

**Secondary Educational Administrator Attitudes Toward Educating Students with Disabilities in Inclusion Settings**

by

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## Abstract

Inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting has been a topic of debate for quite some time. Educational administrators are at the forefront of the debate because their position requires they guide their schools in inclusion practices for students with disabilities. Previous studies (Bailey, 2004; Dyal & Flynt, 1996; Praisner, 2003; Sharma & Chow, 2008) have investigate the attitudes of educational administrators and how those attitudes relate to the opportunities school administrators provide for students with disabilities. Several factors have been shown to relate to the attitudes of educational administrators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. These factors include perceptions of teacher workload and management, inclusion benefits, level of disability, professional development, resources, and placement. In addition, previous research has shown professional and background characteristics relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion. These professional and background characteristics are gender, age, years of teaching experience, years of school administrative experience, having a special education qualification, student enrollment size, and level of school (middle school, junior high school, high school, or a combination of middle school and high school).

The present study investigated the factors that have been shown to relate to educational administrator attitudes toward inclusion by conducting a survey of Alabama secondary level educational administrators. Results indicate factors that were reported by other researchers in previous studies continue to relate to educational administrator attitudes toward inclusion today.

Through open ended survey items, several themes emerged in connection with perceived barriers to inclusion practices. Educational administrators report lack of funding, classroom disruptions, teacher training, achievement gap, and the type of disability as barriers to effective inclusion programs. This study revealed that teacher workload and management, inclusion benefits, level of disability, professional development, resources, and placement relate to school administrator reported attitudes toward inclusion. Professional background characteristics and demographics have also were also shown to relate to the reported attitudes of school administrators. Identifying the factors and professional characteristics that relate to school administrators attitudes could give educational policy makers and educational professionals ideas for creating educational policy and programs for special education students.

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“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13

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## CHAPTER I. NATURE OF THE STUDY

Educational administrators play a key role in the development and implementation of inclusive programs to serve the academic and social emotional needs of students with disabilities through the allocation of funds, schedule adjustments and classroom assignments, hiring personnel, and community relationships. Legislation requires that students with disabilities are educated in their least restrictive environments to the greatest extent possible with their non-disabled peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Educating students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment requires that educational administrators, general education teachers, and special education teachers collaborate. Inclusive education is a “value-based practice that attempts to bring students, including those with disabilities, into full membership within their local school community” (Udvari-Solner, 1996, p. 101). School administrators’ values and attitudes toward the practice of inclusion can support or hinder an inclusive program. The educational administrator is in the position to determine the overall operating process of a special education program including resource allocations and staffing (Nanus, 1992). Therefore, the educational administrator holds the most influential position to support inclusive programs for students with disabilities.

Educational administrator attitudes and beliefs about the inclusion of students with disabilities is a factor in leading effective inclusion programs for students with disabilities. A school administrator’s attitude about inclusion has an impact on a students’ increased opportunity to be served in the general education setting or it can limit efforts to reduce the

segregated nature of special education services (Praisner, 2003). Furthermore, an educational administrator's attitude toward inclusion could affect the administrator's willingness to utilize a facilitative leadership style. Utilizing a facilitative leadership style to support professional collaboration is another component to successful inclusive education programs (Mamblin, 1999). According to Smith and Leonard (2005), significant factors of successful inclusive programs are teamwork, mutual goals, teacher empowerment, and a school administrator who utilizes a facilitative leadership style.

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of school administrators, including principals and assistant principals of secondary schools (middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools), toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The study identified the presence or absence of a relationship between of a school administrator's personal characteristics, training, experience and/or school characteristics and their attitudes toward inclusion. This study also identified school administrator perceived barriers to effectively leading a program that serves special education students in the inclusive setting. An added component of this study was to investigate the perceived barriers toward inclusion through the eyes of rural school administrators. Researchers have suggested that rural school leaders face added challenges. This component was included in this study because many schools in Alabama are classified as rural. Therefore, another purpose of the study was to compare the perceived barriers of rural and urban schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The effectiveness of inclusion programs for students with disabilities has been an on-going topic of debate among educators and educational administrators. Meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of students with various disabilities is a priority in schools

nationwide. Including students with disabilities in the regular education classes is one placement option for a student with a disability. School administrators who are knowledgeable of the special education continuum of special education services will be better able to lead effective inclusion programs. The understanding or lack of understanding of the continuum of special education services could contribute to the attitudes and perceptions of inclusion programs for students with disabilities.

School administrators who exude positive attitudes toward students with disabilities and their right to be included in regular education classes are imperative to solving the educational inequity for students with disabilities. An analysis of the development of a school administrator's attitude toward inclusion of students with disabilities is the first step in studying the inequality problem. Pryor and Pryor (2005) suggested that behaviors are determined by beliefs that people hold. The purpose of this study is to determine if reported attitudes or beliefs are related to a school administrator's knowledge, experience and/or school characteristics. In working with students with disabilities, a school administrator would benefit from knowledge of the law that regulates educational programs for students with disabilities. Again, the knowledge or lack of knowledge of special education law could contribute positive or negative attitudes toward including students with disabilities.

