with positive role models, friends, and facilitated their acquisition of pre-academics, social, language, and motor skills. Moreover, parents of children with disabilities perceived inclusion to be superior in enhancing their child's self image, making their child happier, and more confident. Although parents had positive perceptions about inclusion, they also voiced concerns.

Parent concerns were related to obtaining special services for their children, as well as large class size, and teacher preparation (Green & Stoneman, 1989; Peck, Hayden, Wandsneider, Peterson, & Richarz, 1989; Wesley, Buysse, & Tyndall, 1997). Other parental concerns related to inclusion included the availability of qualified personnel, frustration from misdiagnosis, labeling the children's struggles, perceptions of other people's ignorance when pertaining to disabilities, teacher's lack of expertise when implementing inclusion, quality of parent involvement, the school's failure to provide inclusive placements, rejection, not be accepted by their non-disabled peers and the effectiveness of their child's academic, social, and behavioral developments (Salend & Duhaney, (2002); Soodak (2004). A strong parent-school partnership is an essential element in the success of inclusionary placements. It is also important to remember that parents should be treated as individuals, just like their children.

Each parent has a unique view of his or her child. Establishing collaborative relationships should be the school's priority. An inclusive school is built on shared

responsibilities and a sense of belonging to a community where diversity and human relations are valued (Garrick & Salend, 2000).

Teachers' Attitudes Regarding Inclusion

The inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular education classroom is a relatively recent phenomenon taking center stage in educational reforms in the last two decades. Current research on teacher attitudes has focused primarily on teacher responses to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular education classroom (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Cook, Tankersley, Cook & Landrum, 2000; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Teachers' attitudes may be the fulcrum determining the ultimate success or failure of an inclusion program (Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are one of the most important factors in determining the success of the practice or program.

Teachers are perceived to be integral to the implementation of inclusive education (Haskell, 2000). Research communicates the view that teachers are key to the success of inclusionary programs (Cant, 1994). Positive attitudes reflecting a commitment to teaching children with disabilities often determine the extent to which all children with disabilities are accepted as part of the school community (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Teacher preparation also plays an important role in developing positive attitudes toward inclusion, and affects the level of confidence and knowledge which teachers regard as necessary for them to better cater to the needs of diverse learners and students

with special needs (Hsien, 2007). The level and nature of support that teachers receive is another influential factor that determines the attitudes of teachers (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). Inclusion can only be successful if teachers are part of the team driving this process (Horne, 1983; Malone, Gallagher, & Long, 2001).

There are many challenges educators face when implementing inclusion in their schools and classrooms. Teachers are generally fearful of inclusion because of their lack of knowledge or fear of little support. Some teachers are not adequately trained to teach differential instructional methods or to cope with the specific needs of students (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Other reasons why teachers may not support inclusion are the inability to work collaboratively with other teachers (general and special education), lack of time to plan with special education teachers, uncertainty about social and academic benefits for students with disabilities, and insufficient administrative support to allow time for planning and problem-solving.

Teachers face increased pressure as their roles diversify with the contemporary inclusive classroom (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Clayton, 1996; Forlin, 1997; Long, 1995; McKinnon & Gordon, 1999; Paterson & Graham, 2000; Schloss, 1992). Teachers are further required to be psychologically and practically prepared to take on the dynamic role of inclusive educator (Mullen, 2001). Limitations in student learning outcomes may be largely determined by the expectations teachers set for their performance (Pugach & Seidl, 1995). When teachers provide students with the instruction that suits their individual needs, the higher the students' academics and social

performances are. Students function better and succeed in classes where teachers apply adaptive instruction. Implementation of adaptive instruction boosts the chances of successful inclusion.

Inclusion is not merely a placement in a general education classroom. Inclusion implies students with disabilities will receive a quality education among peers without disabilities. Salend (2001) described inclusion as an attempt to “establish collaborative, supportive, and nurturing communities of learners that are based on giving all students the services and accommodations they need to learn, as well as respecting and learning from each other’s individual differences” (p.5). The presence of students with special needs in a general education setting may present a challenging opportunity for teachers, causing them to reexamine and implement teaching approaches that are appropriate for all students in the class based on the understanding that pupils with special needs are an integral part of the group (Almog, 2008).

Principals’ Attitudes Toward Inclusion

The appropriate implementation of the LRE mandate depends not only on well-trained teachers, but also well-trained school administrators, particularly the principal. Today, principals must be equipped with legal, pedagogical, and cultural knowledge (Collins & White, 2001). The principal is instrumental to the success of instruction at the building level (Sergiovanni, 1991). According to Guzman and Schofield (1995), the principal’s leadership was cited as critical for successful inclusion.

In order for a school to effectively address the needs of its special education population, the principal must display a positive attitude and commitment to the inclusion practices and pose the skills and knowledge to lead the staff to create an inclusive learning environment (Evans, Bird, Ford, Green, & Bischoff, 1992; Rude & Anderson, 1992). Since the early 1980s, research indicates that the principal plays a major role in shaping teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and overall school climate (Leibfried, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1984; Tyler, 1983). A principal's positive attitude is an essential factor in creating a climate of acceptance for all students and programs. McAneny (1992) concluded that principals who had positive attitudes were more likely to provide opportunities for students with special needs to remain in the general education setting. If inclusion is to work, its success depends heavily upon the principal (Ayres & Meyer, 1992). To promote inclusion, principals must possess the attitudes, skills, and strategies to facilitate inclusion practices.

Attitude is also important to the success of inclusion. Gameros (1995) examined principals' attitudes and roles and found their leadership and vision to be a vital part of an inclusive school environment. Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin (1996) conducted a survey involving 680 regular educators and principals. These respondents from this study were located in 32 sites in the United States and Canada, where educational opportunities for all children were valued. The researchers concluded that positive attitudes were associated with administrative support, time for collaboration, and more experiences with disabled students.

York and Tundidor (1995) also reported that attitudes are very critical. Their study used focus groups rather than surveys. The groups consisted of general and special educators, parents, students, administrators, and support staff. The groups were asked about their perceptions and factors that influence the practice of successful inclusion. The allocation of time for collaboration, skills, and attitudes were perceived as necessary for the success of inclusion.

