Elementary Principals' and Teachers' Educational Beliefs and Practices in Inclusive Schools

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS’ AND TEACHERS’ EDUCATIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY
DAWN MARIE GATES HILL
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study will explore the educational beliefs and practices of elementary principals and teachers in inclusive schools. Nine elementary schools in a unit district are the focus of this study given the significant gains made in closing the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

The research questions in this study are as follows:

(1) How are principals’ LRE beliefs and practices related to student achievement?

(2) How are teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices related to student achievement?

The elementary schools included in this study not only narrowed the achievement gap between students with IEPs and their non-disabled peers, but they have also exceeded state targets for educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. All schools referenced in this study are located in a northern Illinois school district near the city of Chicago.

Online surveys will be administered to nine elementary principals and 15 elementary teachers in the district. The data obtained from the survey will inform the researcher about teachers’ and principals’ beliefs and practices related to academic outcomes for students with disabilities.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Education is the cornerstone to a quality of life. The concept of education provides a foundation to build upon learning experiences to enable informed decision-making and application of critical skills (Freire, 1970b). The goal of education is to equip individuals with a broad knowledge base for the purpose of contributing to the larger community and society as a whole (Freire, 1970b).

Public schooling is an avenue in which individuals can receive an education. The formalized nature of public schooling has allowed individuals to access curriculum and a wide range of content and subject areas. The knowledge and skills gained from educational experiences in schools help individuals better understand and navigate the world around them. This leads to increased productivity and advocacy in all aspects of one’s life. As a result, economic, social, and political influence and prosperity take shape for the betterment of society.

Historically, the right to an education and public schooling has not been afforded to all people. Society considered certain individuals worthy of an education. This included wealthy, Caucasian students that were educated in top-notch schools with qualified staff and a wealth of resources. Students of color, poverty-stricken, and/or
disabled students were excluded from schooling due to circumstances beyond their control (Noll & Trent, 2004; Jacobs-Bell, 2014).

Prior to the authorization of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, students with disabilities were excluded from public schooling based on the premise that they lacked the ability to learn and could potentially stifle other students from learning (Stainback et al., 1989, p. 5). Many of them, particularly students with severe or profound disabilities, were ostracized from the education continuum and resided in state institutions (Noll & Trent, 2004). In general, the educational continuum for students with disabilities ranged from the most restrictive to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) to include institutionalization, deinstitutionalization, separate schools, and special classes (Jacobs-Bell, 2014). Educators’ interpretation of the educational continuum and LRE inform placement decisions for students with disabilities.

The landmark court case, Brown versus the Board of Education, paved the way for society to rethink the exclusionary practices towards marginalized populations (Jacobs-Bell, 2014). The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schooling is unconstitutional and violates the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Foner & Kennedy, 2004).

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted the following statement: “It is not possible to be in favor of justice for some people and not be in favor of justice for all people.” Federal legislation prohibiting racial segregation in public schools has led to an increase in awareness and advocacy for students with disabilities to be educated in a normal
school environment with their non-disabled peers (Noll & Trent, 2004, p. 4). The inclusion of students with disabilities in schools and classrooms with their non-disabled peers has produced achievement data indicating students with disabilities can achieve at the same rate as their non-disabled peers.

The global Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic created a public health emergency resulting in school closures and a rapid shift from traditional in-person learning to remote learning in March 2020 (Grooms & Childs, 2021). Schools were charged with distributing devices to families for student access to the Internet and online learning. Principals and teachers adjusted curriculum to incorporate digital and non-digital core content. Districts and schools offered professional learning around digital platforms to equip teachers with knowledge and skills to connect and engage students in remote learning. At the start of School Year (SY) 2020-21, many districts continued remote learning while some districts transitioned to a hybrid model or full in-person learning based on federal, state and local officials’ reopening plans. Districts and schools provided families with choice to select the learning model for students including full remote, hybrid, and full in-person learning. The use of multiple learning models posed new challenges for schools and districts to meet the needs of all students.

This research study was conducted during SY 2020-2021 amid the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the researcher faced an added layer of complexity to conduct the study. From the State of Illinois Governor’s stay at home orders and restricted access to people outside immediate households, the researcher determined an online survey would be the sole instrument for data collection. Although an online
survey involves no direct contact with others, administration is less personal thus creating a barrier. The researcher was compelled to adhere to safety protocols and adjust the study accordingly with the intent to yield accurate results.

The global COVID-19 pandemic posed increasing challenges in relation to home and work responsibilities. For districts operating fully remote or hybrid models, teachers and administrators had to balance remote teaching and learning for their students and household children simultaneously. Primary students in grades pre-kindergarten through second grade typically required more adult support and supervision with online learning than older students. In addition, the online platform was a new way of learning for students and educators, particularly at the elementary level. Teachers and administrators shifted instructional practices to engage students in remote platforms; however, not all students were successful with this newly adopted learning model. Students and families faced financial hardships limiting access to technology and Internet. Parents and guardians were charged with preparing learning space in the home and supporting online learning while either not working, working inside or outside the home. Schools and families had legitimate concerns about student engagement, learning and progress. Research shows the greatest impact on learning was for students of color, students with disabilities, and English learners (Goldstein, 2020; Kearney & Childs, 2021).

In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, PreK-12 teachers in New York State took part in a study to determine their perceptions of student access and participation in online learning, particularly for diverse groups of learners (Catalano, 2021). Results revealed students in lower SES groups tend to have less access to
technology and Internet resulting in exclusion from the educational process (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). For participation in online learning, 30% of students overall were not completing assignments. Students with disabilities and English learners were significantly less likely to complete assignments in high-needs districts. A common reason for non-compliance was a lack of parental supervision.

Grooms and Childs (2021) conducted a study of K-12 principals in the United States serving racially and socio-economically diverse school communities to examine their response and decision-making to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Findings support previous case studies which indicate that principals respond in crisis situations with an orientation to meet the needs of students and staff, keep schools safe, implement strategic decisions, and be flexible to adjust current and future circumstances (Mutch, 2015; Notman, 2017).

As an elementary principal, wife, and mother of a primary student, the researcher sought ways to support her family and work to meet the demands. She and her husband hired a tutor for their son to support remote learning in the home. Although the financial commitment was heavy, the benefits were worth the sacrifice. Given the costs associated with tutoring, families in financial duress due to unemployment, decreased work hours, or other circumstances beyond their control were not able to take advantage of individual student support. The global COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequities across demographic categories, specifically vulnerable populations (Goldstein, 2020; Kearney & Childs, 2021).
Statement of the Problem

Students with disabilities have been excluded from public education due to significant learning differences in comparison to their typically developing peers. Society perceived students with disabilities as incapable of learning; thus, exclusion became a common practice for many of these students (Stainback et al., 1989, p. 5; Noll & Trent, 2004). Some students with disabilities were provided a public education in separate schools and classes (Sigmon, 1983); yet, their education was sub-par in comparison to general education schools and classrooms (Foner & Kennedy, 2004; Jacobs-Bell, 2014). In the separate schools and classrooms, students with disabilities had little to no interactions with their non-disabled peers. The teaching staff, physical space, and classroom materials and supplies lacked quality and appeal. For students with disabilities, public schooling involved exclusion altogether or separate and unequal educational experiences.

The Civil Rights Movement in 1964 brought segregation and inequalities for students of color to the limelight (Foner & Kennedy, 2004; Jacobs-Bell, 2014). The movement later influenced the fight for students with disabilities to receive a public education in general education schools and classrooms (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

The inclusion of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in general education classrooms and schools is a legal mandate intended to provide students with a Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (IDEA, 2004). Since the general education setting is where students with IEPs would be educated if they were not disabled, it is expected that they receive instruction in
general education to the maximum extent possible. All students can learn and are entitled to be included and educated with their grade peers in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Fullan, 2003a). Principals’ interpretation of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Anderson & Macri, 2009; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; McGrew, 2008; Praisner, 2003; Riehl, 2000) and teachers’ interpretation of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007; Brandes & Crowson, 2009; Boling, 2007; Pearce, 2009; Sze, 2009) is grounded in their educational beliefs and practices and these Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) practices are linked to the achievement of students with disabilities (Capper & Frattura, 2008; Frattura & Capper, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2009). The problem is that there is a gap in literature exploring principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices. For students with disabilities, it is critical to understand elementary principals’ and teachers’ educational beliefs and practices regarding LRE. By gaining an understanding of principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices, the relationship to student achievement can be explored.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore elementary principals’ and teachers’ Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) beliefs and practices and determine how these relate to the achievement of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in general education classrooms in a northern Illinois school district. The study will be conducted by administering online surveys to teachers and principals. Survey results will be compared within and across individual principal and teacher groups.
Few empirical studies have reported principals’ attitudes regarding inclusion. Overall, studies of the principals’ attitudes have revealed mixed findings. Some showed that they supported the benefits of inclusion as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), while others revealed a tendency for low expectations for success (Avissar et al, 2003).

This study will explore the viewpoints of elementary principals and teachers on inclusion. This study will also explore the relationship between principals’ and teachers’ attitudes on inclusion and the impact their attitudes on inclusion have on student achievement. This research is significant as it will deepen understandings on inclusion and bridge a research gap in the area of inclusion and student achievement.

**Conceptual Framework**

In this study, the success of inclusive schools will be determined based on academic outcomes of students with IEPs. Statewide assessments will be evaluated to determine if the achievement gap is closing between students with IEPs and non-IEP students. Since principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices set the foundation for learning opportunities for all students, the study will utilize a qualitative approach to investigate these individuals’ implementation of inclusion. The support and leadership of principals are documented as integral components of successful school change (Fullan, 2001) and successful inclusion (Hasazi et al., 1994; Simpson, 2004). Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) creates an inclusive global school.

Principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices will be analyzed using Bandura’s social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). Bandura defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to
produce given attainments” (p. 3). Self-efficacy beliefs lead to carrying out a task to reach a desired goal or outcome. According to Bandura, “People’s level of motivations, affective states and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true” (p. 2). In other words, beliefs inform actions. Self-efficacy is at the center of Bandura’s social cognitive theory, which views human functioning as a result of the interactions between personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences (Pajares, 1997). Personal factors relate to knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy as internal elements. Behaviors can include teaching strategies and leadership actions around inclusive practices. Environmental influences connect behaviors to home, work, school, and classroom. As a social cognitive construct, personal, behavior, and environmental influences will drive the discourse around principals’ and teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding inclusion and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

Morgan and Demchak (1996) believe that administrator involvement becomes crucial because the attitudes of the school personnel and students often mirror that of the administrator. Since the early 1980s, researchers have been suggesting that the principal plays a major role in shaping teacher attitudes, behaviors, and overall school climate (Leibfried, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1984; Tyler, 1983). Ayres et al. (1994) cite research that shows a huge “obstacle faced by teachers was the nature of the leadership provided by administrators (and their)…attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools and classrooms” (p. 91). If inclusion is to be a feasible alternative to more segregated placements, its success will depend heavily upon the readiness and the willingness of general education administrators to make the decision that will provide
appropriate opportunities for students with special needs to remain in general education (Ayres & Meyer, 1992). When educators follow the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mandate, inclusion is accomplished.

This study will investigate principals’ and teachers’ Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) beliefs and inclusive practices in relation to academic achievement of students with IEPs. Social-cognitive theory will be the construct to analyze LRE beliefs and inclusive practices of teachers and principals. This study will also investigate how the achievement gap can be narrowed between students with IEPs and non-IEP students.

**Research Questions**

In a northern Illinois school district, the achievement gap between students with IEPs and their non-disabled peers has narrowed in reading and math as measured by statewide achievement tests (Illinois State Board of Education Report Card, 2014-2015). District-level demographic and state assessment data indicates that students with IEPs are being educated in the Least Restrictive Environment in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Illinois State Board of Education Report Card, 2014-2015). This district follows the policies. The problem is that there is a gap in literature exploring principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices. For students with disabilities, it is critical to understand elementary principals’ and teachers’ educational beliefs and practices regarding LRE. By gaining an understanding of principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices, the relationship to student achievement can be explored. My research questions are as follows:
(1) How are principals’ LRE beliefs and practices related to student achievement?

(2) How are teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices related to student achievement?

Overview of Methodology

This is a qualitative study examining a one-unit PreK-12 district that exceeded the state targets for Least Restrictive Environment Indicators 5A and 6A on the State Performance Plan (SPP). The rationale for selecting Indicators 5A and 6A is to assess the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Indicator 5A measures students with IEPs ages 6-21 who are educated inside the general education classroom for 80 percent or more of their school day (see Appendix A). Indicator 6A measures children ages 3-5 who are enrolled in regular early childhood programs and receive the majority of their special education and related services in regular early childhood programs (see Appendix A). The unit district exceeded state LRE targets which was the basis for selection in this study.