In order to understand the importance of including students with disabilities in the general education setting school administrators would need an understanding of the law that governs the right of students with disabilities to be included in these classes. In this section, we will focus on laws that regulate special education and school administrators' reported knowledge of them.

Public Law 94-142, which was passed by Congress in 1975, required school districts across the nation to reform in order to meet the requirement of the law to provide all students with their least restrictive environment through the continuum of special education services (Powell & Hyle, 1997). The placement of special education students along the continuum of special education services requires an esoteric knowledge and understanding of Public Law 94-142 and of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (I.D.E.A.) as well as civil rights legislation and the Americans with Disabilities Act (Powell & Hyle, 1997). Although legislation has stipulated that students with disabilities receive educational services in their least restrictive environments, or to the greatest extent possible with non-disabled peers, studies have shown that school administrators who have a negative attitude about special education tend to limit the placement of students with disabilities in the regular education classes (Praisner, 2003). According to Powell and Hyle (1997), the Individuals with Disability Education Act has been in place for decades, however, school administrators have limited knowledge about the law or about the educational needs of students with disabilities.

Crockett (2002) suggested school administrators misconstrue the terms least restrictive environments and inclusion based on their limited knowledge of special education. The misunderstanding of these terms results in illegal or oversimplified implementations of inclusion (Crockett, 2002). According to Crockett (2002), educational administrator training programs have a responsibility to prepare educational administrators to effectively lead inclusion programs for students with disabilities. Crockett (2002) suggests that leadership preparation in special education administration should follow a conceptual framework that includes teaching future administrators about ethical practices in special education, individual considerations, providing equity under the law, effective programming, and productive partnerships. The educational

administrator preparation program components that Crockett (2002) suggests has the goal of, preparing school administrators who can develop and implement effective programs for students with disabilities. A school administrator's knowledge and ability to correctly implement special education law could contribute to a school administrator's belief about inclusion of students with disabilities. Principals are discouraged in that they feel unprepared for their roles as leaders of special education programs (Goor & Schwenn, 1997).

Another piece included in special education law is the continuum of special education services. Again, school administrators understanding of the special education continuum of services could contribute to a belief system in turn developing positive or negative attitudes towards inclusion. Previous studies have shown that school administrators from the elementary level are more likely to place students with speech and language impairments, physical disabilities, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities, deaf/blind impairments, and blind/visual impairments in regular education settings; whereas, the regular education setting is chosen less frequently for students with serious emotional disturbance and autism (Praisner, 2003). Experts have suggested that a school administrator's experience with special education and his or her education in the area of special education could relate to the differences in the placement of students with disabilities in their most appropriate least restrictive environments (Praisner, 2003).

In determining the most appropriate educational placement for a student with a disability, an Individual Education Plan (IEP) committee will consider placement options along a continuum of services. The continuum of special education services begins on the left with the most restrictive including; hospital or public institution, residential school, homebound instruction, special school, special class in regular school, part-time special class, regular class

with resource room, and full-time regular class which is the least restrictive and farthest to the right (Taylor, 2004). In determining the most appropriate placement for a student, special education professionals would select the placement option farthest to the right of the continuum, or the least restrictive environment in which the student's needs are being met. A school administrator's knowledge of various disabilities and the options for placement along the continuum is often limited; therefore, school administrators are not able to guide his/her team of special education teachers and regular education teachers to the best placement option for individual students. A school administrator's limited knowledge of the special education continuum of services could cause frustration and could contribute to a negative attitude toward educating students with disabilities.

More and more students and their parents are advocating for being included in the regular education classroom. One study found that school administrators are in agreement with the placement of students with mild disabilities in the regular education classrooms (Monda-Amaya, 1998). Although this study found that school administrators are accepting of students with mild disabilities being included in the regular education classroom, parents of students with more severe disabilities have persuaded the courts to allow their children to participate in regular education classrooms as well (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2000). A study focusing on Alabama school principals found that study participants believed that a continuum of services should be maintained. The school administrators reported that they are not in agreement with the full inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classrooms (Dyal & Flynt, 1996). The study respondents suggested that they are resistant to major changes and are more comfortable with pullout programs for special education services (Dyal & Flynt, 1996). A



school administrator's belief or attitude about the most appropriate educational placement for special education students could have developed in relations to their training and experience.