In order for inclusion to be successful, other necessary components include opportunities for professional development, a strong mission and vision, a problem-solving team, and flexible time schedules (Schattman & Benay, 1992). The principal cannot ignore the rising expectations placed on him or her due to inclusion. Sage and Burrello (1994) reported the principal is expected to design, lead, manage, and implement programs for all students, those with and without disabilities. Principals must also be able to monitor and evaluate the inclusion process. These responsibilities require the principal to promote vision and values and to encourage all stakeholders, such as parents, students, teachers, and community members, to act positively toward inclusion.

Greyerbiehl (1993) reported that some principals were lacking in several critical competencies that are effective implementation for successful inclusion. Some barriers principals face when it comes to successful inclusion include ineffective training programs, poor leadership strategies, negative beliefs and attitudes, lack of teacher support, and poor communication. Other barriers include rigid general education expectations, insufficient staffing, lack of material, lack of time for collaboration, and the

fear that regular education students would be disadvantaged by inclusion. Other studies revealed that principals and other educators had inaccurate knowledge about inclusion and misinformed attitudes about the legal boundaries and effective practices for integrating students with disabilities into the general education setting (Cutbirth & Bengé, 1997; Monahan, Marino, Miller, & Cronic, 1997). Principals also expressed little knowledge about pertinent court cases and identified the need for additional training in special education law (Pilcher, 1996).

Inclusion and the Assistant Principal

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) has broadened the leadership responsibilities of the elementary school assistant principal to ensure the provision of FERPA for students with disabilities. The assistant principalship has been in an evolutionary process for over 50 years. Only recently has the role of the elementary school assistant principal been seen as a valuable asset to the school organization (Marshall, 1992). Some of the traditional roles of the assistant principal included managing student discipline, monitoring attendance, and supervising teachers. Since the 1980s, the traditional leadership role of the elementary school assistant principal has changed.

The assistant principal's leadership role is now more compound and requires expertise in many areas when working to increase student achievement. The role of the elementary school assistant principal is critical to the implementation of inclusion policy for students with disabilities. Today the assistant principal's responsibilities include but

are not limited to monitoring curriculum and instruction; designing, leading, managing, and implementing programs for all students (Sage & Burrello, 1994); conducting teacher evaluations; coordinating statewide testing; and assisting with staff development. The elementary school assistant principals must also learn to monitor and evaluate the inclusion process and to accomplish other school goals.

There is an increased need for assistant principals to exert leadership in schools. The leadership role of the assistant principal must be taken seriously in light of recent demands placed upon schools. One such demand is inclusion. As one of the instructional leaders in schools, the elementary school assistant principal is a key player in leading special education initiatives for inclusion.

Audetter and Algozzine (1992) defined inclusion as an attempt to fill the gap between special education resource rooms and regular education classrooms. Today, special education is viewed less as a place and more as an integrated system of academic and social supports designed to help students with disabilities succeed within the least restrictive environment (Sage & Burrello, 1994; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, Mc Laughlin, & Williams, 2002). For most children with disabilities, this means that the vast majority of the learning takes place in general education classroom. (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

School administrators play a pivotal role in helping to promote the inclusion of students and for the improvement of educational opportunities for all students, especially those with unique learning needs. Effective leaders model inclusive thinking and

leadership in their support of students with disabilities (Gates et al., 2001; Klingner et al., 2001; Sage & Burrello, 1994). Research indicates that the support and guidance offered by the building administrator is the key in the success of an inclusion situation (Gameros, 1995; Villa et al., 1996). When the perceived role is in alignment with respect to a successful inclusionary school, the end result is beneficial to all children in the school (Sergiovanni, 1984). Finally, the elementary school assistant principal is the critical change agent who affects the education of students with exceptionalities. If inclusion is going to work, it must start with administration (Blenk & Fine, 1995). The relationship between inclusion and the elementary school assist principal is crucial.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and recommended instructional arrangements related to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. Elementary school assistant principals from a metropolitan school district in North Central Texas participated in the survey. The survey was designed to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and recommended instructional arrangements for students with disabilities. The survey consisted of four parts: the assistant principals' demographic information, training and experience, attitudes toward inclusion, and the recommended instructional arrangement for students with disabilities

Participants

The participants in this study included 76 elementary school assistant principals from a metropolitan school district in North Central Texas. The district employs 322 campus administrators. There were 80 elementary schools in the district. Each elementary school campus had at least two administrators (the principal and the assistant principal). On campuses that had over 800 students, there were two assistant principals. The characteristics of the elementary school assistant principals varied according to the size of the campus, the number of special education students on campus, age, gender, years of experience, and special education training.

Setting

This study was conducted in a metropolitan school district in North Central Texas. The city in which the study took place is the 17th largest city in the United States and had a diverse population. The school district that participated in the study focused on the academic achievement and/or vocational training for all students and envisioned a high performing learning organization in which all students achieve proficiency in rigorous standards of intellectual thought and knowledge. The mission of the school district was to provide and support rigorous learning opportunities, which result in successful completion of a high quality school experience for all students.

The participating school district had an enrollment of nearly 80,000 students. The student population of the school district was also diverse. Of the nearly 80,000 students enrolled, 26% of the student population was African-American, 57% Hispanic, 15% White, and 2% Asian or Other. This school district had 7,091 (8.9%) students enrolled in special education.

The district also provided support and services for special education students determined by the Admissions, Review, and Dismissal (also referred to as the ARD committee) and goals stated in the student's IEP. Each elementary campus provided special education instruction for special education students based on their individual needs. Special education students attended the schools closest to their homes. These schools provided all, or most, of the services in the general education classroom or in a small special learning group for part of their day with specialized staff.

Population and Sample

The participants in this study were 76 out of 87 administrators (assistant principals) from a metropolitan school district in North Central Texas. The researcher attended one of the monthly meetings in the spring of 2009 and explained to the elementary school assistant principals the significance of the study and solicited their participation. A letter explaining the study and seeking consent was provided to all participants. The elementary school assistant principals were then given a survey to complete and turn in at the end of the meeting.

Instrumentation

The survey used in this study was a modified version by of a survey developed by Praisner (2000). The purpose of the survey was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes toward inclusion and the recommended instructional arrangement of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The survey consisted of four sections the elementary school assistant principals' (a) demographic information, (b) training and experience, (c) attitudes toward inclusion, and (d) the recommended instructional arrangements for students with special needs.

Design and Procedures

Participant Permission

The Elementary School Leadership Department of the school district was contacted to seek permission to conduct the study.