This study uses purposive sampling based on the district’s LRE and statewide assessments as measured by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) District Special Education Profile and Illinois Report Card. The District Special Education Profile provides data on student demographics, state assessment outcomes, and educational environment. Educational environment refers to the extent to which students with IEPs receive special education and related services in classes or schools with their non-disabled peers (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014). Districts are required to report special education data in the Funding and Child Tracking System in order for profiles to be generated (ISBE Funding and Child Tracking System, 2013-
The Illinois Report Card provides district and school-level demographics and state assessment results. The selection criteria include the following: (1) Exceeding LRE state targets in Indicators 5A and 6A, (2) Closing the achievement gap between students with IEPs and non-IEP students. This sampling will be unique given the atypical outcomes of this district (Merriam, 2009).

This study constitutes case study research within the boundaries of a school district located in northern Illinois. Case study research is the best method to address the research questions because teachers and principals in the district will be the focus for data collection and analysis. The district was selected based on successful LRE implementation.

Data collection will consist of surveys administered to the elementary principals and teachers in the district. Principal surveys will enable the researcher to better understand their beliefs and practices related to the inclusion of students with IEPs in general education settings. The data obtained from the teacher surveys will inform the researcher about principals’ influence on teachers’ beliefs and practices. Principals convey messages of acceptance or disapproval through their own actions or symbolic gestures which represent a powerful influence on school wide acceptance of differences (Collins, 2003; Gameros, 1995).

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has limitations due to sampling selection and position attrition. The sampling is a small, unit PreK-12 district located in northern Illinois. Given the district’s size, it limits generalizations to larger districts.
The geographic location of the district can pose a limitation as well. The district is located in a small, geographic area which limits generalizations to larger geographic areas.

Position attrition will create limitations pertaining to changes in building principals and teachers. Principals and teachers may resign or retire from the district; thus, new hires may not be able to speak to the shift toward inclusive education. The memories of these shifts may not be readily available.

There are limitations to historical data due to the time in which it is released to the public. The District Special Education Profiles are available through the 2013-2014 school year. Since current data is not accessible, it can limit the validity of the study.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is to address a research gap in literature regarding LRE beliefs and practices of teachers and principals in relation to student achievement. By analyzing elementary schools that have exceeded state LRE targets, it is important to understand the beliefs and practices associated with LRE implementation and the inclusion of students with IEPs in general education classrooms. Academic achievement of students with IEPs is also important to understand as it relates to principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices. Achievement of students with disabilities has been a concern for decades (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; McDonnell et al., 1997; Wagner et al., 2006). Many states report that over 70% of students with disabilities perform below proficiency on annual statewide reading and mathematics tests (Center on Education Policy, 2009).
Beliefs and leadership practices influence the direction, goals, and outcomes of schools. The contributions of this study to the field of education are as follows: (1) Furthering understanding of LRE interpretation and implementation in elementary schools; (2) Naming and identifying influences of academic outcomes for students with IEPs in comparison to their non-disabled peers.

Summary

Principals’ and teachers’ educational beliefs and practices regarding the inclusion of students with IEPs in general education settings will be examined in this qualitative study. Although IDEA states that students with IEPs are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the LRE, schools have adopted and implemented inclusion in different ways. Research shows that students with IEPs benefit from being educated alongside their typically developing peers. There is a significant achievement gap between students with IEPs and their non-disabled peers. The focus of this study is to assess inclusive schools through the eyes of principals and teachers who have cultivated academic success for students with IEPs.

Whereas there are many accounts of schools that have embarked on initiatives to function more inclusively, there are remarkably few empirical studies of the principals in these settings (Salisbury, 2006). Avissar et al. (2003) reported that principals’ vision and leadership behavior can promote inclusive practices. This study will focus on principals as the primary change agents for successful inclusion.
Definition of Key Terms

**Accommodations** – Changes in the delivery of instruction, type of student performance, or method of assessment which do not significantly change the content or conceptual difficulty of the curriculum (Hallahan et al., 2012).

**ADA** – The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, State and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation. It also mandates the establishment of TDD/telephone relay services (U.S. Department of Education: Civil Rights Division: Disability Rights, 2009).

**Educational Environment** – extent to which students with IEPs receive special education and related services in classes or schools with their non-disabled peers (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014)

**FAPE** – Free and appropriate public education refers to special education and related services that (A) Are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge, (B) Meet the standards of the State Educational Agency (SEA), including the requirements of this part, (C) Include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education in the State involved, (D) Are provided in conformity with an individualized education program (IDEA, 2004)

**High-incidence disability** – students identified as having emotional/behavioral disabilities, learning disabilities, and mild intellectual disabilities (Sabornie et al., 2006).
**IDEA** – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act refers to a federal law that ensures the provision of early intervention, special education and related services to children with disabilities from birth to age 21 (IDEA, 2004).

**Inclusion** – mainstreaming; the idea of placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms and other school activities (Hallahan et al., 2012).

**Indicator 5A** – measures students with IEPs ages 6-21 who are educated inside the general education classroom for 80 percent or more of their school day (ISBE State Performance Plan, 2013-2014).

**Indicator 6A** – measures children ages 3-5 who are enrolled in regular early childhood programs and receive the majority of their special education and related services in regular early childhood programs (ISBE State Performance Plan, 2013-2014).

**Individualized Education Program (IEP)** – a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting and includes (1) Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, (2) Measurable annual goals, (3) Special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services (IDEA, 2004).

**Low incidence disability** – students with severe intellectual disabilities, multiple disabilities, autism, or sensory disabilities like deaf-blindness (Giangreco, 2000).

**LRE** – Least restrictive environment; To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, 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 (IDEA, 2004).

**Modifications** – Changes made in instruction or assessment to make it possible for a student with a disability to respond more normally (Hallahan et al., 2012).

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** – federal law designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance from the United States Department of Education. The regulations require a school district to provide a free and appropriate public education to each qualified student with a disability who is in the school district’s jurisdiction, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability (United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2015, Introduction).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review is composed of three categories which include the following: (1) Inclusion and LRE, (2) LRE and Student Achievement, and (3) Principals’ and Teachers’ Roles in Inclusion. First, the researcher will outline special education law and legal cases related to inclusion and LRE in schools. Secondly, the relationship between LRE and student achievement will be discussed. Third, principals’ and teachers’ roles to support inclusion in schools will be examined. Finally, the literature review will consider the study’s contribution to educational leadership pertaining to academic achievement for students with disabilities.

Inclusion and LRE

Full inclusion was not prevalent until the late 1980’s (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Will, 1986). Federal legislation such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Act has paved the way for students with IEPs to be educated in schools and classrooms with their non-disabled peers. The adoption of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 afforded students with IEPs a right to a FAPE in the LRE. Prior to this point in history, students with IEPs were denied educational opportunities in schools with students who were non-disabled. The law was later renamed the IDEA in 1990 which was reauthorized in 1997 and 2004 respectively.
IDEA requires public school systems in every state to provide a continuum of services in the least restrictive setting for all children with IEPs. IDEA also mandates that placement decisions are made by a multidisciplinary team and that a continuum of service delivery options are available.

Notable court cases in the early 1970s, Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) versus Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (334 F. Supp. 1257) and Mills versus Board of Education (348 F. Supp. 866), prohibited school districts from excluding students with handicapping conditions (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, p. 369). In the PARC versus Commonwealth of Pennsylvania case, the court ruled that children diagnosed with mental retardation in Pennsylvania were entitled to a free public education in regular classrooms rather than segregated from the general education population. Mills versus Board of Education expanded the PARC versus Commonwealth court decision to include all children with disabilities. These litigation decisions impacted laws protecting the educational rights of students with disabilities.

**LRE and Student Achievement**

Successful inclusion is characterized by students educated in the LRE and demonstrate academic growth on state assessments (Bublitz, 2016). There has been much debate regarding the inclusion of students with IEPs in general education classrooms. In the past two decades, inclusive practices have been implemented in schools across the country in which special education services take place within the general classroom in a co-teaching approach with teachers, instructional assistants, and/or therapists (Udvari-Solner, 1996; Tremblay, 2013). The success or failure of inclusive
schools is directly impacted by principals’ beliefs and leadership practices (Ramirez, 2006). As the instructional leaders, principals routinely make curriculum and instructional decisions as it pertains to all students. Their beliefs and actions toward student learning are reflected in those decisions (Ramirez, 2006).

**Curriculum Design**

Curriculum development and implementation decisions must be considered to ensure students’ educational needs are met. Students have varying abilities, preferences, cultures, languages, and experiences, all of which affect how they learn (Meyer et al., 2014). Despite the diversity or variability found in learners, contemporary curriculum (i.e., the goals, methods, media/materials, and assessments used to support learning) is often designed and implemented for the imaginary “average” learner at the expense of teaching all students well (Rose & Meyer, 2006). Curriculum is often developed under the premise that a “fair” curriculum is when everyone is learning in the same way (Meyer et al., 2014).

The Center for Applied Special Technology, known as CAST, Inc., developed and established the theory of Universal Design for Learning or UDL (CAST, n.d.). This approach involves expanding, at the point of design, the teaching methods, materials, and assessments to make inclusive educational goals accessible for all students, including those with disabilities (Rose & Meyer, 2002). UDL is frequently highlighted as an educational approach that facilitates inclusion (Coyne et al., 2006; Dicker, 2006; Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2012; Jackson, 2005).
Universal Design for Learning (UDL) conceptualizes teaching and learning as a dynamic system that must be reformed to better meet the needs of learners in the 21st century (Rose & Meyer, 2006). UDL is about optimizing learning and access to the general education curriculum (Rose & Meyer, 2006). UDL is a framework that provides alternatives for methods of instruction, delivery of instruction materials (equipment), and student responses (how students show what they can do) – all within the general curriculum for the benefit of every student, regardless of his or her specific areas of diversity (Rose & Meyer, 2002). This framework helps teachers to see how inflexible curricula are the problem, not the learner (Gordon et al., 2009; McGuire et al., 2006). UDL helps teachers design and implement curriculum that is accessible, appropriate, and inclusive for all learners from the start (Pisha & Coyne, 2001; Pisha & Stahl, 2005).

The three core principals of UDL are multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement which offer a relatively simple but effective roadmap for addressing learner variation through diverse curriculum design (CAST, n.d.). Recognizing the important connection between technology, UDL, and equity of access in education, the U.S. Department of Education included definitions and references to UDL in its National Educational Technology Plan, completed in 2010, and projecting technology use in education for the next 10 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Additionally, the U.S. Congress adopted the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard (NIMAS) as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. NIMAS ensures that all students, kindergarten
through grade 12, will have access to educational texts and other printed resources in formats that are readily accessible for their individual learning needs.

The purpose of schooling becomes focused on developing multiple, meaningful paths to learning rather than perpetuating a one-size-fits all mentality of learning where the consumption of content is the main goal (CAST, 2011). Research indicates that UDL-based classrooms yield promising learning outcomes for students with and without disabilities (Coyne et al., 2010; Dalton et al., 2002; Dymond et al., 2006; Kortering et al., 2008).

The term universal design (UD) was coined by a renowned architect, Ronald Mace, as a way of “designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life” (Center for Universal Design, 2008). Mace designed buildings based on the needs of the intended users of the space (CAST, 2007). The original UD principles, which were developed by a team of architects, product designers, engineers, and environmental design researchers (Story et al., 1998), originally focused on proactively reducing environmental barriers and providing increased access to the physical environment. For example, the addition of sidewalk curb cuts provided access to individuals using wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, bicycles, skateboards, roller blades, and dollies. Educational models such as UDL extended the idea of access to the learning environment (Rose et al., 2006). Universal design in education means that the physical, social, and learning environments are designed so that all students’ learning is supported (McGuire et al., 2006).
Teacher Collaboration

Teacher collaboration is important in the development and implementation of curriculum. Murray (2004) states, “Collaborative practices are valued for the positive influence they can have on student learning in inclusive settings and for their influence on teachers’ sense of efficacy, professionalism, morale, and dedication” (p. 45). Co-teaching is a collaborative practice in which both the general and special educators are present in the general education setting whereas general and special education students are being educated (Ripley, 1997; Friend & Cook, 2003; Lee, 2003). The expectation is that general and special education teachers maintain equal responsibility for instruction (Ripley, 1997).

Because both special and general educators share the common goal of student achievement, both sets of teachers share responsibility for involving students with disabilities in the inclusive educational setting (Beckman, 2001). This shared role presents the teachers’ need for ongoing working relationships with each other, including increased communication to support the academic and behavior needs of these students (Friend & Cook, 2003).