Training programs for school administrators leading special education programs can contribute to positive and negative attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education setting. Attitudes are formed by the beliefs we hold. Pryor and Pryor (2005) suggested that there are several kinds of beliefs. One type of belief is a thought that connects our behavior to the approval or disapproval of people who are important to us (Pryor & Pryor, 2005). The people who are important to school administrators are most likely the staff they lead. In leading an inclusive educational programs school administrators are responsible for organizing and leading programs wherein school administrators, regular education teachers, and special education teachers collaborate to meet the academic and social emotional needs of students with various disabilities. This task is challenging in that each staff member of a school has formed his/her own belief system of educating students with disabilities. Smith and Leonard (2005) found that teamwork, mutual goals, teacher empowerment, and principal as facilitator related to successful school inclusion.

As mentioned previously, school characteristics contribute to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion. School characteristics could be considered the school staff's ability to be involved in teamwork and establish goals as they relate to including students with disabilities in the regular education setting. Another aspect of the current study is to determine perceived barriers to leading effective inclusion programs. Perceived barriers contribute to attitudes toward inclusion programs. Studies have shown that, a barrier to educating students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment is the lack of personnel prepared to provide quality inclusive services to the student and his/her family (Buell, Hallam & Gamel-McCormick,

1999). In order to create a successful inclusion program for students with disabilities, personnel from general and special education must collaborate as team members (Buell et al., 1999). A source for developing positive and negative attitudes toward inclusion is effected by the school administrator's ability to create a culture in which both general educators and special educators are able to work together for the common good of the special education students. To add to this barrier, "as many as half of all new special educators leave the field within the first three years because of poor administrative support, limited preparation, complex job responsibilities, and overwhelming paperwork requirements" (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004, p. 2).

Although the focus of this study was the perceptions and attitudes of school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities, one must not overlook the importance of teacher attitudes and perceptions toward inclusion. One study found that teachers who had in-service training and coursework in the area of special education held more positive attitudes towards inclusion than did teachers who had no training in the area of special education (Ernst & Rogers, 2009). Another finding of previous studies on teacher attitudes towards inclusion was that teacher attitudes are influenced by the type and severity of the disability and by teachers' access to instructional supports (Ernst & Rogers, 2009). Designing effective professional development and providing appropriate supports for both general educators and special educators can also be a source of contentment. School administrators who are untrained in special education will have difficulties determining the most effective professional development activities and the supports needed to meet the needs of both groups of teachers. This can lead to the development of certain attitudes toward inclusion programs. The ability or inability to

develop effective professional development for school staff in the area of special education can relate to the school administrator's special education qualifications.

Special education qualifications have been presented by researchers as a factor that influences the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion. One study conducted on the topic found that administrators with less than seven years of experience and those with special education qualifications expressed more positive attitudes towards the integration of students with disabilities than principals with more years of experience and no special education qualifications (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998). The same study found that school principals believed that inclusion worked for students with learning disabilities. Principals did not believe students with more severe disabilities could be served in the general education classes (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).

School administrators who have a positive view of special education programs are those school administrators who value diversity in their school (Goor & Schwenn, 1997). Conversely, school administrators who have developed a negative attitude toward special education programs are those who believe that special education students require a disproportionate amount of time and resources (Goor & Schwenn, 1997). Those school administrators believe that students with disabilities should be educated in more segregated environments (Goor & Schwenn, 1997). Again, some school administrators have developed a belief system about students with disabilities. These belief systems develop their attitudes and norms in relationship to educating these students in their least restrictive environments. School administrators of rural Alabama schools face challenges that support their belief systems and attitudes.

The current study focused on Alabama school administrators. In Alabama a large percentage of schools are classified as rural. Dyal and Flynt (1996) conducted a study about

Alabama principals' perception of inclusion. Forty-nine percent of the survey respondents for that study classified their school as rural (Dyal & Flynt, 1996). The study conducted by Dyal and Flynt is eighteen years old. A newer study on the topic of inclusion can show if school administrator attitudes have changed in this eighteen year period. This study is different than the study conducted by Dyal and Flynt in that it focuses on secondary schools in Alabama. There are challenges to leading rural schools; an added challenge is effectively managing special education programs. In 2004, the Government Accounting Office found that rural districts faced challenges in meeting No Child Left Behind provisions to a greater extent than non-rural districts (GAO, 2004). Some challenges faced by rural schools are meeting NCLB student proficiency, releasing teachers and administrators for professional development, and recruiting, retaining, and training highly qualified educators (Nagle, Hernandez, Embler, McLaughlin, & Doh, 2006). Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) cited barriers such as: administrative constraints, teacher preparation, funding patterns, and governmental regulations, resistance to change, economic challenges, and geographic challenges. The challenges of rural schools have an influence on the attitudes of school administrators about special education.

This study provides insight into the factors that influence the development of attitudes toward special education by school administrators. Attitudes for the purpose of this study were defined by Pryor and Pryor (2005) as a favorable, unfavorable, or neutral feeling toward some object, person or behavior. According to Pryor and Pryor (2005), "attitudes can vary in both strength and direction. They can range from extremely favorable to extremely unfavorable, through a neutral midpoint (neither favorable nor unfavorable)." It is important to understand that behaviors are determined by the beliefs that people hold. Beliefs are also the basis for the attitude and the norm people form (Pryor & Pryor, 2005).