Survey

The purpose of the survey was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and the recommended instructional arrangements related to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. The survey also gathered demographic information about the elementary school assistant principals and their types of training and experiences. There were no right or wrong answers. The participants were asked to address the questions to the best of their knowledge.

The information gathered from the individual responses remained confidential. The survey consisted of four sections the elementary school assistant principals' (a) demographic information, (b) training and experience, (c) attitudes toward the inclusion, and (d) the recommended instructional arrangements for students with disabilities in the general education setting. This survey was modified from another survey created by Cindy Praisner (2000).

Duration of Study

The study and survey were introduced at the assistant principals' monthly meetings held in the spring of 2009. Each elementary school assistant principal received a survey. The participants were asked to complete and turn in the survey at the end of the meeting. There was a designated place in the rear of the room for them to submit the completed surveys.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and the recommended instructional arrangements for special needs students in the general education setting. This study attempted to answer the following questions

1. Are the attitudes of the elementary school assistant principal more positive or negative in relation to the inclusion of special education students in the general education setting?
2. Is there a relationship between the elementary school assistant principals' knowledge of special education law and their attitudes toward inclusion?
3. Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with autism?
4. Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with serious emotional disturbance?
5. Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with specific learning disabilities?
6. Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with mental retardation?

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by examining the frequencies and percentages of the categorical variables and the means and standard deviations of the continuous variables.

In addition, non-parametric correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationships among the continuous variables, due to data that was not normally distributed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and recommended instructional arrangement related to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. The study involved a descriptive, quasi-experimental research design. Part one of the survey consisted of demographic information that was used as independent variables for grouping and comparing responses to survey items. Part two contained information pertaining to the elementary school assistant principals' training and experience. Part three consisted of the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with special needs. Part four dealt with what the elementary school assistant principals' felt was the most appropriate instructional arrangement for students with disabilities

Data Collection

The survey was administered at the elementary school assistant principals' meeting in the spring of 2009. The researcher explained the significance of the study and solicited the assistant principals' participation by completing a survey. The participants were elementary school assistant principals from a metropolitan school district in North Central Texas. Seventy-six out of approximately eighty-seven elementary school assistant principals (87.4%) completed the survey.

Demographic Characteristics of the Elementary School Assistant Principals

The participants were 76 elementary school assistant principals. As shown in Table 1, a majority of the respondents were female (80.3%) and the male comprised slightly less than 20% of the sample (19.7%). The ethnic distribution of the sample comprised of 29 African-American (38.2%), 23 Caucasian-American (30.3%), 21 Hispanic American (27.6%), and 3 belonged to other ethnicity (3.9%). The degrees held by the respondents were master's 40 (52.6%), and master's plus 36 (47.4%).

Table 1

Demographic Information

	N	%
<hr/>		
Gender		
Male	15	19.7
Female	61	80.3
Ethnicity		
African-American	29	38.2
Caucasian American	23	30.3
Hispanic American	21	27.6
Other	3	3.9
Degrees Held		
Master's	40	52.6
Master's Plus	36	47.4

The average age was 41 years old ($M = 40.61$, $SD = 9.24$) with a range of 29 minimum and 70 maximum years, (see Table 2). The average years reported spent as assistant principal was 4 ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 3.89$) ranging from 0 years minimum to 19 years maximum. The number of the years of teaching regular education for the assistant principal ranged from 0 to 35 years with an average of 6 years ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 5.14$). Results revealed that the average number of years of teaching special education for the assistant principal was 6 ($M = 6.45$, $SD = 7.23$) with a range of 0 to 30 years. On average the total number of in-service training hours for inclusion for the assistant principal was 10 ($M = 9.83$, $SD = 20.50$) ranging from 0 minimum to 150 maximum hours. The total number of special education college credits for the elementary school assistant principal ranged from 0 to 105 hours with an average of 14 ($M = 13.59$, $SD = 21.49$).

Table 2

Educational Levels and Experience of the Assistant Principals

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age	71	40.61	9.24	29	70
Years of Assistant Principal Experience	76	4.43	3.89	0	19
Years of Teaching Regular Education	76	5.75	5.14	0	35
Years of Teaching Special Education	76	6.45	7.23	0	30
Hours of In-Service Training on Inclusion	76	9.83	20.50	0	150
Special Education College Hours	76	13.59	21.49	0	105

As shown in Table 3, over half of the respondents had a student body between 301– 500 (51.3%). A quarter of the participants had between 501- 800 students (25.0%), while 14.5% had less than 300 students, and 9.2% had over 801 students.

Table 3

Total Number of Students in the Assistant Principals' Elementary School

	N	%
Less than 300	11	14.5
301-500	39	51.3
501-800	19	25.0
801+	7	9.2
Total	76	100.0

Results on the student population in each of the buildings are presented in Table 4. A majority of the elementary school assistant principals had 30 or less students receiving special education services in their buildings (86.8%). The remaining proportion of the sample comprised 7.9% who indicated between 31-40 special education students, 2.6% had between 41-50 special education students, and 2.6% reported over 51 special education students in the elementary school building.

Table 4

Number of Special Education Students in the Elementary School Building

	N	%
Fewer than 10	17	22.4
11-20	27	35.5
21-30	22	28.9
31-40	6	7.9
41-50	2	2.6
51+	2	2.6
Total	76	100.0

Research Question One

Are the attitudes of the elementary school assistant principals' more positive or negative in relation to the inclusion of special education students in the general education setting? The findings of this study revealed that the elementary school assistant principals responded convolutedly in regards the inclusion of special needs students in the general education classroom (see Table 5). The elementary school assistant principals answered ten questions regarding their attitudes toward inclusion. While some

of their responses toward inclusion were positive others were contrary to the philosophy and laws regarding inclusion.