Master Schedule

The development of the master school schedule can enable teacher collaboration through strategic, scheduled preparation periods. Wasley (1997) states, “Schedules are instruments that can be used to accomplish curricular, pedagogical, and assessment goals to derive improvements in student accomplishments” (p. 46). According to Canady and Rettig (2008), school schedules can be made to build in time for collaboration by creating
common planning time for teams of teachers to meet and collaborate. DuFour (2002) favored building collaborative time within “the master schedule to allow daily common preparation periods for teachers of the same grade level, course or department” (p. 98). “The value that is placed on shared work must be both said and demonstrated. The opportunity for collaboration must be prominent in the schedule” (Inger, 1993, p. 6).

According to Erb (2000), common planning time is non-negotiable for successful teaming and greater student achievement. Hockmann (2002) states, “A poorly designed schedule can single-handedly destroy the ability of a school faculty to create and sustain a school environment” (p. 22). The school’s schedule is a symbolic representation of the philosophies and goals embedded within an educational organization (Keefe & Jenkins, 2002).

Principals, as “chief learning officers,” (National Association for Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2008, p. 15), must affirm that both student and adult learning reside at the core of the school vision and mission. It is important for principals to schedule common planning time for grade level and department teams, discussing and modeling various collaboration strategies, observe teams as they practice these strategies, and diminish the opportunities for teachers to isolate themselves from their colleagues (DuFour et al., 2006). Reeves (2004) noted that the most important implication is for the leader to make time for teachers to collaborate within and among grade levels to identify existing gaps and overlaps in the curriculum.
**Principals’ and Teachers’ Roles in Inclusion**

School leaders play a central role in creating the conditions necessary for systemic changes to occur by determining what initiatives are undertaken and, ultimately, how inclusively a school functions (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Heifetz & Laurie, 1997; Reitzug, 2002; Riehl, 2000; Weiss, 1995). They must be knowledgeable and willing to adopt educational practices that will benefit all students and teachers. The implications of their decisions must be considered in relation to all learners.

Studies of inclusive schools where the majority of students with disabilities are educated in general education settings for 80% or more of the school day (McLeskey et al., 2011; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011) reveal a common core of characteristics that reflect a commitment to the principles of diversity, social justice, and equity (Mayrowetz & Weinstein, 1999; Peck et al., 1989; Salisbury et al., 1993; Sands et al., 2000). In these schools, administrators are intentional about embedding these principles into the culture of the school so that all students, including those with disabilities, are valued and included in all aspects of the school community (Riehl, 2000; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Sands et al., 2000; Villa & Thousand, 2005).

Stainback and Stainback (1990) define an inclusive school as a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met. General education works cooperatively with special education to provide a quality learning environment for all students (Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Praisner, 2000). Teachers and administrators must be taught how to cooperate and collaborate and they
must be given the support necessary to plan and work in teams to meet the needs of all students (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1992, p. 5).

**Professional Learning Communities**

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provide a structure in which school teams can collectively work together to improve student outcomes. PLCs are defined as “a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way” (Stoll et al., 2006). The use of PLCs as cultural change agents in public schools has been gaining popularity for years as a result of the ability of PLCs to build individual and collective capacity to influence student learning (Eaker et al., 2002; Stoll et al., 2006). In an effort to foster collaborative norms of interactions and break down teacher isolation (Baumard & Starbuck, 2005; Collinson & Cook, 2004), there has been increasing interest and advocacy around restructuring teachers’ work environment into collaborative communities of practice, particularly in elementary school settings (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Little, 1999; Louis et al., 1996; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) emerged as early champions of organizing structure groups of teacher teams with established guidelines and structures to learn about and change their practice. PLCs provide the opportunity for teachers to work interdependently to identify students’ learning needs, make progress to achieve collective goals and common understanding of practices, and improve instruction in the classroom (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; DuFour, 2004; DuFour et al., 2008;

PLCs represent one of the most used strategies in efforts at reform (Hargreaves, 2007; Lieberman & Miller, 2007, 2008), with a growing body of research suggesting PLCs as an effective strategy for supporting a collaborative culture focused on continuous learning (Anderson & Togneri, 2002; Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Servais, Sanders, & Derrington, 2009) at all levels of education (Bolam et al., 2005; Cooper et al., 2005; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). PLCs, by definition, exist for the purpose of improving teacher professional learning for the purpose of improved student learning (Stoll & Louis, 2007).

An increasing amount of research shows favor in the value of supporting PLCs in schools (Angelle & Teague, 2011; Little, 2006; Pankake & Huffman, 2010). It has been noted that PLCs can have a positive influence on teachers’ sense of professionalism, participation in shared decision-making, vision for the school and trust in colleagues (Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord, 2007, 2009; Kruse & Louis, 1993; Kruse et al., 1994; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001, 2006).

DuFour and Eaker (1998) and Hord (2004) indicate that the most promising avenue for creating sustained, substantive school improvement is by developing the ability of the teaching staff, or faculty, to function as a PLC. Hord indicated, “A core characteristic of the PLC is an undeviating focus on student learning” (Louis & Kruse, 1995, p. 9). High quality teaching has been linked to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Harris & Sass, 2011), and PLCs are recognized as improving the
quality of teaching and contributing to sustainable progress in student learning (Harris & Jones, 2010; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). An effective PLC requires the collaborative efforts of administrators and teams of teachers, and the degree of trust within the school’s collaborative cultures significantly affects PLC effectiveness relative to the performance of students (Bryk & Schneider, 2004; Forsyth et al., 2006).

According to Hargreaves (2007), strong and sustainable PLCs are characterized by strong cultures of trusted colleagues who value each other personally and professionally, who are committed to their students, who are willing to discuss and disagree about evidence and data that can inform them about how to improve their practices in ways that benefit their students – and who are willing to challenge one another’s practice in doing so (p. 188).

Tschannen-Moran (2004) states, “Professional learning communities are based on trust that teachers and principals will act with the best interests of students in mind by researching best practices and pursuing data to bolster decision making” (pp. 107-108; Elmore et al., 1996; Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Louis et al., 1996). Fullan (1999) claims that in order to improve student outcomes school-wide, success will only be possible “if organizational members develop trust and compassion for each other” (p. 37).

The principal is a primary agent in the success and effectiveness of implementing conditions for a learning community culture (Fullan, 2001; Harris, 2002; Lambert, 1998; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Speck, 1999). Principals are increasingly tasked with creating opportunities for improving professional learning and development for teachers as a key aspect of school improvement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Research on
learning communities highlights the important role of the principal in creating the culture and structural conditions for ongoing professional learning toward improving student learning (Bolam et al., 2005; Huffman & Hipp, 2008; Lambert, 1998; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009).

According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) and Leithwood et al. (2008), even though leadership from the principal is a crucial factor in all changes within a school, leadership from all teachers is equally crucial. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that principals should join with teachers to cultivate three forms of capital essential for improving teaching in all schools: human capital (the knowledge and skills of teaching and learning); social capital (the processes and structures that enable relationships build on trust and respect to form bonds among teachers that support the hard work of learning to improve teaching), and decision-making capital (the ability to make wise and informed decisions that reflect the level of professionalism required as a teacher). The combination of these kinds of capital leads to the professional capital required to transform teaching in schools. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), an effective use of PLCs is to promote all three forms of capital among teachers, with teachers and administrators jointly ensuring the conditions for collective responsibility for continuous learning and improvement are established and sustained.

Response to Intervention (RTI)/Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Response to Intervention (RTI)/Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) processes and procedures enable school teams to support the learning and development of all students. According to Bender and Shores (2007), “RTI [MTSS] is a process of
implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and adjusting instruction depending on the student’s response” (p. 7). Gresham (2002) stated that response to intervention is the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions that match the student’s needs. Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) described RTI as a continuous monitoring of student’s learning rate and ongoing instructional adjustments to support learning. The leading researchers on RTI, all agreed that this is a framework designed to improve student achievement (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; VanDerHeyden & Burns, 2010; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

VanDerHeyden and Burns (2010) described RTI as “the systematic use of data-based decision making to most effectively allocate resources to enhance learning outcomes for children” (p. 3). Hamilton (2010) proposed that RTI is a system driven by the unique context of the individual learning situation, such as resources that are available to support the model as well as the staff’s level of RTI knowledge. Crockett and Gillespie (2007) attested that successful RTI implementation hinges on the coordination of resources, the use of valid assessments, and the implementation of effective interventions by highly trained professionals.

Batsche et al. (2006), say RTI has three general characteristics: (1) Logical structure for allocating precious instructional resources efficiently and targeting them specifically to all student needs, (2) Commitment to use the best findings from our current and emerging knowledge base (scientific research) as we go about our instruction, and (3) Commitment to use a logical, decision-making framework to guide our
instruction, referred to as data-based decision making or the problem-solving method (p. 1).

**Implications of the Study**

**District Information**

The unit PreK-12 district is comprised of ten schools, nine elementary and one high school. The focus of the study is the nine elementary schools. District demographics include the following:

- **Student population**: 5151
- **Black**: 48%
- **Hispanic**: 31%
- **White**: 19%
- **Two or More Races**: 2%
- **Low Income**: 84%
- **English Learners**: 16%
- **Students with IEPs**: 13%

The mission, vision, and strategic goals are as follows:

**Mission statement**: The district will be recognized as being progressive, innovative and creative. We work together to build ONE community with strong partnerships. We are ONE district committed to increasing student achievement. We have ONE vision of producing globally productive citizens. We do this for the diverse needs of ALL children.
Vision statement: The district will celebrate the unique diversity our students possess while providing visionary educational opportunities.

Strategic goals: (1) MTSS, (2) Stakeholder Communication and Engagement, (3) Effective Communication for Effective Leaders.

The following district documents and policies were reviewed to provide context for inclusion:

- Board Meeting Minutes-August 10, 2020
  - Instruction: Assistant Superintendent discussed making curriculum guides for K-8 along with a High School and Junior High curriculum road maps and training for teachers
  - Technology: Superintendent discussed that the district is 1:1 which means every student will have either an IPad or Chromebook

- Board Meeting Minutes-August 24, 2020
  - Assistant Superintendent stated that all certified staff positions are filled. The district hired 44 teachers and 11 administrators.

- Board Policy-Instruction: Administrative Procedure-Evaluating and Reporting Student Achievement

- Board Policy-Instruction: Administrative Procedure-Special Education Procedures Assuring the Implementation of Comprehensive Programming for Children with Disabilities (See Appendix H)

- Board Policy-Instruction: Curriculum Content

- Board Policy-Instruction: Curriculum Development
• Board Policy-Instruction: Education of Children with Disabilities (see Appendix H)
• Board Policy-Instruction: Educational Philosophy and Goals
• Board Policy-Instruction: Grading and Promotion
• Board Policy-Instruction: Instructional Materials
• Board Policy-Personnel: Staff Development Program
• District Document: Strategic Plan

The district has made steady progress in closing the achievement gap between students with IEPs and non-IEP students in reading and math. From 2010 to 2014, the district’s achievement gap decreased from 45% to 30% in reading and from 36% to 27% in math (Illinois State Board of Education Report Card, 2014-2015).

Research Study

In the study, the researcher seeks to examine principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices in relation to student achievement at elementary schools in a northern Illinois school district. Principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices will be analyzed using social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura, “People’s level of motivations, affective states and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true” (p. 2). In other words, beliefs inform actions. Self-efficacy is at the center of Bandura’s social cognitive theory, which views human functioning as a result of the interactions between personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences (Pajares, 1997). Personal factors relate to knowledge,
motivation, and self-efficacy. Behavior can include teaching strategies and/or inclusive practices. Environmental influences connect to home, work, school, and classroom.

Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Self-efficacy beliefs lead to carrying out a task to reach a desired goal or outcome.

The main components of Bandura’s social-cognition categories that will be used to analyze data are personal self-efficacy, behavior, and environmental influences. LRE beliefs and practices connect to Bandura’s social-cognition categories.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Study Design/Methodology

This qualitative study will use a case study methods to explore a small unit district comprising mostly elementary schools. The district has exceeded the state targets for LRE Indicators 5A and 6A on the State Performance Plan (SPP). Indicator 5A measures students with IEPs ages 6-21 who are educated inside the general education classroom for 80 percent or more of their school day (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014). Indicator 6A measures children ages 3-5 who are enrolled in regular early childhood programs and receive the majority of their special education and related services in regular early childhood programs (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014). In addition to exceeding state LRE targets, the district has made steady progress in closing the achievement gap between students with IEPs and non-IEP students.

This study constitutes case study research within the boundaries of a school district located in a south suburb of Chicago, Illinois. Case study research is the best method to address the research questions because teachers and principals in the district will be the primary focus for data collection and analysis. District documents and policies will also be reviewed. The district was selected based on successful LRE implementation.
Unit of Study/Participants

Purposive sampling will be used based on the district’s LRE and statewide assessments as measured by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) District Special Education Profile and Illinois Report Card. The District Special Education Profile provides data on student demographics, state assessment outcomes, and educational environment. Educational environment refers to the extent to which students with IEPs receive special education and related services in classes or schools with their non-disabled peers (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014). Districts are required to report special education data in the Funding and Child Tracking System in order for profiles to be generated (ISBE Funding and Child Tracking System, 2013-2014). The Illinois Report Card provides district and school-level demographics and state assessment results. The selection criteria includes the following: (1) Exceeding LRE state targets in Indicators 5A and 6A, and (2) Closing the achievement gap between students with IEPs and non-IEP students. This sampling will be unique given the atypical outcomes of this district (Merriam, 2009).

Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 2009). Patton (2002) states that “the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 230, emphasis in original).
In this study, the unit district is selected based on its high percentage of inclusion and academic gains for students with IEPs. The sampling will consist of the principal and two teachers (one general educator and one special educator) from each elementary school. The nine elementary schools are categorized by grade bands according to student populations.

- PreK = 3
- K-3 = 2
- 4-6 = 2
- 7-8 = 1
- K-8 = 1

The district superintendent and researcher met to establish online survey distribution procedures and completion deadlines. The researcher sent the principal and teacher surveys to the superintendent to distribute to elementary principals. Principals were instructed to select a general education teacher and special education teacher from their schools to complete the teacher survey. The researcher provided daily survey completion rates to the superintendent; in turn, the superintendent sent reminders to respective parties. The survey was open for one week. The results included nine principals and fifteen teachers for a total of 24 respondents.

**Data Collection Tool/Instrument**

The online survey questions will be adapted from Praisner’s (2000) Principals and Inclusion Survey based on principal and teacher roles. Closed- and open-ended questions will be posed to gather data on beliefs and practices and the relationship to student
achievement. To address validity, Praisner reviewed inclusion literature to identify factors related to personal characteristics, training, and experiences that might relate to education professionals’ attitudes toward inclusion. The questionnaire was presented to a panel of four university professors with experience in the integration of students with disabilities and/or educational administration for review and analysis of questions measuring variables that may relate to principals’ attitudes. In addition, Praisner piloted the survey instrument with nine school leaders, and they provided feedback on the explicitness of the items and the amount of time required to complete the survey. A reliability measure was not computed for the entire survey due to a variety of question types and amount of different information collected (Praisner, 2000).

Online surveys will be administered to elementary principals and teachers in the district and will serve as the primary method of data collection. The data obtained from the online surveys will enable the researcher to better understand LRE beliefs and practices related to the inclusion of students with IEPs in general education settings. Survey data will also inform the researcher about principals’ influence on teachers’ beliefs and practices. Principals convey messages of acceptance or disapproval through their own actions or symbolic gestures which represent a powerful influence on school wide acceptance of differences (Collins, 2003; Gameros, 1995).

District documents and policies will be reviewed to provide context for inclusion.

- Board Meeting Minutes-August 10, 2020
o Instruction: Assistant Superintendent discussed making curriculum guides for K-8 along with a High School and Junior High curriculum road maps and training for teachers

o Technology: Superintendent discussed that the district is 1:1 which means every student will have either an IPad or Chromebook

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  o Assistant Superintendent stated that all certified staff positions are filled. The district hired 44 teachers and 11 administrators.

- Board Policy-Instruction: Administrative Procedure-Evaluating and Reporting Student Achievement
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- Board Policy-Instruction: Educational Philosophy and Goals
- Board Policy-Instruction: Grading and Promotion
- Board Policy-Instruction: Instructional Materials
- Board Policy-Personnel: Staff Development Program
• District Document: Strategic Plan

**Procedure**

The study will be carried out with support from the district superintendent. The researcher will meet with the superintendent to identify principals and teachers for the study. The consent process and online survey will be discussed. Participants’ email addresses will be collected to administer the consent and survey. The superintendent will communicate to principals and teachers to inform them about the research study. After initial communication from the superintendent, the researcher will administer the consent and survey to participants. The survey will be open for two weeks. Reminder emails to complete the survey will be sent to participants three times during the two-week administration window.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices will be analyzed using social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura, “People’s level of motivations, affective states and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true” (p. 2). In other words, beliefs inform actions. Self-efficacy is at the center of Bandura’s social cognitive theory, which views human functioning as a result of the interactions between personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences (Pajares, 1997). Personal factors relate to knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy. Behavior can include teaching strategies and/or inclusive practices. Environmental influences connect to home, work, school, and classroom.
Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Self-efficacy beliefs lead to carrying out a task to reach a desired goal or outcome.

Survey data will be collected including demographics and open-ended questions coded using a teacher and principal data coding sheet with Bandura’s social-cognition categories (see Appendix E). The categories to code responses will be self-efficacy personal, behavioral, and environmental factors.

**Data Triangulation**

A triangulation of data will be used to assess the sample for accuracy that includes principal and teacher response validity and district documents and policies. Principal and teacher response validity will enable the researcher to determine accuracy of educational beliefs and practices regarding inclusion in schools.

District documents and policies will be reviewed to provide context for inclusion. This will include (1) Board meeting minutes specific to instruction, technology, and staffing of certified teachers and administrators, (2) Board instructional policies specific to philosophy, goals and special education, and (3) The district strategic plan to identify priorities, strategies and action steps to meet identified goals. The data from these documents will inform the educational beliefs and practices related to students with disabilities. In addition, the data will help measure the variables in the study, principal and teacher beliefs and practices.
Triangulation will support the validity of the study by considering multiple sources of data. This strategy will help the researcher draw conclusions and inferences about the research findings.

**Researcher Role and Positionality**

The researcher is an elementary school principal. The study will be conducted in an objective way. For data validation, the protocol will be to validate responses and coding with a colleague for accuracy.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The results of the study are comprised of four sections including (1) District Information, (2) Documents Review, (3) Teacher Results, and (4) Principal Results. First, the researcher will present district information to provide context and shed light on the global COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, a review of relevant district documents and policies will be discussed. Third, teacher survey results will be presented as qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, principal survey results will be presented in the same manner as teacher survey results.

District Information

The unit PreK-12 district is comprised of ten schools, nine elementary and one high school. The focus of the study is the nine elementary schools. The district has exceeded the state targets for LRE Indicators 5A and 6A on the State Performance Plan (SPP). Indicator 5A measures students with IEPs ages 6-21 who are educated inside the general education classroom for 80% or more of their school day (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014). Indicator 6A measures children ages 3-5 who are enrolled in regular early childhood programs and receive the majority of their special education and related services in regular early childhood programs (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014). In addition to exceeding state LRE targets, the district
has made steady progress in closing the achievement gap between students with IEPs and non-IEP students in reading and math. From 2010 to 2014, the district’s achievement gap decreased from 45% to 30% in reading and from 36% to 27% in math (Illinois State Board of Education Report Card, 2014-2015).

District demographics include the following:

Table 1. District Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student population</th>
<th>5151</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Income</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learners</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEPs</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The district serves students with low- and high-incidence disabilities. Eleven disability categories are represented including autism, developmental delay, emotional disability, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, and traumatic brain injury (see Appendix A). Presently, three disability categories are not represented which include deafness, deaf-blindness and visual impairment (see Appendix A).

**COVID Context**

The global Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic created a public health emergency resulting in school closures and a rapid shift from traditional in-person
learning to remote learning in March 2020. Schools were charged with distributing devices to families for student access to the Internet and online learning. Principals and teachers adjusted curriculum to incorporate digital and non-digital core content. Districts and schools offered professional learning around digital platforms to equip teachers with knowledge and skills to connect and engage students in remote learning. At the start of SY20-21, many districts continued remote learning while some districts transitioned to a hybrid model, or full in-person learning based on federal, state and local officials’ reopening plans. Districts and schools provided families with a choice to select the learning model for students including full remote, hybrid, and full in-person learning. The use of multiple learning models posed new challenges for schools and districts to meet the needs of all students.

Documents Review

District documents were reviewed to provide context on inclusion and least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. The mission, vision and strategic goals focus on the collective efforts of the district and community to meet the diverse needs of students and increase academic achievement. Board of Education instruction policies specifically for children with disabilities highlight federal, state and local laws, guidelines and procedures for the provision of special education and related services including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Illinois School Code, Illinois State Board of Education Special Education rules, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Parent guidance on
special education procedures including required notice and consent forms for Section 504 and Special Education are accessible to parents via the district website.

The Board of Education agendas and minutes reflect district priorities. The district is 1:1 which means every student has either an iPad or Chromebook. The superintendent discussed School Leadership Teams (SLTs) and the goal to make sure students and parents are aware of expectations for SY2020-2021. Curriculum guides for K-8 along with a High School and Junior High curriculum road maps and training for teachers were discussed at the start of the SY 2020-2021. The district is focused on recruitment, hiring, and retention of effective teachers and leaders. Current and past COVID-19 adult and student counts are shared with the public over the course of SY2020-2021.

The district has adopted various instructional models in accordance with the Governor’s phased reopening plans for the safety of staff and students. During the summer of 2020, the district held summer school remotely from June to August. At the start of SY20-21, remote learning, hybrid, and full in-person learning were available options. Full in-person learning was extended to families who were essential workers. Hybrid or remote learning models were options for families.

The position of the district superintendent is that all students are general education students with different levels of support including English learners, diverse learners, and Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) Tier 3. The mission, vision, and strategic goals align with the superintendent’s position. Diversity and student achievement are highlighted and reinforced in the vision and mission. MTSS is the first strategic goal.
Students have access to support temporarily to address an immediate need or for an extended period of time. This is particularly important given the pandemic and the additional stressors associated with social emotional well-being, trauma, and mental health that can impact student learning.

Data collection was obtained from principals and teachers at the nine elementary schools. The district superintendent and researcher met to establish online survey distribution procedures and completion deadlines. The researcher sent the principal and teacher surveys to the superintendent to distribute to elementary principals. Principals were instructed to select a general education teacher and special education teacher from their schools to complete the teacher survey. The researcher provided daily survey completion rates to the superintendent; in turn, the superintendent sent reminders to respective parties. The survey was open for one week. The results included nine principals and 15 teachers for a total of 24 respondents.

Teacher Results

The global COVID-19 pandemic posed increasing challenges on teachers to adjust curriculum and shift instructional practices from in person to remote with limited transition time. Although districts and schools provided professional development to employ online learning platforms, teachers grappled with implementation through “in the moment” hands-on learning experiences. In the study, 15 teacher results are presented. One of the 15 teachers referenced remote learning and belief in a differentiated approach and least restrictive environment for student learning.
Table 2. Work Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Teaching Experience with Students with Disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For teacher respondents, years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 34 across grade bands. Similarly, years of teaching experience with students with disabilities ranged from 1 to 34 across grade bands. On average, teachers in pre-kindergarten have 14.5 years of teaching experience and 11 years of teaching experience with students with disabilities. Teachers in grade band kindergarten through third have 16 years of teaching experience and 11 years of teaching experience with students with disabilities on average. In grade band four through six, teaching experience and teaching experience with students with disabilities was 34 years. For grade band seven through eight, teaching
experience was 19 years and teaching experience with students with disabilities was 18 years on average.

**Qualitative**

Qualitative data was collected in the four open-ended questions as follows:

- (5) How are your instructional practices related to student achievement?
- (6) Is there anything you want to add about your instructional practices?
- (10) How are your beliefs related to student achievement?
- (11) Is there anything you want to add about your beliefs?

Responses to the open-ended questions were coded using a teacher coding sheet with Bandura’s social cognition categories. Social-cognition categories for coding are self-efficacy personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences. Personal factors relate to knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy. Behavior can include teaching strategies and/or inclusive practices. Environmental influences connect to home, work, school, and classroom.

The researcher viewed individual responses and coded open-ended questions based on the most prevalent category. Categories were totaled for each open-ended question. No/NA and Skipped questions were also totaled. A table showing the results can be found in Appendix E.

Coding results indicate that the behavior category was most highly represented for open-ended question 5. Personal and behavior categories were equally represented for open-ended question 6. The personal category was most highly represented for open-ended questions 10 and 11.
Open-ended questions aligned with the coding categories. Questions 5 and 6 aligned with the behavior category while questions 10 and 11 aligned with the personal category. The researcher noticed that most respondents answered in congruence with the question and associated category.

Trends emerged from the data based on coded responses. For the personal category, respondents indicated a desire to expand their knowledge and self-reflection to meet students’ needs. Respondents’ belief systems were consistent with all students can learn and achieve. The overarching themes were expectations, accountability, and teacher supports. Sample responses are as follows:

- In my former school, there was a poster that hung in our hallway, which sums up my beliefs about achievement. "All children can learn, but not all on the same day or in the same way." Having high expectations is important, but also knowing that some students can't jump that high and might need a ladder, or an escalator, and sometimes, you need to celebrate every step along the way. All children need to feel that someone cares and that they are worthwhile. These fundamental needs carry over into how much they try, and how much they achieve.