## **Purpose Statement**

The purposes of this study were to determine the relationship between school administrator experience with special education, school administrator training, teacher training, years of school administrator experience and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes. The study also determined the perceived barriers toward effectively educating students with disabilities in inclusion classes.

## **Research Questions**

Research questions utilized for this study are:

1. What factors relate to the attitudes of school principals towards inclusion programs?
2. What is the relationship between the professional and background variables of school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion?
3. What are the perceived barriers to effectively leading inclusion programs for students with disabilities?

## **Significance of the Study**

A study focusing on the perceptions and attitudes of school administrators of secondary schools toward inclusion programs for students with disabilities is significant in that research has shown that school administrators with positive attitudes tend to place students in their least restrictive environments more times than school administrators who have a less favorable attitude towards these programs (Praisner, 2003). Furthermore, a study focusing on the perceptions and attitudes of school administrators in Alabama has not been conducted since 1996. A new study on Alabama school administrators could reveal a change in school administrator perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion programs for students with disabilities.

The results of the study can be used to initiate reform in the areas of school leadership and special education.

Currently, research on the topic of school administrator attitudes toward inclusion focuses on elementary-level school administrators. There are several studies that have focused on teacher attitudes toward inclusion but few that focus on school administrator attitudes. There is also limited research on providing inclusion services for students with disabilities in rural Alabama schools. There is more research on school administrator preparation programs in the area of special education which was utilized for the current study. The information gained from this study could be used to facilitate reform efforts for secondary school administrators in the area of special education in Alabama.

### **Delimitations**

The current study focused on Alabama school administrators of secondary schools. The school administrators surveyed worked in Alabama middle schools, junior high schools, and high schools during the 2014–2015 school year.

### **Definitions of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, ‘least restrictive environment’ refers to an educational setting in which a student with a disability can interact with and be educated with peers who do not have a disability. Full inclusion is another term used in the study. ‘Full inclusion’ refers to a student with a disability receiving all educational services within the general education classroom with non-disabled peers.

### **Organization of the Study**

The following study is organized into five chapters, a bibliography, and appendixes conclude the study document. Chapter two includes a review of literature about the attitudes and

perceptions of school administrators toward inclusion programs for students with disabilities and the factors that influence the development of these attitudes and perceptions. Chapter three explains the research design and methodology of the study. The survey instrument used to collect data, the selection of study participants, and the procedures of the study are described as well. Chapter four is a report of the analysis of the data collected and a discussion of the results. Finally, chapter five consists of a summary, conclusion, and recommendations section.

### **Summary**

Equity in education is a priority in Alabama schools especially for students with various disabilities. Although laws govern the services that should be provided for students with disabilities, the laws can be interpreted and implemented in various ways by school administrators. Preparation programs for secondary level school administrators have the duty of educating school administrators in effectively leading special education programs. An in-depth knowledge of special education could contribute to a school administrator's confidence in leading special education programs and therefore affect their attitude about programs that serve students with disabilities. Understanding the perceived barriers to effectively leading inclusion programs for students with disabilities could influence school policy makers to make changes. These changes could affect a school administrator's belief system and attitude about educating students with disabilities as well. The current study investigated research about the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion programs for student with disabilities. Based on research a study was designed to reveal the attitudes of school administrators and the factors that contribute to these attitudes.

## CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **Introduction**

In the area of special education, school administrators exhibit various attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about educating students with disabilities. In this chapter a review of literature was developed as it relates to the attitudes of school administrators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education setting. Literature was also reviewed as it relates to the factors that could possibly contribute to the attitudes school administrators hold about inclusion. Researchers have conducted studies similar to this study about school administrator views of educating students with disabilities. For example, Bailey (2004) conducted a study in which he focused on the idea that, the school administrator is in the position with the most organizational power, he or she can positively or negatively affect inclusion policies. Although Bailey conducted a similar study the current study is unique in that the focus of the current study is Alabama secondary schools.

Another unique contribution that this study will make is a comparison of the perceived reported barriers to effective inclusion programs by school administrators. Praisner (2003) conducted a study in which she focused on the attitudes of elementary school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. Allen Dyal and Samuel Flynt (1996) looked at school administrator roles in shaping the educational climate of schools and how they provide opportunities for interaction between nondisabled and disabled students. That study focused on the perceptions of school administrators toward inclusion.



The current study includes principals and assistant principals. In many cases assistant principals are in charge of the special education programs in their school building. Another unique characteristic of this study is the fact that this study focused on Alabama schools many of which are classified as rural. Rural schools have added challenges in relation to educating students with disabilities. Given this, the current study focused on the similarities and differences between Alabama school administrators of rural and urban schools. According to the American Association of Administrators (2012), 44.0% of Alabama schools are classified as rural. The added perceived barriers of rural schools could contribute to negative or positive attitudes of rural school administrators toward inclusion programs for students with disabilities. Federal mandates could be viewed as difficult to implement and interpret. Some school administrators may view appropriately following federal mandates as a barrier to leading effective inclusion programs.