Table 5

Attitudes Toward Inclusion

	Percent				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting.	1.3	7.9	6.6	46.1	38.2
Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities.	14.5	28.9	9.2	25.0	22.4
Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school.	19.5	28.9	15.8	25.0	10.5
An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed.	17.1	35.5	10.5	19.7	17.1

Note. N=76

Table 5, continued

Attitudes Toward Inclusion

	Percent				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.	23.7	21.1	15.8	26.3	13.2
Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities.	27.6	28.9	7.9	19.7	15.8
General education should be modified to meet the needs of students including students with disabilities.	30.3	44.7	10.5	5.3	9.2
It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.	9.2	22.4	15.8	34.2	18.4
No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities.	3.9	5.3	15.8	36.8	38.2
It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.	7.9	19.7	27.6	22.4	22.4

Note. N=76

The means and standard deviations for the attitude toward inclusion items are shown in Table 6. The scores range from zero to four with lower scores indicating more agreement with the item and higher scores indicating more disagreement with the item. The item with the highest level of agreement is, "General education should be modified to meet the needs of students including students with disabilities" ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 1.20$). Items for which the participants tended to agree slightly are, "Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities," "Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school," "An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed," and "In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them" ($M = 1.67$ - 1.84 , $SD = 1.31$ - 1.46). The items with the highest level of disagreement are, "Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting," ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .94$) and, "No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities" ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.06$). The items for which the participants tended to disagree slightly are, "Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities," "It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms," and "It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities" ($M = 2.12$ - 2.32 , $SD = 1.25$ - 1.42).

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations of Attitudes Toward Inclusion Items

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting.	3.12	.94	0	4
Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities.	2.12	1.42	0	4
Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school.	1.78	1.31	0	4
An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed.	1.84	1.39	0	4
In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.	1.84	1.40	0	4
Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities.	1.67	1.46	0	4
General education should be modified to meet the needs of students including students with disabilities.	1.18	1.20	0	4
It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.	2.30	1.27	0	4

Note. N=76; Items measured on a 5-point likert type scale with 0= 'Strongly agree' 1= 'Agree' 2= 'Uncertain' 3= 'Disagree' 4= 'Strongly disagree'

Table 6, continued

Means and Standard Deviations of Attitudes Toward Inclusion Items

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities.	3.00	1.06	0	4
It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.	2.32	1.25	0	4

Note. $N=76$; Items measured on a 5-point likert type scale with 0= 'Strongly agree' 1= 'Agree' 2= 'Uncertain' 3= 'Disagree' 4= 'Strongly disagree'

As seen in Table 7, the relationships among the ten attitudes toward inclusion were examined using Spearman's Rho correlation coefficients due to the non-normal distribution of all the variables. There was a significant positive relationship between item one and item six ($\rho = .417, p < .01$) and between item one and item ten ($\rho = .259, p < .05$), indicating that those who agreed more that, "Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting," also tended to agree more with the following two statements: "Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities" and "It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities."

Table 7

Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between the Attitudes Toward Inclusion Items

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9
Q2	.146								
Q3	-.144	-.478 **							
Q4	.153	.616 **	-.208						
Q5	-.137	-.493 **	.657 **	-.386 **					
Q6	.417 **	.544 **	-.283 *	.359 **	-.507 **				
Q7	-.174	-.047	.151	.106	.085	-.185			
Q8	-.063	-.300 **	.417 **	-.185	.492 **	-.470 **	.173		
Q9	.176	-.004	.151	-.052	.157	.125	-.413 **	.138	
Q10	.259 *	.391 **	-.476 **	.247 *	-.682 **	.625 **	-.107	-.442 **	-.010

Note. $N=76$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; Q1 = Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting. Q2 = Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with disabilities. Q3 = Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school. Q4 = An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed. Q5 = In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes schools specifically designed for them. Q6 = Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities. Q7 = General education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities. Q8 = It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms. Q9 = No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities. Q10 = It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.

There was a significant negative correlation between item two and item three ($\rho = -.478, p < .01$), item five ($\rho = -.493, p < .01$), and item eight ($\rho = -.300, p < .01$), indicating that those who agreed more that, “Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with disabilities,” tended to disagree more with the following three statement: “Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school,” “In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes schools specifically designed for them,” and “It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.” In addition, there was a significant positive correlation between item two and item four ($\rho = .616, p < .01$), item six ($\rho = .544, p < .01$), and item ten ($\rho = .391, p < .01$), indicating that those who agreed more that, “Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with disabilities,” tended to also agree more with the following three statement: “An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed,” “Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities,” and “It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.”

There was a significant positive correlation between item three and item five ($\rho = .657, p < .01$), and between item three and item eight ($\rho = .417, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school,” also tend to agree more that, “In

general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes schools specifically designed for them” and “It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.” In addition, there was a significant negative correlation between item three and item six ($\rho = -.283, p < .05$) and between item three and item ten ($\rho = -.476, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school,” tend to disagree more that, “Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities,” and that, “It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.”

There was a significant negative correlation between item four and item five ($\rho = -.386, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed,” tend to disagree more that, “In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes schools specifically designed for them.” In addition, there was a significant positive correlation between item four and item six ($\rho = .359, p < .05$) and between item four and item ten ($\rho = .247, p < .05$), indicating that those who agree more that, “An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed,” tend to agree more that, “Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities,” and that, “It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.”

There was a significant negative correlation between item five and item six ($\rho = -.507, p < .01$) and between item five and item ten ($\rho = -.682, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes schools specifically designed for them,” tend to disagree more that, “Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities” and “It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.” In addition, there was a significant positive correlation between item five and item eight ($\rho = .492, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes schools specifically designed for them,” tend to agree more that, “It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.”

There was a significant negative correlation between item six and item eight ($\rho = -.470, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities,” tend to disagree more that, “It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.” In addition, there was a significant positive correlation between item six and item ten ($\rho = .625, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities,” tend to agree more that, “It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.”

There was a significant negative correlation between item seven and item nine ($\rho = -.413, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “General education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities,” tend to disagree more that, “No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities.” There was also significant negative correlation between item eight and item ten ($\rho = -.442, p < .01$), indicating that those who agree more that, “It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms,” tend to disagree more that, “It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.”

As seen in Table 8, the relationships among attitudes toward inclusion and the demographic variables of age, years of teaching regular education, years of teaching special education, and training in inclusive practices were examined using Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients due to the non-normal distribution of all the variables (see Table 8). Participants’ age was not significantly correlated with any of the attitudes toward inclusion items.

For survey questions stating, *only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting*, *general education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities*, and *general education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities*, there was no significant relationships

between the elementary school assistant principals' years of regular education teaching, years of special education teaching, and years of training in inclusive practices.