- I hold all students accountable for their learning experiences and I hold high standards of learning for all learners. With appropriate accommodations and modifications in response to interventions, students of all needs can achieve learning goals.
I want the students to be able to achieve their goals in the environment that works best for them. Although being in a general education classroom is beneficial for all students, there are many that would benefit from being in either a self-contained classroom or resource room for parts of the day as well. I feel sometimes the goals of students with disabilities are forgotten in a general education setting. Not purposefully, but a teacher can only support so much in a general education setting. When placing students with disabilities in a general education classroom, supports for the teacher and student should be put in place as well. Placing an extra aide in the classroom or one on one aide for students with disabilities will help students achieve their goals.

Common themes in the behavior category were data-driven instruction, instructional methodologies/strategies, and student supports. Respondents discussed reviewing lessons with students using online programs such as Zearn based on work completion. There was discussion around the use of assessments to group students and provide individual instruction or intervention in a co-teaching model with two educators. In a remote setting, small groups can be arranged using break-out rooms on a digital platform such as Zoom. A variety of methods and strategies are mentioned such as number talks, think pair share, and notice and wonder discussions to engage students and assess understanding. Weekly/daily modifications of materials and methods to help students achieve IEP goals were shared. This may include digital and non-digital content using various platforms. Remote learning incorporates direct, live instruction for synchronous learning and small group and independent practice for asynchronous
learning. Accommodations and modifications are provided based on student needs to achieve learning objectives and goals.

In the environmental category, respondents’ language included ‘we’ or ‘our’ in reference to classroom/school expectations and goals.

Respondents were given an opportunity to provide additional information in questions 6 and 11 as a follow up to the previous questions 5 and 10. Most respondents chose not to respond to questions 6 and 11 by indicating No/NA or skipping the questions altogether. However, a teacher provided context about beliefs in light of the pandemic for question #11. The teacher response is as follows:

I don't believe in one-size-fits all education. How can it? That includes LRE.

Some children benefit from a smaller class size and more support for part of/all day, while some students can flourish in regular classroom. Just like some children have flourished during remote learning and some have floundered.

**Quantitative**

Quantitative data was collected in the following seven closed-ended questions that consisted of one multiple-choice and six scale-response items (refer to Appendix C for items):
Figure 1. Seven Closed-ended Questions

1. How often do you collaborate with your grade level general education and special education teacher colleagues at your school?
   - Weekly
   - Bi-weekly
   - Monthly
   - Other (please specify)

2. To what extent do your teacher collaborations discuss the following work?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit and lesson planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student work analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer observations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. To what extent do you provide the following supports to students with disabilities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culturally relevant curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic intervention and/or enrichment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations and modifications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native language text and resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. To what extent do you engage in professional development to support instruction for students with disabilities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universal Design for Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistive Technology and/or Augmentative Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. To what extent do you believe students with disabilities should be placed in the following classrooms for the majority of the school day?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separate or self-contained classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. To what extent do you believe students with disabilities will meet your learning expectations as described below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderate rates of learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low rates of learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High rates of learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. How would you rate the processes for Response to Intervention/Multi-tiered Systems of Support at your school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
<th>Highly Ineffective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions 1 through 4 focused on practices while questions 7 through 9 focused on beliefs. Responses were grouped into beliefs and practices.

**Practices**

Teacher practices were categorized with a report of the highest ratings. Categories include teacher collaboration for general and special educators, student supports, and professional development. In the context of the global pandemic, these practices will take place virtually.

In the category, teacher collaboration for general and special educators, 60% of respondents indicated collaboration with their grade level teacher colleagues takes place weekly. Respondents rated curriculum development (53.33%), unit and lesson planning (66.67%), and student work analysis (53.33%) as frequently discussed during teacher collaborations. Peer observations were rated as rarely discussed by 40% of respondents (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Teacher Collaboration (Q1 and Q2)**
For student supports, culturally relevant curriculum (33.33%) and native language text and resources (46.67%) were rated as frequently provided to students with disabilities. Academic intervention and/or enrichment (46.67%) and accommodations and modifications (66.67%) were rated as always provided to students with disabilities (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Supports to Students with Disabilities (Q3)
In the professional development category, teacher engagement in Universal Design for Learning (46.67%) and Assistive Technology and/or Augmentative Communication (40%) were rated occasionally. IEP Development was equally rated always, occasionally, and rarely (26.67%) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Professional Development to Support Instruction for Students with Disabilities (Q4)

Q4: To what extent do you engage in professional development to support instruction for students with disabilities?

Beliefs

Teacher beliefs were categorized with a report of the highest ratings. Categories include least restrictive environment, learning expectations, and multi-tiered system of supports. As a result of the global pandemic, remote learning may impact teachers’ beliefs.

In the category, least restrictive environment, respondents rated placement in separate or self-contained classrooms (50%) and resource classrooms (51.14%) for
students with disabilities as occasionally. General education classrooms were rated frequently by 71.43% of respondents (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Students with Disabilities Placement in Classrooms (Q7)

Q7: To what extent do you believe students with disabilities should be placed in the following classrooms for the majority of the school day?

For learning expectations, rates of learning were identified as low, high, or moderate. Respondents defined rates of learning for students with disabilities and responded accordingly. Fifty percent of respondents rated low rates of learning as occasionally. High rates of learning was rated occasionally by 50% of the respondents. Moderate rates of learning was rated frequently by 64.29% of respondents.
Figure 6. Students with Disabilities Meet Your Learning Expectations (Q8)

**Q8:** To what extent do you believe students with disabilities will meet your learning expectations as described below?

Answered: 14  Skipped: 1

Multi-tiered System of Supports was rated effective by 66.67% of respondents.

Figure 7. Rate the Processes for Response to Intervention/Multi-tiered Systems of Support (Q9)

**Q9:** How would you rate the processes for Response to Intervention/Multi-tiered Systems of Support at your school?

Answered: 15  Skipped: 0
Principal Results

The global COVID-19 pandemic posed increasing challenges on principals to lead and support the school community with the quick transition from in person to remote instruction. Principals were charged with establishing remote learning plans, structures and systems to continue student learning to the greatest extent possible. In the study, nine principal results are presented. Two of the nine principals specifically referenced COVID. One principal discussed the importance of teacher collaboration practices to build team trust and support through COVID. Another principal talked about beliefs in daily personal growth in the wake of COVID.

Table 3. Work Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Experience</th>
<th>Leadership Experience with Students with Disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35 years</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Respondents</th>
<th>Leadership Experience (on average)</th>
<th>Leadership Experience with Students with Disabilities (on average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not identified</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For principal respondents, years of leadership experience ranged from 3 to 22 across grade bands. However, years of leadership experience with students with disabilities ranged from 8 to 22 across grade bands. On average, principals in pre-kindergarten have eight years of leadership experience and 14 years of leadership experience with students with disabilities. Principals in grade band kindergarten through third have 17.5 years of leadership experience and 20 years of leadership experience with students with disabilities on average. In grade band four through six, leadership experience and leadership experience with students with disabilities was 8.5 years on average. For grade band seven through eight, leadership experience and leadership experience with students with disabilities was 18 years. The principal in grade band kindergarten through eight has eight years of leadership experience and leadership experience with students with disabilities.

Qualitative

Qualitative data was collected in the four open-ended questions as follows:

- (5) How are your leadership practices related to student achievement?
- (6) Is there anything you want to add about your leadership practices?
- (10) How are your beliefs related to student achievement?
- (11) Is there anything you want to add about your beliefs?

Responses to the open-ended questions were coded using a principal coding sheet with Bandura’s (1997) social cognition categories. Social-cognition categories for coding are self-efficacy personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences. Personal factors relate to knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy. Behavior can include
teaching strategies and/or inclusive practices. Environmental influences connect to home, work, school, and classroom.

The researcher viewed individual responses and coded open-ended questions based on the most prevalent category. Categories were totaled for each open-ended question. No/NA and Skipped questions were also totaled. A table showing the results can be found in Appendix G.

Coding results indicate that the behavior category was most highly represented for open-ended question 5. The personal category was most highly represented for open-ended questions 6, 10, and 11. Open-ended questions aligned with the coding categories. Questions 5 and 6 aligned with the behavior category while questions 10 and 11 aligned with the personal category. The researcher noticed that most respondents answered in congruence with the question and associated category except for question 6. The personal category was most prevalent for question 6.

Trends emerged from the data based on coded responses. For the personal category, respondents specified essential qualities such as motivation, curiosity, and growth as a leader to impact student achievement. Respondents’ belief systems were consistent with all students can learn and achieve. The overarching themes were expectations, accountability, and supports. Sample responses are as follows:

- I believe all student can excel when given the proper support, encouragement and goals for high expectations.
- I believe a motivated and curious leader always seeks to find the best ways to guide and grow student achievement.
I believe that all students can be successful if they are taught in the modes that best suits their learning modality.

Common themes in the behavior category were data-driven instruction, instructional staff supports, and student supports/interventions. Respondents discussed student-centered decision making based on data to support instructional practices, curriculum development, teaching strategies, professional development, and school improvement plans. In a remote setting, a variation of digital and non-digital mediums to support student learning will be considered and explored. Collaboration and planning with school teams and teacher teams including grade-level, programs, and vertical was mentioned to support student achievement. There was discussion about assessing and monitoring student needs; in response, intervention and supports were identified and provided. A principal stated,

I am very hands on when it comes to student achievement. I play many roles in my building which includes providing coverage for teachers in classrooms, picking students up from their home and transporting them to school, celebrating their academic achievements and accomplishments, etc.

Due to the pivot to remote learning, the virtual space is the new norm to interact and engage with students and staff. New learning is taking place on digital platforms and instructional delivery models for student engagement. School and classroom schedules reflect synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities across content areas for students to engage in whole group, small group and independent activities.
In the environmental category, respondents identified school-wide goals and practices such as positive culture, staff buy-in, and teacher collaboration for student achievement.

Respondents were given an opportunity to provide additional information in questions 6 and 11 as a follow-up to the previous questions 5 and 10. Most respondents chose not to respond to questions 6 and 11 by indicating No/NA or skipping the questions altogether. However, principals provided context about leadership practices in light of the pandemic for question 6. Principal responses are as follows:

- Providing opportunities for teachers to learn from each other is crucial in developing trusting relationships amongst them. This has helped in my team supporting one another through COVID in instructional materials and emotional well-being.
- I am growing as a leader every day, especially during COVID.

**Quantitative**

Quantitative data was collected in seven closed-ended questions that consisted of one multiple-choice and six scale-response items. Questions 1 through 4 focused on practices while questions 7 through 9 focused on beliefs. Responses were grouped into beliefs and practices (refer to Appendix D for items).

**Practices**

Principal practices were categorized with a report of the highest ratings. Categories include teacher collaboration for general and special educators, student supports, and professional development.
In the category, teacher collaboration for general and special educators, 55.56% of respondents indicated collaboration with grade level teacher colleagues is scheduled weekly. Fifty-six percent (55.56%) of respondents rated unit and lesson planning as always discussed. Respondents rated curriculum development (55.56%) and student work analysis (55.56%) as frequently discussed during teacher collaborations. Peer observations were rated as occasionally discussed by 55.56% of respondents (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Teacher Collaboration (Q1 and Q2)

**Q1: How often do you schedule collaboration with grade level general education and special education teachers?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-weekly</td>
<td>23.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For student supports, culturally relevant curriculum was equally rated always, frequently, and occasionally (33.33%). Academic intervention and/or enrichment was equally rated always and frequently (44.44%). Accommodations and modifications were rated as always provided to students with disabilities by 88.89% of respondents. Native language text and resources (44.44%) were rated as occasionally provided to students with disabilities (see Figure 9).
In the professional development category, principal engagement in Universal Design for Learning (66.67%) was rated occasionally. Assistive Technology and/or Augmentative Communication (33.33%) were rated rarely. IEP Development was equally rated frequently (55.56%) (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Professional Development to Support Instruction for Students with Disabilities (Q4)
Beliefs

Principal beliefs were categorized with a report of the highest ratings. Categories include least restrictive environment, learning expectations, and multi-tiered system of supports.

In the category, least restrictive environment, respondents rated placement in separate or self-contained classrooms (66.67%) as rarely. General education classrooms was rated frequently by 55.56% of respondents. Resource classrooms (44.44%) for students with disabilities was rated occasionally (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Students with Disabilities Placement in Classroom (Q7)

For learning expectations, rates of learning were identified as low, high, or moderate. Respondents defined rates of learning for students with disabilities and responded accordingly. Respondents rated low rates of learning (44.44%) and high rates of learning (55.56%) as occasionally. Moderate rates of learning were rated frequently by 66.67% of respondents.
Figure 12. Students with Disabilities Meet Your Learning Expectations (Q8)

Q8: To what extent do you believe students with disabilities will meet your learning expectations as described below?

Answered: 9  Skipped: 0

Multi-tiered System of Supports was rated effective by 55.56% of respondents.