Federal mandates have forced school leaders to focus on the needs of students with disabilities. School administrators are required to provide students with disabilities with a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. Least restrictive refers to an educational environment in which a student with a disability is able to participate in academic activities to the maximum extent possible with non-disabled peers (U.S. Department of Education: Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004). The least restrictive environment is based upon the individual needs of the student and can fall on a continuum of special education placements. Previous litigation on the subject of least restrictive environments has protected the rights of special education students but has also protected the rights of regular education students in the regular classroom setting. The court cases that have helped to set a precedent include *Roncker V. Walter*, *Light V. Parkway*, and *Hartmann V. Loudoun*. These cases will be discussed in more

detail. The interaction between disabled and nondisabled peers is the critical component of the least restrictive environment legislation.

In order to provide students with disabilities a free appropriate education in their least restrictive environment, schools have adopted the inclusion model. Inclusion models require that special education teachers and general education teachers collaborate to develop and implement educational programs for students with disabilities. Regardless of the special education placements, school administrators have the task of negotiating the collaboration of teachers, supporting staff, parents, and community members. Collaboration is essential to developing and implementing effective educational programs for students with disabilities (Mamblin, 1999; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). The attitude and perceptions of school administrators toward the inclusion of special education students may have a relationship to the attitudes and perceptions of both general education teachers and special education teachers.

To compound the complex issues of educating a diverse population, school administrators are faced with challenges of educating students in rural settings. School administrators of rural schools face challenges of administrative constraints, teacher preparation, funding patterns, and governmental regulations in regards to leading effective special education programs (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006). Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) also found that school administrators of rural schools face the added challenges of resistance to change, economic challenges, and geographic challenges. Successful educational administrators of rural special education programs address the challenges of hiring qualified educators in the area of special education, meeting state standards, providing time for professional development opportunities, and school funding. Addressing the challenges of rural schools is pertinent to the current study because the purpose of the study is to gain an understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, and

knowledge of Alabama school leaders of special education programs and as mentioned previously a large number of Alabama schools are classified as rural.

Leading schools with special education programs pose many challenges. Challenges include meeting the needs of special education students and typically developing students, selecting and managing effective co-teaching pairs, meeting state standards, effectively allocating resources, and involving parents and community members. Positive experiences in teaching diverse learners will lead to optimistic attitudes and beliefs of teachers which is imperative in obtaining positive learning outcomes.

In reviewing and synthesizing literature about the school administrator's attitude toward including students with disabilities in the regular education setting, literature was selected based on its relevance to the topic. Literature published in the 1990s and 2000s was included. Literature published in the 1990s was used to present historical background and context about reforms in inclusive education. More recent literature was used to explain current school administrator preparation programs and perceived barriers to leading inclusion programs. More current literature was also used to present information about school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. Current literature includes information about assistive technologies and teaching methodologies that could contribute to school administrator attitudes toward inclusion practices.

The following review of the literature includes background information and describes special education law and how it has shaped the current view of inclusive education. This literature review details a framework of leading special education programs and how concepts included in the framework can influence educational administrator attitudes towards inclusion programs. To begin, a background of special education law and the continuum of special

educational services are reviewed. Secondly, case studies relevant to the law of least restrictive environment are presented. Next, an overview of literature about educational administrator training and education in the field of special education is included. That section is followed by a review of literature related to the perceived barriers to leading effective inclusive programs. Finally, literature about the attitudes, knowledge and beliefs of school administrators toward educating students with disabilities is presented.

### **Special Education Law Related to Inclusive Education Practices**

The law strictly regulates the administration of special education programs. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and P.L. 94-142 were put in place to regulate the educational placement of students with disabilities. Before President Ford signed the Education for all Handicapped Children in 1975, most special education students were excluded from public schools (Yell, 2003). The Education for all Handicapped Children preceded the IDEA. The IDEA established that students with disabilities have the same right to a free, appropriate public education (Yell, 2003). The law brought to the forefront that students with disabilities were often segregated from the general education populations. A movement began as a result of the awareness of the injustices in the isolation of special education students. The purpose of the movement was to establish a unitary system of education for all students; and the movement was called the Regular Education Initiative, or REI (Murphy, 1996).