Table 8

Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Age, Years of Teaching Regular Education, Years of Teaching Special Education, and Training in Inclusive Practices

	Age	Regular Ed. Teaching	Special Ed. Teaching	Inclusive Practices
Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting.	.004	-.164	-.014	-.046
Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with disabilities.	.197	-.509 **	.497 **	-.382 **
Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school.	-.172	.406 **	-.391 **	.405 **
An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed.	-.006	-.407 **	.349 **	-.216
In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.	-.109	.521 **	-.370 **	.401 **

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 8, continued

Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Age, Years of Teaching Regular Education, Years of Teaching Special Education, and Training in Inclusive Practices

	Age	Regular Ed. Teaching	Special Ed. Teaching	Inclusive Practices
Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities.	.214	-.434 **	.244 *	-.344 **
General education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities.	-.140	.115	-.065	.067
It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.	-.097	.404 **	-.290 *	.424 **
No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities.	-.016	.126	-.100	.039
It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.	.106	-.438 **	.346 **	-.313 **

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

There was a negative correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' experience in teaching general education ($\rho = -.509, p < .001$) and their training in inclusive ($\rho = -.382, p < .001$) practices. In contrast, there was a positive correlation ($\rho = .497, p < .001$) with the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience in regards to the survey question stating *classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities*. There was a negative correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' experience in teaching general education ($\rho = -.434, p < .001$) and their training in inclusive ($\rho = -.344, p < .001$) practices. In contrast, there was a positive correlation ($\rho = .244, p < .05$) with the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience in regards to the survey question stating *students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities*. There was a negative correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' experience in teaching general education ($\rho = -.438, p < .001$) and their training in inclusive ($\rho = -.313, p < .001$) practices.

In contrast, there was a positive correlation ($\rho = .346, p < .001$) with the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience in regards to the survey question stating *policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities*. There was a negative correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' experience in teaching regular education ($\rho = -.407, p < .001$) and the elementary school assistant principals'

experience in teaching special education ($\rho = .349, p < .001$) in regards to the survey question stating *an effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed*. There was a positive correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' experience in teaching general education ($\rho = .406, p < .001$) and their training in inclusive practices ($\rho = .405, p < .001$). In contrast, there was a negative correlation ($\rho = -.391, p < .001$) with the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience in regards to the survey question stating *students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school*.

There was a positive correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' experience in teaching general education ($\rho = .521, p < .001$) and their training in inclusive practices ($\rho = .401, p < .001$). In contrast, there was a negative correlation ($\rho = -.370, p < .001$) with the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience in regards to the survey question stating *in general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them*. There was a positive correlation between the elementary school assistant principals experience in teaching general education ($\rho = .404, p < .001$) and their training in inclusive practices ($\rho = .424, p < .001$). In contrast, there was a negative correlation ($\rho = -.290, p < .001$) with the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience in regards to the survey question stating *it is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms*.

Research Question Two

Is there a relationship between the elementary school assistant principals' knowledge of special education law and their attitudes toward inclusion? Approximately 88% of the elementary school assistant principals indicated that their level of knowledge of special education law was minimal to moderate (see Table 9). Only 12% of the elementary school assistant principals perceived themselves as having adequate knowledge of special education law.

Table 9

Knowledge of Special Education Law

	N	%
Minimal	18	23.7
Between Minimal and Moderate	18	23.7
Moderate	31	40.8
Between Moderate and Expert	9	11.8
Total	76	100.0

When asked about their knowledge of special education terms, majority of the respondents (88.1%) rated themselves either moderate or between moderate and expert in regard to their knowledge of special education terms (see Table 10). Only 5.3%

elementary school assistant principals rated themselves having minimal, knowledge of special education terms.

Table 10

Knowledge of Special Education Terms

	N	%
Minimal	4	5.3
Between Minimal and Moderate	2	2.6
Moderate	34	44.7
Between Moderate and Expert	33	43.4
Expert	3	3.9
Total	76	100.0

The relationships among attitudes toward inclusion and the elementary school assistant principals' self ratings of the understanding of special education laws and terms were examined using Spearman's Rho correlation coefficients due to the non-normal distribution of the variables (see Table 11). Participants' understanding of special education terms was not significantly correlated with any of the attitudes toward inclusion items.

Table 11

Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Understanding of Special Education Law and Terms

	Understanding Special Education Law Terms	
Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting.	-.042	.182
Classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities.	-.343 **	.017
Students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school.	.222	.084
An effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed.	-.124	-.035
In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.	.295 **	-.008
Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities.	-.304 **	.144
General education should be modified to meet the needs of students including students with disabilities.	.139	.007
It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms.	.269 *	.101
No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities.	.023	.204

Note. N=76; Items measured on a 5-point likert type scale with 0= 'Strongly agree' 1= 'Agree' 2= 'Uncertain' 3= 'Disagree' 4= 'Strongly disagree'

Note. N=76; Items measured on a 5-point likert type scale with 0= 'Strongly agree' 1= 'Agree' 2= 'Uncertain' 3= 'Disagree' 4= 'Strongly disagree'

Table 11, continued

Spearman's Correlation Coefficients between Attitudes Toward Inclusion and Understanding of Special Education Law and Terms

	Understanding Special Education Law Terms	
It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.	-.300	** -.034

Note. N=76; Items measured on a 5-point likert type scale with 0= 'Strongly agree' 1= 'Agree' 2= 'Uncertain' 3= 'Disagree' 4= 'Strongly disagree'

For survey questions stating, *only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with disabilities in a school setting, students with severe/profound disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school, an effective general educator can help a student with a disability to succeed, general education should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities, and no discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities*, there was no significant relationships between the elementary school assistant principals' understanding of special education laws.

There was a negative correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' understanding of special education laws with the attitude items stating *classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities* ($p = -.343, p < .01$), *students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities* ($p = -.304, p < .01$), and *it should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities* ($p = -.300, p < .01$), indicating that assistant principals who reported greater understanding of special education laws tended to have more agreement with these items.

There was a positive correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' understanding of special education laws with the attitude items stating *in general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them* ($p = .295, p < .01$), and *it is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms* ($p = .269, p < .05$), indicating that assistant principals who reported greater understanding of special education laws tended to have more disagreement with these items.

Research Question Three

Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with autism? Approximately 26% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended a less inclusive environment for students with autism. Recommendations by the respondents on instructional arrangements for students with

autism are shown in Table 12. Results show that 28.9% of elementary school assistant principals recommended that children with autism be placed in special education classes for most or all of the school day, 19.7% recommended part-time special education classes, while relatively equal proportions recommended special education served outside regular school (13.2%) and regular classroom instruction and resource room (14.5%).