Figure 13. Rate the Processes for Response to Intervention/Multi-tiered Systems of Support (Q9)

Q9: How would you rate the processes for Response to Intervention/Multi-tiered Systems of Support at your school?

Answered: 9  Skipped: 0
Data Validation

The researcher consulted with a colleague to validate coding results. The researcher and colleague identified environmental influences as connections; however, behaviors may or may not be seen as a result of the environment. For example, a principal respondent stated the following: “My leadership practices of promoting and supporting a positive culture is directly related to student achievement in that if my teachers feel happy, my students will also feel happy and therefore, they will learn.” Positive culture could be observable behaviors or feelings such as a culture of calm. Another example is a teacher respondent’s statement: “Our instructional practices go hand in hand with student achievement. The more we collaborate with general education teachers, the greater the student achievement.” Both examples present a connection to the environment through observable or non-observable behaviors.

Summary

In summary, teacher and principal qualitative and quantitative results are similar in relation to beliefs and practices. The global COVID-19 pandemic was minimally represented at 6% for teachers and 22% for principals respectively; thus, impact on beliefs and practices is inconclusive. Coding results largely fell in the personal category. A teacher outlier was identified with personal and behavior categories showing equal representation for open-ended question 6. The principal outlier was identified with open-ended question 6 being aligned with the behavior category, yet the highest representation was in the personal category. Category themes aligned with closed-ended responses. For teachers, a behavior theme was student supports and consistent with scale response
ratings for providing accommodations and modifications, academic intervention and/or enrichment. For principals, a behavior theme was student supports and consistent with scale response ratings for academic intervention and/or enrichment. The environmental category was coded the least.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Responding to Research Questions

Given the problem statement, a gap in literature exists with exploring principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices. For students with disabilities, it is critical to understand elementary principals’ and teachers’ educational beliefs and practices regarding LRE. By gaining an understanding of principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices, the relationship to student achievement can be explored. IDEA (2004) outlines legal requirements for students with disabilities to receive a FAPE in the LRE. All students can learn and are entitled to be educated with their grade peers in the LRE (Fullan, 2003a). Principals’ interpretation of the LRE (Anderson & Macri, 2009; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; McGrew, 2008; Praisner, 2003; Riehl, 2000) and teachers’ interpretation of the LRE (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007; Brandes & Crowson, 2009; Boling, 2007; Pearce, 2009; Sze, 2009) is grounded in their educational beliefs and practices and these LRE practices are linked to the achievement of students with disabilities (Capper & Frattura, 2008; Frattura & Capper, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2009). My research questions are as follows:

(1) How are principals’ LRE beliefs and practices related to student achievement?

(2) How are teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices related to student achievement?
Principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices were analyzed using social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura, “People’s level of motivations, affective states and actions are based more on what they believe than on what is objectively true” (p. 2). In other words, beliefs inform actions. Self-efficacy is at the center of Bandura’s social cognitive theory, which views human functioning as a result of the interactions between personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences (Pajares, 1997). Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Self-efficacy beliefs lead to carrying out a task to reach a desired goal or outcome.

Teacher Discussion

Teachers’ quantitative results, documents review, and the COVID context were compared to identify relationships. Quantitative results specific to practices are teacher collaboration for general and special educators, student supports, and professional development. For teacher collaboration, teachers’ responses varied from frequent discussion of curriculum development, unit and lesson planning, and student work analysis to rarely discussing peer observations. District Board policy for curriculum development outlines expectations for teachers and staff to own, create and implement curriculum guides. The policy states: Curriculum guides serve as a framework from which a teacher will develop units of study, individual lesson plans and approaches to instruction that will serve the students’ particular needs at a particular time. District Board policy for the Staff Development Program outlines visits to other classrooms and schools as a professional development opportunity. Due to the global COVID-19
pandemic and shift to remote learning, peer observations were less likely to occur. In addition, peer observations require scheduling, classroom coverage, and other logistics for implementation.

Student supports were rated differently amongst teachers. For students with disabilities, culturally relevant curriculum and native language text and resources were frequently provided whereas academic intervention and/or enrichment and accommodations and modifications were always provided to students with disabilities. Academic intervention and/or enrichment relate to MTSS while accommodations and modifications are incorporated into students’ IEPs. District demographics reflect a culturally and linguistically diverse student population with variation between individual schools. District board policy for curriculum content requires United States history instruction, specifically the roles and contributions of ethnic groups, including but not limited to, the African Americans, Albanians, Asian Americans, Bohemians, Czecks, French, Germans, Hispanics, Hungarians, Irish, Italians, Lithuanians, Polish, Russians, Scots, and Slovaksians in the history of this country and State. The Instructional Materials Board policy states instructional materials should provide quality learning experiences for students and (1) Depict in an accurate and unbiased way the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society; and (2) Contribute to a sense of the worth of all people regardless of sex, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability or any other differences that may exits. In the district strategic plan, the first goal is focused on development and implementation of MTSS for all students. Special education law is addressed in the Education of Children with Disabilities Board policy.
Amid COVID-19, curriculum and instructional materials were adapted to support online learning. In addition, the virtual space provided an opportunity to implement MTSS via small group break-out rooms using Google Meet or Zoom.

Teacher engagement in professional development had the most variation in practice. Ratings included occasional engagement in Universal Design for Learning and Assistive Technology and/or Augmentative Communication. IEP development was rated always, occasionally, and rarely. The district strategic plan shows a pictorial representation of a thermometer with the MTSS Framework including Professional Learning Communities and UDL/Instruction components. District Board policy for the Staff Development Program outlines professional growth requirements according to state law and the local collective bargaining agreement. Staff development opportunities include planned in-service programs in the district with staff input, visits to other classrooms and schools as well as conferences, workshops and other meetings, and leaves of absence for advanced training and internships. During COVID-19, professional development shifted from in-person to virtual. Professional development was prioritized resulting in limitations in certain topic areas. Individual school differences were prevalent.

Quantitative results specific to beliefs are LRE, learning expectations, and MTSS. For LRE, placement in separate or self-contained classrooms was rated rarely, general education rated frequently, and resource rated occasionally. District Board policy for the Education of Children with Disabilities outlines federal, state and local laws requiring students to be educated in the LRE. The policy states: The School District shall provide a
free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment and necessary
related services to all children with disabilities enrolled in the District, as required by the
Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and implementing provisions of the School
Code, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities
Act. The term “children with disabilities,” as used in this policy, means children between
ages 3 and 21 (inclusive) for whom it is determined, through definitions and procedures
described in the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Special Education rules, that
special education services are needed. In the context of COVID, the LRE mandate still
applied with students receiving remote instruction from a general education teacher,
special education teacher or both based on their IEPs. The use of online break-out rooms
was used to support implementation of service minutes to advance student learning.

Learning expectations and rates of learning for students with disabilities showed
variation. Both low rates of learning and high rates of learning were rated occasionally.
Moderate rates of learning were rated frequently. District Board policy for Grading and
Promotion states every teacher shall maintain an evaluation record for each student in the
teacher’s classroom. The Administrative Procedure: Evaluating and Reporting Student
Achievement Board policy identifies the roles of the teacher and building principal. The
teacher informs students about the grading system at the beginning of the school year or
term, whichever is applicable. The teacher explains that grades: (1) assess progress
toward education goals and assist in the improvement of that progress, (2) will be given
by the teacher, using his or her professional judgment, in an impartial and consistent
manner, and (3) will reflect excessive absences. Student achievement will be assessed as
demonstrated through such performance indicators as the following (these are not listed in order of importance and are not exclusive):

- Preparation of assignments, including completeness, accuracy, legibility, and promptness.
- Contribution to classroom discussions.
- Demonstrated understanding of concepts.
- Application of skills and knowledge to new situations.
- Organization, presentation, and content of written and oral reports.
- Originality and reasoning ability when working through problems.
- Accomplishment in class presentations and projects.
- Performance on tests, quizzes, and final examinations.

The teacher assigns grades for academic improvement and achievement using standardized criterion-referenced test scores, letter grades, and/or other assigned numerical criteria. During the COVID-19 pandemic, districts and schools shifted from a standard grading system to a Pass/Fail system to assess student learning and progress. In addition, local and state standardized assessments were canceled.

MTSS was rated as effective and academic intervention and/or enrichment was always provided to students with disabilities. District goal one on the strategic plan is the development and implementation of MTSS for all students.

The COVID-19 context presented unique challenges that inherently impacted teacher responses although only one teacher explicitly stated the pandemic. The rapid shift from in-person to remote learning changed the way in which teachers collaborated,
student supports were delivered, and professional development was received. Despite these COVID-related changes, district Board policies remained the same. Inconsistencies were noted in relation to district policies and teachers’ practices specifically engagement in professional development.

Teacher beliefs were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. LRE interpretation, learning expectations, and MTSS posed new ways of thinking and response to student needs in a remote setting. Adherence to district goals and policies was still expected and teacher responses aligned to this expectation. Implementation of Board policies required adjustment particularly for learning expectations and rates of learning due to the shift from standard grading to Pass/Fail and cancellation of standardized assessments.

District documents supported teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices. The district is committed to increasing student achievement while meeting the diverse needs of all students. The district strategic plan addresses MTSS to support students with identified deficits and move toward academic and social-emotional growth considering the pandemic and beyond. Board policies outline special education laws and procedures to ensure compliance and uphold the rights of students with disabilities. District priorities are reflected in Board meeting agendas and minutes, specifically around instruction and staffing schools with certified teachers and leaders.

The researcher could not determine teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices and the relationship to student achievement in large part due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of the teachers indicated frequent placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, frequent moderate rates of learning, and effective MTSS
processes. Similarly, more than half of teachers collaborated with general and special educators weekly with frequent discussion of unit and lesson planning, curriculum development and student work analysis. Accommodations and modifications were always provided to students with disabilities. Teachers indicated that students with disabilities were frequently placed in general education classrooms while frequently learning at moderate rates. As a high-performing district, one would assume that students with disabilities would be frequently learning at high rates. The assumption is COVID had a significant impact on student outcomes.

**Principal Discussion**

Principals’ quantitative results, documents review, and the COVID context were compared to identify relationships. Quantitative results specific to practices are teacher collaboration for general and special educators, student supports, and professional development. For teacher collaboration, principals’ responses varied from unit and lesson planning always discussed, curriculum development and student work frequently discussed, and peer observations occasionally discussed. District Board policy for curriculum development outlines expectations for teachers and staff to own, create and implement curriculum guides. The policy states: Curriculum guides serve as a framework from which a teacher will develop units of study, individual lesson plans and approaches to instruction that will serve the students’ particular needs at a particular time. District Board policy for the Staff Development Program outlines visits to other classrooms and schools as a professional development opportunity. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and shift to remote learning, peer observations were less likely to
occur. Due to the complexity of the remote learning schedule with synchronous and asynchronous learning, logistics and scheduling for peer observations would be problematic.

Student supports had the most variation in practice for principals. Culturally relevant curriculum were rated as always provided, frequently provided, and occasionally provided to students with disabilities. Academic intervention and/or enrichment were rated as always provided and frequently provided in relation to MTSS. Accommodations and modifications in students’ IEPs were always provided whereas native language text and resources were occasionally provided. District demographics reflect a culturally and linguistically diverse student population with variation between individual schools. District board policy for curriculum content required United States history instruction, specifically the roles and contributions of ethnic groups, including but not limited to, the African Americans, Albanians, Asian Americans, Bohemians, Czecks, French, Germans, Hispanics, Hungarians, Irish, Italians, Lithuanians, Polish, Russians, Scots, and Slovaks in the history of this country and State. The Instructional Materials Board policy states instructional materials should provide quality learning experiences for students and (1) Depict in an accurate and unbiased way the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society; and (2) Contribute to a sense of the worth of all people regardless of sex, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability or any other differences that may exit. In the district strategic plan, the first goal is focused on development and implementation of MTSS for all students. Special education law is addressed in the Education of Children with Disabilities Board policy.
Amid COVID-19, curriculum and instructional materials were adapted to support online learning. In addition, the virtual space provided an opportunity to implement MTSS via small group break rooms using Google Meet or Zoom.

Principal engagement in professional development ratings showed considerable variation. Ratings included occasional engagement in Universal Design for Learning and rarely engaging in Assistive Technology and/or Augmentative Communication. IEP development was rated frequently. The district strategic plan shows a pictorial representation of a thermometer with the MTSS Framework and Professional Learning Communities and UDL/Instruction components. District Board policy for staff development program outlines professional growth requirements according to state law and local collective bargaining agreement. Staff development opportunities include planned in-service programs in the district with staff input, visits to other classrooms and schools as well as conferences, workshops and other meetings, and leaves of absence for advanced training and internships. During COVID-19, professional development shifted from in-person to virtual requiring prioritization and limitations in certain topic areas. Individual school differences were prevalent.