The REI movement complimented a mandate included in the IDEA. The mandate is known as least restrictive environment (LRE) (Lipsky & Gartner, 2003). LRE was enacted by the IDEA and P.L. 94-142 as

a way to assure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children ... are educated with children who are not handicapped and that ... removal of handicapped

children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of that handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplemental aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (Part B, Section 612(5)(B)) IDEA Legislation)

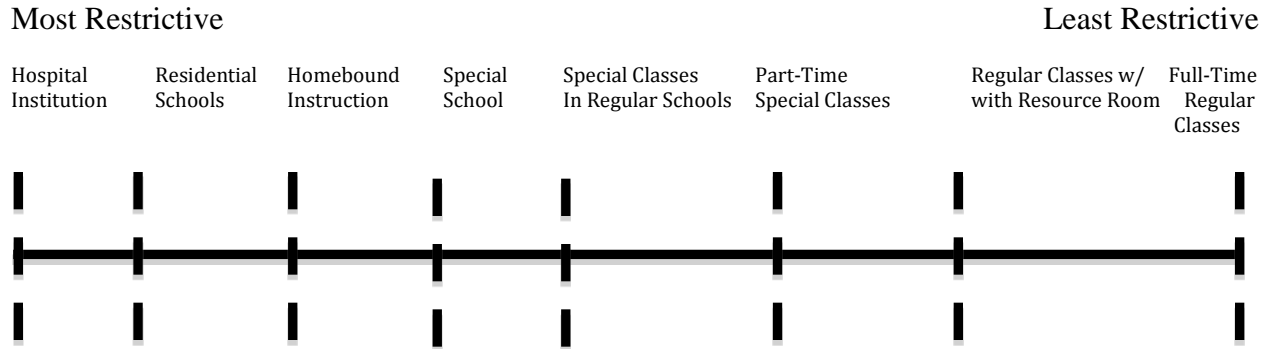
The special education continuum is explained in terms of least restrictive. Most restrictive placements are also the most segregated and offer the most intensive services; least restrictive placements are the most integrated and independent and offer the least intensive services. The assumption is that every person with a developmental disability can be educated in an educational placement that is along this continuum based on individual needs (Taylor, 2004). The continuum begins with the most restrictive environments and ends with the least restrictive environments. The most restrictive special education environment is a hospital or public institution (Taylor, 2004).

The enactment of P.L. 94-142 initiated changes in special education in terms of least restrictive environment. However, many special education students continue to be placed in segregated disjoined programs. According to Wang, Reynolds, and Walberg (1986) “pull-out” approaches to educating students with disabilities remains the primary strategy of special education programs. The “pull-out” approach to special education is one type of special education placement setting that is part of a continuum of special education services. The “pull-out” approach occurs when the student with a disability is taken out of the general education setting to be educated. This approach is utilized when a student is included in the regular education classes part-time.

Along the special education continuum are residential schools, homebound instructional placements, special school placements, special classes in regular schools, part-time special

classes, and regular classes with resource rooms. The least restrictive end of the continuum is full-time regular class placements (Taylor, 2004). Residential schools normally serve students with specific disabilities. There are residential schools for the deaf, the blind, autistic, and multi-disabled. These schools are the most restrictive school settings, in that students who attend these schools do not participate in academic activities with non-disabled peers. Homebound instruction is in place in order to serve students who are unable to attend public schools or other placement options.

Special schools are similar to residential schools in that students attend schools that serve students with specific disabilities. These schools employ professionals with experience and training in the specific disabilities. The special school setting offers more intense services for the targeted disability. The difference, however, is that the students are not residential. The next placement on the continuum of services is a special class in a regular school or self-contained class. Self-contained classes can be composed of students with similar disabilities or students with various disabilities. The sixth and seventh placements listed on the special education continuum of services are part-time special class and regular class with a resource room. Figure 1 illustrates the special education continuum.



*Figure 1. Least Restrictive Environment Continuum of Special Education Placements*

When a special education student is educated for a portion of the day in a regular class, the student is mainstreamed (Idol, 2006). The least restrictive environment for a student with disabilities, according to the law, is a full-time regular class placement. The IEP team determines the placement of students with disabilities in the various special education settings. P.L. 94-142 established the continuum of special education services that should be utilized by special educators to ensure the least restrictive environment for special education students. The regulation reads as follows:

Each public agency shall insure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of handicapped children for special education and related services.... The continuum ... must include ... (instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions).... (Federal Register, 1977, p.42497)

Educating a student with disabilities in a regular education class for a full day is known as inclusion. Inclusion of all students in the regular education classrooms has been a much-debated topic for education professionals in all areas.

The law does not specifically define inclusion. However, the law does define LRE and inclusion is similar to LRE (Yell, 2003). Inclusion supports the least restrictive environment law by ensuring that students with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers. According to Florida State University's Center for Prevention and Early Intervention, inclusion is defined as educational services that are provide in an age-appropriate setting, that focused on the core curriculum, are in the general education classroom, and are guided by the students IEP ("What is Inclusion?," 2002). As mentioned previously, the legal basis of inclusion, according to IDEA, is that schools must (a) educate students with disabilities to the maximum extent possible with non-disabled peers, and (b) place students with disabilities in special classes, separate schools, or other removal of students from regular education classes only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in the regular education class with supports and accommodations cannot be achieved (IDEA Regulations, 34 C.F.R.). The law does not mandate inclusion; however, the law requires that professionals consider the least restrictive environment based on student needs in determining the appropriate placement (Yell, 2003).