Table 12

Instructional Arrangements for Students with Autism

	N	%
SPED served outside regular school	10	13.2
SPED class for most or all of school day	22	28.9
Part-time SPED class	15	19.7
Regular classroom instruction and resource room	11	14.5
Regular classroom instruction for most of the school day	6	7.9
Full-time regular education with support	3	3.9

Research Question Four

Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend inclusion for students with specific learning disabilities? As shown in Table 13, majority of the assistant principals recommended that children with specific learning disabilities be placed in a regular classroom instruction and resource room (23.7%),

regular classroom instruction for most of the school day (19.7%), and special education served outside regular school (15.8%). Approximately 44% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended a more restrictive setting.

Table 13

Instructional Arrangement for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

	N	%
SPED served outside regular school	12	15.8
SPED class for most or all of school day	10	13.2
Part-time SPED class	11	14.5
Regular classroom instruction and resource room	18	23.7
Regular classroom instruction for most of the school day	15	19.7
Full-time regular education with support	10	13.2

Research Question Five

Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend inclusion for students with serious emotional disturbance? Results show that majority of the elementary school assistant principals recommended that children with serious emotional disturbance be placed in special education classes for most or all of the school day (34.2%), 22.4% recommended regular classroom instruction and resource

room, and 17.1% recommended part-time special education classes (see Table 14). Only 12% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended the general education setting for students with serious emotional disturbance.

Table 14

Instructional Arrangements for Students with Serious Emotional Disturbance

	N	%
SPED served outside regular school	11	14.5
SPED class for most or all of school day	26	34.2
Part-time SPED class	13	17.1
Regular classroom instruction and resource room	17	22.4
Regular classroom instruction for most of the school day	2	2.6
Full-time regular education with support	7	9.2

Research Question 6

Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with mental retardation? As shown in Table 15, 34.2% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended that children with mental retardation be placed in special education classes for most or all of the school day, 19.7%

recommended part-time special education classes, and 18.4% recommended regular classroom instruction and resource room. Only 17% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended regular classroom instruction most of the school day or with support for students with mental retardation.

Table 15

Appropriate Placement for Students with Mental Retardation

	N	%
SPED served outside regular school	8	10.5
SPED class for most or all of school day	26	34.2
Part-time SPED class	15	19.7
Regular classroom instruction and resource room	14	18.4
Regular classroom instruction for most of the school day	4	5.3
Full-time regular education with support	9	11.8

As seen in table 16, a majority of the elementary school assistant principals recommended placement in special education classes for part or most of the school day for students with autism (28.9%), serious emotional disturbance (34.2%), and mental retardation (34.2%). The one exception was for students with specific learning

resource and support by 23.7% of the respondents followed by those who recommended regular classroom instruction for most of the day (19.7%). The one exception is for students with specific learning disabilities, in which elementary school assistant principals recommended a less restrictive inclusive setting. The attitudes expressed by this sample of elementary school assistant principals does not match public policy of federal and state guidelines, IDEIA and state laws, recommending the least restrictive access to the general education curriculum and placement with non-disabled peers.

Table 16

Summary of Instructional Arrangements

	Percent			
	Autism	Learning Disabilities	Mental Retardation	Emotional Disturbance
SPED served outside regular school	14.9	15.8	10.5	14.5
SPED class for most or all of school day	32.8	13.2	34.2	34.2
Part-time SPED class	22.4	14.5	19.7	17.1
Regular classroom instruction and resource room	16.4	23.7	18.4	22.4
Regular classroom instruction for most of the school day	9.0	19.7	5.3	2.6
Full-time regular education with support	4.5	13.2	11.8	9.2

Summary

The results from this study revealed that the elementary school assistant principals responded convolutedly in regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The gender, age, ethnicity, and education of the elementary school assistant principals were not significant factors, while the elementary school assistant principals' years of teaching regular education, years of teaching special and training in inclusive practices were significant factors. When recommending the most appropriate placements for students with special needs, assistant principals recommended placements that varied according to the students' disabilities. For students with autism, serious emotional disturbance, and mental retardation the elementary school assistant principals recommended for them to be in a more restrictive setting for most or all of the school day. However, for students with specific learning disabilities, the elementary school assistant principals recommended for these students to receive a least restrictive setting regular classroom instruction and resources. The findings presented in this chapter are further discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to examine the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and recommended instructional arrangements related to inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. Research that connects the attitudes and recommended instructional arrangement of the elementary school assistant principal towards inclusion in the general education setting was the basis for this study. The research design used for this study was a descriptive, quantitative, quasi-experimental survey.

Discussion

Research Question One

Are the attitudes of the elementary school assistant principals more positive or negative in relation to the inclusion of special education students in the general education setting?

The findings in this study revealed that the elementary school assistant principals responded convolutedly in regards to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. The elementary school assistant principals' responses to the ten attitudes toward inclusion items were skewed, therefore, the Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient was used to calculate the relationships between the items and with age, and teaching experience due to the non-normal distribution of all the variables.

While the elementary school assistant principals with regular education teaching experience and training in inclusive practices disagreed with the study by Hunt, Staub, Alweell, & Goetz, (1994), the elementary school assistant principals with years of teaching special education agreed that students with severe/profound disabilities could achieve both academically and socially in the inclusive classroom. Giangreco, Edelman, Cloinger, and Dennis (1993) concluded that contact between non-disabled peers and peers with severe disabilities can have positive effects on both students with and students without disabilities.

The elementary school assistant principals with years of teaching special education agreed that classrooms with both students with disabilities and without disabilities enhanced the learning experiences of students with disabilities and that students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities. These findings agree with Bennett, Deluca, and Bruns (1997), studied the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities. These researchers reported that parents of children with disabilities believed that inclusion benefited their children. The parents perceived that inclusion provided their children with positive role models, friends, and facilitated their acquisition of pre-academics, social, language, and motor skills. Moreover, parents of children with disabilities perceived inclusion to be superior in enhancing their child's self image, making their child happier and more confident.

Research Question Two

Is there a relationship between the elementary school assistant principals' knowledge of special education law and their attitudes toward inclusion?

Only 12% of the elementary school assistant principals perceived themselves as having between moderate and expert knowledge of special education law. When asked if it should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities be integrated into general educational programs and activities, the elementary school assistant principals with regular education teaching experience disagreed while the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience agreed. Anderson and Decker (1993) suggested that the elementary school assistant principals' attitudes may not be aligned with the laws and policies because administrators may have minimal training and/or experience in the areas of special education and special education law.