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MTSS was rated as effective as academic intervention and/or enrichment was always provided to students with disabilities. District goal one on the strategic plan is the development and implementation of MTSS for all students.

The COVID-19 context presented unique challenges that inherently impacted principal responses although only two principals explicitly stated the pandemic. The rapid shift from in-person to remote learning changed the way in which teachers
collaborated, student supports were delivered, and professional development was received. Despite these COVID-related changes, district Board policies remained the same. Inconsistencies were noted in relation to district policies and teachers’ practices specifically engagement in professional development.

Principal beliefs were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. LRE interpretation, learning expectations, and MTSS posed new ways of thinking and response to student needs in a remote setting. Adherence to district goals and policies was still expected and principal responses aligned to this expectation. Implementation of Board policies required adjustment particularly for learning expectations and rates of learning due to the shift from standard grading to Pass/Fail and cancellation of standardized assessments.

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processes. Similarly, more than half of principals scheduled weekly teacher collaboration for general and special educators with unit and lesson planning always discussed followed by curriculum development and student work analysis frequently discussed. Accommodations and modifications were always provided to students with disabilities. Frequent principal engagement in IEP development was noted. Principals indicated that students with disabilities were frequently placed in general education classrooms while frequently learning at moderate rates. As a high-performing district, one would assume that students with disabilities would be frequently learning at high rates. The assumption is COVID had a significant impact on student outcomes.

The unit PreK-12 district was selected for participation in the study given its high performance in LRE implementation. The district has exceeded the state targets for LRE Indicators 5A and 6A on the State Performance Plan (SPP). Indicator 5A measures students with IEPs ages 6-21 who are educated inside the general education classroom for 80 percent or more of their school day (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014). Indicator 6A measures children ages 3-5 who are enrolled in regular early childhood programs and receive the majority of their special education and related services in regular early childhood programs (ISBE District Special Education Profiles, 2013-2014). In addition to exceeding state LRE targets, the district has made steady progress in closing the achievement gap between students with IEPs and non-IEP students in reading and math. From 2010 to 2014, the district’s achievement gap decreased from 45% to 30% in reading and from 36% to 27% in math (Illinois State Board of Education Report Card, 2014-2015).
A high performing district presents a unique sampling that can impact results. Since district outcomes are atypical, the data may be skewed. The researcher predicts respondents in average or low-performing districts would have different responses, presenting a more representative data sample.

**Limitations**

Sample open-ended responses can be coded under multiple categories/themes. Responses were coded based on the most prevalent category/theme. The researcher and colleague identified a limitation with coding into a single category/theme. To address this, the researcher would have double checked responses with teachers and/or principals in addition to consulting with a colleague.

Another limitation is teacher representation across grade bands. Grade bands four through six had one respondent. For greater representation across grade bands, the researcher would have contacted respective principals to follow up on teacher survey distribution and completion. Teacher respondents by grade bands are as follows:

- PreK = 7
- K-3 = 4
- 4-6 = 1
- 7-8 = 2
- K-8 = Not identified

For students with disabilities, all disability categories are not represented in the study. The three disability categories that are not represented are deafness, deaf-blindness, and visual impairment.
The pandemic limited data collection methods used by the researcher. Survey research was solely used to limit contact with others. The researcher would have included virtual principal interviews as another data source for the study.

The impact of the pandemic on teachers’ and principals’ beliefs and practices is unclear. One teacher and two principals referenced the pandemic in their responses. The researcher would have explicitly stated the pandemic in survey questions to elicit responses.

**Research Implications**

The implications for the unit district are targeted professional development opportunities for teachers and principals to support instruction for students with disabilities. Lower rates of engagement in professional development in Universal Design for Learning, Assistive Technology and/or Augmentative Communication, and IEP Development were reported. Peer observations were rarely or occasionally discussed in teacher collaborations. Professional development can help principals and teachers gain knowledge to implement instructional best practices to meet students’ needs in the LRE. The goal is to increase expectations and rates of learning for students with disabilities.

**Action Research**

The researcher and superintendent will arrange a follow up meeting with the student support team after the study. A PowerPoint presentation will be prepared and include results, data analysis, district recommendations, and action steps with a timeline for completion. The presentation will be shared with the superintendent for feedback prior to the follow up meeting. Meeting outcomes will include the following:
• Strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation of special education programming
• Targeted professional development for schools on instructional best practices for students with disabilities.

After the follow up meeting, the researcher will schedule quarterly check-ins with the superintendent to discuss implementation and outcomes.

Further Research

The researcher will consult with Loyola University Chicago School of Education faculty and staff to recruit and hire a qualified individual to expand research to other Illinois unit districts serving grades pre-kindergarten to twelve. Selection criteria would include the following: (1) Exceeding LRE state targets in Indicators 5A and 6A, (2) Closing the achievement gap between students with IEPs and non-IEP students. Purposive sampling would include elementary and high school teachers and principals. Data collection would be expanded to include principal interviews and teacher surveys.

As an elementary principal and aspiring district superintendent, the researcher wants to contribute to systemic change and improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all students have a right to an education. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 provisioned the right for students with disabilities to be educated in public schools. Education took shape across the continuum ranging from the most restrictive to the LRE. Common practice was to educate students with
disabilities in separate schools and classrooms with little or no interaction with their non-disabled peers.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and schools is a legal mandate intended to provide students with a FAPE in the LRE (IDEA, 2004). Since the general education setting is where students with IEPs would be educated if they were not disabled, it is expected that they receive instruction in general education to the maximum extent possible. All students can learn and are entitled to be educated with their grade peers in the LRE (Fullan, 2003a).

Given the study’s results, principals’ and teachers’ interpretation and implementation of LRE was consistent with federal legislation and the educational rights of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are frequently placed in general education classrooms. Principals and teachers believe students can learn and achieve. Shared beliefs and practices influence the direction, goals, and outcomes of schools.

The impact of the study is moderate given the researcher could not determine principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices and the relationship to student achievement in large part due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The district serves as a model for other districts in the alignment of teachers’ and principals’ beliefs and practices for successful LRE implementation. The researcher wants to see principals and teachers assessing LRE beliefs and practices in conjunction with special education laws to provide students with disabilities inclusive learning spaces with non-IEP students. This will enable all students to experience and embrace diversity both inside and outside the school building; thus providing enhanced learning to foster student achievement.
Principals’ interpretation of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Anderson & Macri, 2009; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; McGrew, 2008; Praisner, 2003; Riehl, 2000) and teachers’ interpretation of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007; Brandes & Crowson, 2009; Boling, 2007; Pearce, 2009; Sze, 2009) is grounded in their educational beliefs and practices and these Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) practices are linked to the achievement of students with disabilities (Capper & Frattura, 2008; Frattura & Capper, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2009). The problem is that there is a gap in literature exploring principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices. For students with disabilities, it is critical to understand elementary principals’ and teachers’ educational beliefs and practices regarding LRE. By gaining an understanding of principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices, the relationship to student achievement can be explored.

The goal of education is to equip individuals with a broad knowledge base for the purpose of contributing to the larger community and society as a whole (Freire, 1970b). For students with disabilities, educational experiences must be inclusive and reflective of societal norms. Students with disabilities will be included in the general population in the world and must be prepared academically, socially, and emotionally for the reality of life. Educators and stakeholders must take collective responsibility and action to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “The time is always right to do what is right.”
APPENDIX A

FIGURES
### RACE/ETHNICITY AND DISABILITY CATEGORY FOR STUDENTS WITH IEPs

#### Percent of Students with IEPs by Race / Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Native Hawaiian</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEPs</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEPs</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEPs</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Percent of Students with IEPs in Each Disability Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Percent of All Students</th>
<th>Percent of Students with IEPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District</td>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deafness</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf-Blindness</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Delay</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disability</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic Impairment</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairment</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech or Language Impairment</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impairment</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Peer districts are districts of the same type as this district: Elementary School, High School, or Unit District
** Peer districts for Unit Districts do not include Chicago Public Schools
*** Students who are receiving special education and/or related services via an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) have been removed from all calculations
EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH IEPs

Educational environment refers to the extent to which students with IEPs receive special education and related services in classes or schools with their non-disabled peers. Research has shown that students with IEPs who received their special education and/or related services in the general education environment displayed increased motivation, higher self-esteem, improved communication and socialization skills, and greater academic achievement as compared to students who received their special education and/or related services in a more restrictive, or segregated, environment.

The educational environments in which students with IEPs ages 6-21 receive their special education and/or related services are generally classified into four settings:

1. Served inside the general education classroom 80% or more of the day
2. Served inside the general education classroom 40% to 79% of the day
3. Served inside the general education classroom less than 40% of the day
4. Served in separate educational facilities

The following information is provided for students ages 6 through 21.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Students with IEPs in Various Educational Environments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Students with an IEP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Environments by Race / Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Peer districts are districts of the same type as this district: Elementary School, High School, or Unit District
** Peer districts for Unit Districts do not include Chicago Public Schools
### Educational Environments for Students with IEPs for Selected Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inside ≥ 60%</th>
<th>Inside 40-79%</th>
<th>Inside &lt;40%</th>
<th>Separate Facility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Disability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual Disability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Health Impairment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Learning Disability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speech or Language Impairment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>98.0%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Early Childhood (EC) Educational Environments (ages 3-5)

Educational environments for children ages 3 through 5 can be generally classified into one of the following settings:

A. Children attending a regular early childhood program and receives the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program.

B. Children attending a regular early childhood program and receives the majority of special education and related services in some other location.

C. Children receiving special education or related services full-time in a separate class/facility.

D. Children receiving special education or related services full-time in the child’s home.

E. Children receiving special education or related services from a service provider, and who do not attend an early childhood or special education program.

### Percent of Students with IEPs in Various Educational Environments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regular Early Childhood Program</th>
<th>Separate Class/Facility</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Service Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Majority of Services Inside EC Program</td>
<td>Majority of Services Outside EC Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Educational Environments by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regular Early Childhood Program</th>
<th>Separate Class/Facility</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Service Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Majority of Services Inside EC Program</td>
<td>Majority of Services Outside EC Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hispanic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asian</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Native Hawaiian</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Native American</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two or More Races</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Peer districts are districts of the same type as this district: Elementary, High School, or Unit
**Peer districts for Unit Districts do not include Chicago Public Schools
## Educational Environments for Students with IEPs for Selected Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Regular Early Childhood Program</th>
<th>Separate Class/Facility</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Service Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Majority of Services Inside EC Program</td>
<td>Majority of Services Outside EC Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Delay</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84.6%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Disability</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Disability</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairment</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>43.6%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disability</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech or Language Impairment</td>
<td>District</td>
<td>All Peer Districts*</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Peer districts are districts of the same type as this district: Elementary, High School, or Unit
**Peer districts for Unit Districts do not include Chicago Public Schools
# STATE PERFORMANCE PLAN INDICATORS FOR STUDENTS WITH IEPs

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) requires states to develop and submit a State Performance Plan (SPP) to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the U.S. Department of Education. The SPP is designed to evaluate the State's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEA and describe how the State will improve its implementation. The plan consists of several priority areas with specific indicators defined for each area. Measurable and rigorous targets are defined for each indicator to show progress throughout the life of the SPP. States are required to publicly report on SPP Indicators 1-14. A link to the Illinois State Performance Plan, Part B can be found at: <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/State-Performance-Plan-Data-and-Accountability.aspx>

The table below shows how this school district performed on specific indicators and whether or not it met the annual state targets for those indicators as defined in the Illinois State Performance Plan. Some indicators require a minimum number of students before comparing district data to the state targets. "N/A" indicates that either the district did not have enough students to report on the district's performance for that particular indicator or the district does not serve students of the ages measured by the indicator.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPP Indicator</th>
<th>Indicator Description</th>
<th>2018 - 2019 District Data</th>
<th>2018 – 2019 State Target</th>
<th>District Met State Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Students with IEPs ages 6-21 served inside the general classroom &gt; 80% of the time</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Children ages 3-5 in regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part B State Performance Plan (SPP) for 2005-2012

Overview of the SPP Development: Please refer to Overview of the SPP Development Section

Monitoring Priority: FAPE in the LRE

Indicator 5: Percent of children with IEPs aged 6 through 21 served:
A. Inside the regular class 80% or more of the day;
B. Inside the regular class less than 40% of the day; and
C. In separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements.

(20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(A))

Measurement:  
A. Percent = [(# of children with IEPs served inside the regular class 80% or more of the day) divided by the (total # of students aged 6 through 21 with IEPs)] times 100.  
B. Percent = [(# of children with IEPs served inside the regular class less than 40% of the day) divided by the (total # students aged 6 through 21 with IEPs)] times 100.  

Percent = [(# of children with IEPs served in separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements) divided by the (total # of students aged 6 through 21 with IEPs)] times 100.