In reviewing the literature on LRE legislation, one can understand the difficult tasks that school administrators have in ensuring that this legislation is implemented appropriately for students with disabilities. Implementing and regulating the most appropriate educational setting for special education students in a school is a daunting task that could contribute to negative attitudes toward educating students with disabilities. To further emphasize the importance of educating special education students in their least restrictive environments a literature review of court cases is presented in the following section. Several court cases have set precedent for the least restrictive environment law.



## **Case Studies: Least Restrictive Environment for Students with Disabilities**

Several court cases have set the standards in special education with regards to appropriate educational settings for students with disabilities. Seven court cases were reviewed as they pertain to the current study. As mentioned previously, the rights of both special education students and regular education students must be protected. These cases are relevant in that they show how courts have interpreted the least restrictive environment legislation. The complexity of the issue of least restrictive environment and the stand that courts take about the issue can be daunting. The complex nature of the least restrictive environment could contribute to a school administrator's attitude and belief about educating students with disabilities in their most appropriate educational settings. The following court cases highlight the complexity of educating students with disabilities in their most appropriate settings.

The case of *Roncker v. Walter* focused on bringing the educational services to the child with disabilities versus bringing the child with a disability to the educational services (Etscheidt, 2012). The idea is that if the educational services can be provided in a nonsegregated environment then every effort should be made to do so. This case helped to develop a two-part test to guide appropriate placement. The two-part test was aimed at answering these two questions: (1) Can the educational services that make the segregated setting superior be feasibly provided in a nonsegregated setting? (If so, the segregated placement is inappropriate.) (2) Is the student being mainstreamed to the maximum extent appropriate? (Douvani & Hulsey, 2002). In another case, *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972), the court found that placement in the regular education setting with appropriate ancillary services was preferable over a special school or class (Etscheidt, 2012). A Pennsylvania court found in the case of *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) that

children with mental disabilities deserve a free public education under the law (Etscheidt, 2012). These court cases show how courts have ruled for students with disabilities and their right to a free and appropriate education. The following cases show how courts have ruled when a child with and disability is a disturbance and danger to other students. Situations that school administrators deal with in which students with disabilities impeded the learning of other students may contribute to school administrator's beliefs and attitudes toward educating students with disabilities in the general education setting.

In the case of *Light v. Parkway*, a court found that the inclusion setting is not the most appropriate placement for all students. Lauren Light was violent, dangerous, and a disruptive student who was placed in a regular education classroom (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). During the time she was included in the regular education class, she was violent toward her classmates. Thirty incidents of violence caused her classmates to seek attention from the school nurse (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). Her parents requested a "stay-put" and that she continue to receive educational services in the regular education classroom. The "stay put" provision of IDEA prevents local education agencies from changing the placement of a student during a due process hearing or judicial action (Walther-Thomas & Brownell, 1998). "Stay put" began with a court ruling in the case between Honig and the department of education. The ruling stated that students with disabilities could not be removed from an educational setting without due process (Yell, 1989). Lauren Light continued her educational services in the regular education classroom, which put her classmates at risk for further harm due to her violent tendencies. The court held that the regular education classroom is not the most appropriate educational setting for a student who is violent toward other students, dangerous, and disruptive (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). The court in this case specified that all circumstances surrounding a student be taken into

consideration in determining the appropriate educational setting (Douvani & Hulsey, 2002). Educational benefit or free appropriate public education FAPE is a consideration that should be made in situations concerning special education students. In a landmark case *Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley* the court found that FAPE would be provided at public expense and that it would conform to the requirements of the individualized education plan (Etscheidt, 2012). The court in this case also ruled that it would not require one test to determine if FAPE was being met (Etscheidt, 2012). In this case, a school administrator's knowledge and understanding of the special education continuum of services would help him/her to determine FAPE. Given a school administrator's training and background in the area of special education, this task could be challenging and could contribute to his/her attitude toward educating students with disabilities.

The case of *Hartmann v. Loudoun* supports the same decision made by the court in the *Light v. Parkway* case. Mark Hartmann was a student who was diagnosed with autism; as a result he exhibited disruptive behaviors in a regular education classroom setting. The IEP team for Hartmann determined that he was not making academic progress and proposed that he be moved to a class specifically designed to support students with autism. Hartmann's parents argued that the school was violating the LRE provision of IDEA. The court disagreed maintaining that,

- (1) Mainstreaming is not required when a student with a disability will not receive an educational benefit from it;
- (2) Any marginal benefit from mainstreaming would be outweighed by benefits that could only be obtained in a separate educational setting;
- (3) A determination of whether the student is a disruptive force in the general education classroom is a legitimate issue; and
- (4) Any IDEA preference for mainstreaming is only

that, and the receipt of social benefits is a subordinate goal to receiving educational benefits. (Douvani & Hulse, 2002, p. 4)

School administrators who had little or no experience with special education students could determine if the special education student was receiving an educational benefit from an included educational placement; however, a school administrator with little knowledge of special education law might struggle in engaging the parents in determining the best placement based on the law. Determining the correct placement of students, whether in an included setting or self-contained educational environment, is difficult. This challenge may contribute to the beliefs and attitudes of school administrators in the area of special education.