As of 1992, very few administrators were ever in programs that required special education or special education law classes (Valesky & Hirth, 1992).

According to Lovitt (1993), although administrators are required to work with special education students, they receive little training on how to deal with them. Dyal, Flynt, and Bennett-Walker (1996) reported that a number of administrators believed that their inclusion (special education) training was inadequate. Finally, Ramirez (2007) reported that the administrators' knowledge of special education law did have an effect on their attitudes toward inclusion. As their perceived knowledge of special education increased, their attitudes toward inclusion became more positive.

Research Question Three

Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with autism?

While 62% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended a more inclusive environment for students with autism, approximately 30% recommended that students with autism be placed in the regular education classroom for most of the school day with resource support. According to Kanner and Asperger, persons with autism were described as perplexing and mystifying individuals. Children and adolescents with autism are described as exhibiting irregular patterns of cognitive and educational strengths and deficits (Jordan, 1999; Simpson, 2001). These same students are also characterized as having significant deficits in basic areas of functioning, including social interaction, communication, learning, and behavior thus contributing to the challenges of educators serving them (Happe, 1998; Quill, 1995; Zager, 1999).

School professionals have reported that they consider themselves to be less capable of serving students identified as having autism (Spears, Tollefson, & Simpson, 2001). In order to meet the unique needs for students diagnosed with autism, individualized education plans (IEPs) must also be developed. Connecting these factors to the implementation of inclusion, students with autism may present significant educational challenges for school educators (Godek, 2008).

Research Question Four

Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend inclusion for students with specific learning disabilities?

Approximately 57% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended that students with specific learning disabilities be placed in the regular classroom for instruction most of the school day with resource support. A trend in school reform has been a movement to serve children with learning disabilities (LD) in the general education classroom as a replacement for providing services in self-contained classes or pull-out programs (Sailor, 1991). This trend is consistent with the intent of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142). This act mandates that all children with handicaps be educated in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent possible.

According to Hardie, 1993; Natahnson, 1992; Salisbury, 1991, there was increased recommendations for inclusive educational programming. Inclusion is not a new concept for students with LD. As early as the 1970s, Kephart was advocating for a full continuum of services for students with LD. As early as 1969, a description of full inclusion services for students with LD appeared in literature (Serio & Todd, 1969).

Schools have been educating students with LD in the general education setting for more than four decades (Zigmond & Baker, 1996). Since the passage of PL 94-142, the Education of Children with Disabilities Act in 1975, public schools have been obliged to provide special education services and related services to students diagnosed with LD.

Consistent with the law, schools have organized special education services to allow students with LD to receive appropriate instruction from a special education teacher and to participate to the maximum extent possible with the instruction being delivered to nondisabled peers in the general education classroom.

Research Question Five

Which instructional arrangement does the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with serious emotional disturbance?

While approximately 66% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended that students with serious emotional disturbance (SED) be placed in special education classes served outside of the regular classroom for most or all of the school day, only 34% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended that students with SED be placed in the regular classroom with instruction for most of the school day with resource support. Historically, students with serious emotional disturbance (SED) were served in specialized, self-contained schools and classrooms. As of the late 1970s, students with emotional and behavioral problems received most or all of their services in special classrooms and schools. These students received minimal interactions with non-disabled peers (Simpson, 2004).

The participants in this study appear to agree that children with serious emotional/behavioral disorders are the least welcomed in the general education setting (Guetzloe, 1994). According to Walker, Ramey, and Gresham (2004), children and youth with SED demonstrate significant deficits in several areas of functioning, including

social interaction, academic performance, and behavior. Students with SED are an especially difficult group to successfully integrate into the general education setting when full inclusion is the objective (Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Lewis et al., 1994; Zions, 1997). Simply placing students with emotional/behavioral disorders in the general education setting is not sufficient enough to produce successful inclusion (Lewis, Chard, & Scott, 1994).

Questions regarding the efficacy of these special education programs for students with SED, along with challenges related to the segregated programs for children and youth with disabilities, became the catalysts for significant educational reform (Simpson, 2004). A salient solution for this reform was in the inclusionary delivery model of students with disabilities in the general education programs and classrooms. As we move toward inclusion, there remains a significant challenge to find ways to successfully include students with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Research Question Six

Which instructional arrangement did the elementary school assistant principal recommend for students with mental retardation?

While approximately 65% recommended that students with mental retardation should be placed in special education classes served outside the regular classroom for most or all of the school day, only 35% of the elementary school assistant principals recommended that students with mental retardation be placed in the regular classroom with instruction for most of the school day with resource support. The attitudes of the

elementary school assistant principals in regards to the inclusion of students with mental retardation in the general education setting are contrary to the supporters of inclusion. The supporters of inclusion cite that children with disabilities who are educated in the general education classroom are more likely to engage in learning, develop self determination, and communicate effectively with their non-disabled peers and teachers, (Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, & Smyth King, 2004; Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994).

The push to integrate students with disabilities was spawned by the need for opportunities for interaction between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, the hope of improved opportunities for social interaction, and the presumed academic performance of students educated in the mainstream (Stevens & Slavin, 1991; Roberts, Pratt, & Leach, 1991; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 1999; Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

This data coincides with the fact that, traditionally students with mental retardation were mostly serviced in self-contained settings designed specifically for them (Polloway, 1984). For these students with disabilities, self-contained classrooms were the norm (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 1995). However, these findings are contrary to Dunn (1968), who argued the most appropriate education placement for students with mild mental retardation was in the general education setting.

The results from this survey revealed that there were negative correlations between the elementary school assistant principals with regular education teaching

experience and the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience responses. When the elementary school assistant principals with regular education teaching experience tended to agree with survey questions, the elementary school assistant principals' with more special education teaching experience tended to disagree on these same items. When the elementary school assistant principals with special education teaching experience agreed with the survey questions, the elementary school assistant principals with regular education teaching experience and training in inclusive practices tended to disagreed.