Overview of Issue/Description of System or Process: These data are collected in the Funding and Child Tracking System (FACTS). The calculations include:

♦ the sum of students in educational environment code 01 (inside the regular class 80% or more of the day) divided by the total number of students with IEPs ages 6-21 on the FACTS December 1 child count,

♦ the sum of students in educational environment code 03 (inside the regular class less than 40% of the day) divided by the total number of students with IEPs ages 6-21 on the FACTS December 1 child count, and

♦ the sum of students in educational environment codes 04-16 (in separate schools, residential facilities, or homebound/hospital placements) divided by the total number of students with IEPs ages 6-21 on the FACTS December 1 child count.

Baseline Data for Indicator 5A for FFY 2004 (July 1, 2004-June 30, 2005): The December 1, 2004 child count from FACTS documents 47.5% of students with disabilities ages 6-21 receiving special education services outside the general education classroom less than 21% of the day. Data indicated that there were 136,055 children with IEPs removed from regular class less than 21% of the day. There were 286,534 students aged 6-21 with IEPs during the timeframe. The percentage of students with disabilities receiving services outside the general education classroom less than 21% of the day has increased since 2002 (from 39.3% in 2002 to 47.5% in 2005).
Part B State Performance Plan (SPP) for 2005-2012

Overview of the SPP Development: Please refer to Overview of the SPP Development Section

Monitoring Priority: FAPE in the LRE

Indicator 6: Percent of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs attending a:
A. Regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program; and;
B. Separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility

(20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(A))

Measurement:
A. Percent = \[\frac{(# \text{ of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs attending a regular early childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program})}{(\text{total # of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs})}\] times 100.
B. Percent = \[\frac{(# \text{ of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs attending a separate special education class, separate school, or residential facility})}{(\text{total # of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs})}\] times 100.

Overview of Issue/Description of System or Process: Data reported for Indicator 6 are the same as the State’s data reported under IDEA section 618. These data are collected in the ISBE Funding and Child Tracking System (FACTS). The calculations include:

♦ the sum of students in educational environment code 30 (child attends a regular early childhood program at least 10 hours per week and receives the majority of hours in special education and related services in the regular education program) plus code 32 (child attends a regular early childhood program less than 10 hours per week and receives the majority of hours of special education and related services in the regular education program) divided by the total number of students with IEPs ages 3-5 on the FACTS December 1 child count,

♦ the sum of students in educational environment codes 23, 24, 25 (separate classes, separate school, or residential facility) divided by the total number of students with IEPs ages 3-5 on the FACTS December 1 child count.

Baseline Data from FFY 2011: The December 1, 2011 child count from FACTS documents 32.2% of students with disabilities ages 3-5 receiving the majority of special education and related services in the regular education program. Data indicated that there were 11,905 children with IEPs who received the majority of special education and related services in the regular education program. There were 36,929 students aged 3-5 with IEPs during the timeframe.
The December 1, 2011 child count from FACTS documents 31.2% of students with disabilities ages 3-5 receiving special education services in separate special education classrooms, public or private separate schools, or residential placements. Data indicated that there were 11,540 children with IEPs served in separate special education classrooms, public or private separate schools, or residential placements. There were 36,929 students aged 3-5 with IEPs during the timeframe.

Discussion of Baseline Data: The Indicator 6A measurement includes the educational environment codes that are defined as a child receiving the majority of hours of special education and related services in the regular education program (FACTS codes 30 and 32). Improvement in this measurement is reflected by an increase in the actual target percentage. Baseline data for Indicator 6A equals 32.2%. The Indicator 6B measurement includes the educational environment codes that are defined as separate class, separate school or residential facility (FACTS codes 23, 24, and 25). Improvement in this measurement is reflected by a decrease in the actual target percentage. Baseline data for Indicator 6B equals 31.2%.
APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** Elementary Principals’ and Teachers’ Educational Beliefs and Practices in Inclusive Schools

**Researcher:** Dawn Hill

**Introduction:** You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Dawn Hill, doctoral candidate, in the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago.

Principals’ and teachers’ educational beliefs and practices regarding the inclusion of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in general education settings will be examined in this qualitative study. Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that students with IEPs are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), schools have adopted and implemented inclusion in different ways.

The questionnaire consists primarily of scale-response items, one (1) demographic question, and four (4) open-ended questions. I anticipate the time needed to complete the survey will be approximately 10-15 minutes depending on how much you share.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore elementary principals’ and teachers’ LRE beliefs and practices related to student achievement.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to:
Complete an online survey. This survey consists of seven (6) scale-response items, one (1) multiple-choice item, one (1) demographic question, and four (4) open-ended questions. The demographic question will be used to aggregate and categorize into different groups for analysis.

**Risks/Benefits:** There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research, however sharing your experiences will help me to better understand teachers’ and principals’ beliefs and practices related to academic outcomes for students with IEPs.

**Confidentiality:** You are being asked to complete the survey and provide demographic information, (i.e. your name and other identifying information). The demographic question will help me to aggregate and categorize open-ended responses into different groups for analysis. You can opt not to answer this question.

When reporting the data, any mention of names, (i.e. people, schools, districts) that appear in the open responses will be removed prior to the presentation of the results. Data will be collected
via a secured data collection portal Survey Monkey and only accessible by the researcher working on this project. In the future, this data may be made available for other researchers to access and analyze.

You will have the option to provide your email if you want to be included in the drawing for one of two (2) $25 Amazon Gift cards. The drawing will occur approximately one month after the start of data collection. Winners will be notified directly.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

**Contacts and Questions:** If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Dawn Hill at dhill8@luc.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:** By clicking on the Start survey button below and commencing with the survey you are indicating that you have read the information provided above and are agreeing to participate in this research study.

(Apple answers)

Start study
Exit study
APPENDIX C

TEACHER SURVEY ADAPTED
1. How often do you collaborate with your grade level general education and special education teacher colleagues at your school?
   - Weekly
   - Bi-weekly
   - Monthly
   - Other (please specify)

2. To what extent do your teacher collaborations discuss the following work?
   - **Curriculum development**
     - Always
     - Frequently
     - Occasionally
     - Rarely
     - Never
   - **Unit and lesson planning**
     - Always
     - Frequently
     - Occasionally
     - Rarely
     - Never
   - **Student work analysis**
     - Always
     - Frequently
     - Occasionally
     - Rarely
     - Never
   - **Peer observations**
     - Always
     - Frequently
     - Occasionally
     - Rarely
     - Never
   - Other (please specify)

3. To what extent do you provide the following supports to students with disabilities?
   - **Culturally relevant curriculum**
     - Always
     - Frequently
     - Occasionally
     - Rarely
     - Never
   - **Academic intervention and/or enrichment**
     - Always
     - Frequently
     - Occasionally
     - Rarely
     - Never
   - **Accommodations and modifications**
     - Always
     - Frequently
     - Occasionally
     - Rarely
     - Never
   - **Native language text and resources**
     - Always
     - Frequently
     - Occasionally
     - Rarely
     - Never
   - Other (please specify)
4. To what extent do you engage in professional development to support instruction for students with disabilities?

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<th></th>
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<td>✔️</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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5. How are your leadership practices related to student achievement?


6. Is there anything you want to add about your leadership practices?


4. To what extent do you engage in professional development to support instruction for students with disabilities?

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6. Is there anything you want to add about your leadership practices?


7. To what extent do you believe students with disabilities should be placed in the following classrooms for the majority of the school day?

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8. To what extent do you believe students with disabilities will meet your learning expectations as described below?

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9. How would you rate the processes for Response to Intervention/Multi-tiered Systems of Support at your school?

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10. How are your beliefs related to student achievement?
11. Is there anything you want to add about your beliefs?

12. Please provide the following demographic information

Name
Email Address
School
Years of Leadership Experience
Years of Leadership Experience with Students with Disabilities
1. How often do you schedule collaboration with grade level general education and special education teachers?
- Weekly
- Bi-weekly
- Monthly
- Other (please specify)

2. To what extent do your teacher collaborations discuss the following work?

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10. How are your beliefs related to student achievement?

   

11. Is there anything you want to add about your beliefs?

   

12. Please provide the following demographic information

   Name
   Email Address
   School
   Years of Leadership Experience
   Years of Leadership Experience with Students with Disabilities
APPENDIX E

SAMPLE TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL DATA CODING SHEET
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APPENDIX F

TEACHER QUALITATIVE DATA
### Teacher Qualitative Data

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**Totals:**
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- Behavior: 11
- Environmental: 3
- NA/No: 0
- Skipped: 0

**Totals:**
- Personal: 4
- Behavior: 4
- Environmental: 0
- NA/No: 1
- Skipped: 3

**Totals:**
- Personal: 12
- Behavior: 0
- Environmental: 1
- NA/No: 0
- Skipped: 2

**Totals:**
- Personal: 7
- Behavior: 1
- Environmental: 0
- NA/No: 5
- Skipped: 2
APPENDIX G

PRINCIPAL QUALITATIVE DATA
## Principal Qualitative Data

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Totals:
- Personal=0
- Behavior=7
- Environmental=2
- NA/No=0
- Skipped=0

Totals:
- Personal=3
- Behavior=1
- Environmental=1
- NA/No=2
- Skipped=2

Totals:
- Personal=6
- Behavior=0
- Environmental=1
- NA/No=1
- Skipped=1

Totals:
- Personal=2
- Behavior=0
- Environmental=0
- NA/No=4
- Skipped=3
APPENDIX H

BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY
Education of Children with Disabilities

The School District shall provide a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment and necessary related services to all children with disabilities enrolled in the District, as required by the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act ("IDEA") and implementing provisions of The School Code, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans With Disabilities Act. The term "children with disabilities," as used in this policy, means children between ages 3 and 21 (inclusive) for whom it is determined, through definitions and procedures described in the Ill. State Board of Education (ISBE) Special Education rules, that special education services are needed.

It is the intent of the District to ensure that students who are disabled within the definition of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are identified, evaluated and provided with appropriate educational services. Students may be disabled within the meaning of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act even though they do not require services pursuant to the IDEA.

For students eligible for services under IDEA, the District shall follow procedures for identification, evaluation, placement, and delivery of services to children with disabilities provided in the ISBE Special Education rules. For those students who are not eligible for services under IDEA, but, because of disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, need or are believed to need special instruction or related services, the District shall establish and implement a system of procedural safeguards. The safeguards shall cover students’ identification, evaluation, and educational placement. This system shall include notice, an opportunity for the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s) to examine relevant records, an impartial hearing with opportunity for participation by the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s), representation by counsel, and a review procedure.

The District may maintain membership in one or more cooperative associations of school districts that shall assist the School District in fulfilling its obligations to the District’s disabled students.

If necessary, students may also be placed in nonpublic special education programs or education facilities.

34 C.F.R. §300.
105 ILCS 5/14-1.01 et seq., 5/14-7.02, and 5/14-7.02b.

CROSS REF.: 2:150 (Committees), 7:230 (Misconduct by Students with Disabilities)

Adopted: November 14, 1994

Last Amended: August 27, 2018
Instruction

Administrative Procedure - Special Education Procedures Assuring the Implementation of Comprehensive Programming for Children with Disabilities

In its continuing commitment to help school districts and special education cooperatives comply with ISBE requirements for procedure, the special education committee of the Ill. Council of School Attorneys (ICSA) prepared model special education procedures. ISBE rules contain the requirements for special education procedures that must be adopted by each school district and cooperative entity. The IASB/ICSA model procedures are approximately 80 pages and are available on the IASB website: iasp.com/law/icsaspeced.cfm.

Revised: October 2001
April 2009
May 12, 2014
June 27, 2016


Bublitz, G. (2016). Effective strategies for district leadership to create successful inclusion models: Special education directors and school reform in context of least restrictive environment. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (1804049365).


Center on Education Policy. (2009). Has progress been made in raising achievement for students with disabilities? State test score trends through 2007-08, part 4. Author.


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Praisner, C.L. (2000). *Attitudes of elementary school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Database (UMI No. 9980932)


VITA

Dawn Hill was born and raised in Kankakee, Illinois. She attended Tennessee State University and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education in 2000. Dawn earned her Master of Education degree in School Counseling at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2007. She completed her Administration and Supervision Type 75 Certification at Loyola University Chicago in 2008.

During her doctoral studies at Loyola University Chicago, Dawn was inducted into Alpha Sigma Nu National Honor Society. She was also a recipient of the 2021 School of Education Transformative Research Excellence Award.

Currently, Dawn is a Principal in Chicago Public Schools. She resides in Chicago, Illinois.
DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

The dissertation submitted by Dawn Marie Gates Hill has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Eilene Edejer, Director
Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Education and
Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Siobhan Cafferty
Clinical Assistant Professor and Associate Dean, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Felicia Stewart
Adjunct Professor, School of Education
Loyola University Chicago