It is important to examine the attitudes of mainstream educators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular settings as their perceptions may influence their behavior toward and acceptance of such students (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Sideridis & Chandler, 1996; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2001). The attitudes of teachers toward inclusion are significantly influenced by their own perceived levels of efficacy, particularly when teaching children with disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich; Forlin, 1998). Teacher efficacy and training are significant variables that have been known to affect teacher receptivity toward inclusion (Brownell & Pajares, 1999). Key aspects of teacher efficacy in an inclusive classroom include sufficient knowledge and the ability to manage diverse needs, as well as the ability to adapt curriculum and instructional strategies to facilitate learning outcomes (Avramidis & Norwich; Forlin; Scruggs & Mastropieri).

The results of the survey revealed that elementary school assistant principals' responded convolutedly in regards to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. The elementary school assistant principals' may have based their responses on their personal experiences as special education teachers and regular education teachers (having taught students with disabilities in their classrooms.) The elementary school assistant principals may have responded more positively when they had received training on inclusive practices causing them to better understand the inclusive philosophy thus better preparing them to meet the needs of all students those with disabilities and those without disabilities.

The elementary school assistant principals with regular education experience may have responded negatively toward some of the survey questions because they may have lacked special education training and experience working with students with disabilities causing them to feel inadequate when teaching students with disabilities. As for the elementary school assistant principals with special education experience, they may have responded more positively based on their personal experiences and prior knowledge and skills when working with students with disabilities.

Conclusions

This present study found that the elementary school assistant principals responded convolutedly in regards to the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. The study reported that there is a correlation between the elementary school assistant principals' level of special education law and their attitudes toward inclusion.

As well as, relationships between the elementary school assistant principals' years of teaching regular education, years of teaching special education, and training in inclusive practices. The study revealed that as effective leaders the elementary school assistant principals' recommended instructional arrangements for students with special with disabilities varied from more restrictive settings (students with autism, serious emotional disturbance, and mental retardation), to less restrictive settings (students with specific learning disabilities). In conclusion, when elementary school assistant principals clearly understand the needs of students with disabilities, IDEIA and other mandates in regards to inclusion, and are committed to the success of all students, then all students with disabilities in inclusive settings across the state of Texas can be academically successful, and become productive citizens in society.

Limitations

This research was a study of convenience. This study was conducted using only elementary school assistant principals from one metropolitan school district in North Central Texas. Since cultures and attitudes in elementary schools differ from state and state, the findings may only be generalized to geographic locations where similar attitudes and cultures exist. Therefore, this sample may not represent the true characteristics of the total population. Another possible limitation may be the size sample and the recruiting of participates. Another potential limitation is related to the randomization of the study. Results may be affected by the number of responses and voluntary participation. Although there are some possible limitations, this study produced

significant findings that may contribute to the research of elementary school assistant principals and their attitudes related to the inclusion and appropriate placement of special needs students in the general education setting.

Future Research

Little research is focused solely on elementary school assistant principals, and their roles remain unclear. Even though some research can be found about the secondary assistant principal, even less can be found on the elementary school assistant principalship (Brottman, 1981). Further researchers should explore to see if there is a relationship between accountability (test scores) and the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. Researchers need to look at which groups of students score higher on tests, those in more restrictive settings or those in less restrictive settings. Future researchers could use focus groups to discuss elementary school assistant principals' attitudes and inclusion. Future researchers may want to examine if elementary school assistant principals received more inclusion training, would their attitudes toward inclusion be even more positive. Another area to explore could be if the elementary school assistant principals were more knowledgeable about special education law, would their attitudes toward inclusion be more positive.

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APPENDIX A

Approval of Research Involving Human Subjects



Institutional Review Board

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
P.O. Box 425619, Denton, TX 76204-5619
940-898-3378 Fax 940-898-3416
e-mail: IRB@twu.edu

February 17, 2009

Ms. Jerri De'Lane Harris
516 Chimney Rock Road
Everman, TX 76140

Dear Ms. Harris:

Re: Elementary School Assistant Principals' Perceptions Related to the Inclusion of Special Needs Students in the General Education Setting

The above referenced study has been reviewed by the TWU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was determined to be exempt from further review.

If applicable, agency approval letters must be submitted to the IRB upon receipt PRIOR to any data collection at that agency. Because a signed consent form is not required for exempt studies, the filing of signatures of participants with the TWU IRB is not necessary.

Another review by the IRB is required if your project changes in any way, and the IRB must be notified immediately regarding any adverse events. If you have any questions, feel free to call the TWU Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

Dr. David Nichols, Chair
Institutional Review Board - Denton

cc. Dr. Nan Restine, Department of Teacher Education
Dr. Lloyd Kinnison, Department of Teacher Education
Graduate School

APPENDIX B

Survey

Elementary School Assistant Principals' Attitudes Related to Inclusion

The purpose of this survey is to determine the opinions of elementary school assistant principals toward the inclusion of special needs students in the general education setting. This survey also gathers information about the types of training and experiences the assistant principals have. Please address the questions to be the best of your knowledge and provide us with what you believe. This information will remain confidential as to individual responses.

Directions: Please answer each of the following questions by filling in the blanks or placing a circle around your answer. The following questions will be only used to describe the population being studies.

- 107

8. Please circle all special education programs on your campus.

Content mastery	Behavior unit	Resource
Life skills	PPCD	Co-teaching
Other inclusion	Other pull-out/self contained	

9. Please circle all of the disabling conditions represented on your campus.

Learning disabled	Emotionally disturbed	Autism/PDD
Multi-handicap	Mental retardation	Visual impairment
Hearing impaired	Speech/language impairment	
Physical disability	Other health impaired	

10. How many special education teachers currently work in your building? _____

11. What are your primary responsibilities as elementary school assistant principal in regards to students with special needs?

Attending ARD meetings	Collaborating with general and special education teacher
------------------------	--

Please list all other responsibilities:

SECTION II- Elementary Assistant Principals' Training and Experience

Directions: Please answer each of the following questions by filling the blanks or placing a circle around your answer.

1. Years of regular education teaching experience: _____
2. Years of special education teaching experience: _____
3. Approximate number of in-service training clock **hours** or continuing education in inclusive practices? _____
4. Approximate number of special education college **credits** in your formal training? _____
5. Most of your special education training has occurred within the last _____ years.
6. What would you say is your level of understanding of special education laws?

Minimal

Moderate

Expert

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

7. What would you say your level of understanding of special education terminology, such as least restrictive environment, learning disabled, and emotionally disturbed?

Minimal

Moderate

Expert

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

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 following disabilities. **Please mark (place an "x") in only one per section:**

Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder

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

Mental Retardation

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

Serious Emotional Disturbance

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

Specific Learning Disability

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

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