The two previous cases focus on court decisions in which inclusion was not the most appropriate setting for all students with disabilities. There are a multitude of cases in which the court decides that inclusion is the best placement for students with disabilities. In the case of *Oberti v. Clementon*, Rafael Oberti was a disruptive student diagnosed with autism who was placed in a regular education classroom. School staff members wanted to move Oberti to a more restrictive environment. The court in this case determined that, “inclusion is a right not a privilege for a select few. Success in special schools and special classes does not lead to successful functioning in integrated society, which is clearly one of the goals of IDEA” (Douvani & Hulse, 2002, p. 3). Early in the debate about least restrictive environment, school professionals considered the idea that students with disabilities should be included in regular education classes for socialization purposes. School professionals in this case include school administrators. They are part of the IEP team that would determine a child’s best educational setting based on the need of social skills. A school administrator’s belief and attitude about including students with disabilities for socialization purposes would contribute to the final

decision made for the student as far as the educational setting he/she was placed in. Legislation does not support placing a student in an inclusion setting for socialization purposes. However, a school administrator has the flexibility under the law to determine that the regular education classroom is the appropriate setting for academic and social purposes. A school administrator with experience in the area of special education may determine that learning appropriate social skills are as important for a special education student as are the academic skills. The school administrator's attitude based on knowledge and/or special education experience determines the decisions they make about educational placements for students with disabilities. Some aspects of special education law are flexible and allow school administrators to use their discretion; however, some aspects are more ridged.

In 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation was placed into law. School leaders were required to shift their focus to student performance in order to meet statewide assessment requirements (Lashley, 2007). Students with and without disabilities were required to show progress on statewide assessments. NCLB impacted the placement of students with disabilities in inclusive settings because of the requirements to show progress on statewide assessments. The law required that all students had access to highly qualified teachers. Previously, students with disabilities received services from special education teachers. Special education teachers were not required to be knowledgeable of the content standards required in each subject or grade level. This new legislation did not provide school administrators as much flexibility as they previously had in regards to student placements. The new academic accountability measures stipulated that all students were required to have access to highly qualified teachers regardless of their disabilities. Although court cases had set the precedent for least restrictive environment and the placement of students with disabilities, the laws had also changed.

In reviewing the court cases in regards to inclusive educational placement for students with disabilities, the courts have ruled for and against inclusion. In some cases, the courts have ruled that the behavior of a student with a disability infringes on the rights of other students in the general education class. While some courts have ruled that every student regardless of the behaviors they exhibit has the right to be educated with their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms, school administrators are included in the process of determining the best placement for the students with disabilities in their school buildings. Zigmond (2003) believes that most would agree that students with mild to moderate disabilities should be educated with their nondisabled peers; however, research does show the superiority of any one placement over another. Effectiveness of an educational placement for a student with a disability depends on the characteristics and needs of specific students and on the quality of a programs implementation (Zigmond, 2003). It is beneficial if school administrators have the knowledge and skill base to effectively lead programs for special education students and this includes the ability to determine the most beneficial placements for students with disabilities. The question remains, “When it comes to offering programs designed to make a difference for all students, are school leaders knowledgeable about special education and skillful in supervising its implementation?” (Crockett, 2002, p. 158).

### **School Leader Preparation and Education in Special Education**

The majority of school administrator preparation focuses on school building administration and supervision of instruction. School administrator preparation does not typically include gaining a comprehensive knowledge of educational issues and how they relate to special needs students and their educational rights (Goor, 1997, p. 2). The quality of preparation of school leaders in the area of special education can influence the development of

beliefs and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. Studies have shown that a majority of school administrators had never taken a single course in special education and had no exposure to the education of children with disabilities in their formal training (Cline, 1981; Davis, 1980). In this section a review of literature was conducted on school administrator preparation, training, and experience in the area of special education. Training and experience has been shown to be a contributing factor in the development of beliefs and attitudes toward educating students with disabilities. This section will also focus on Jean Crockett's (2002) framework for special education administration. Equity of the law is a section of her framework; within that section we will investigate Shapiro and Stefkovich's (2001) ethical leadership and decision-making framework.

Lasky and Karge (2006) conducted a study in which they examined the formal training and experience of principals in the area of special education. Lasky and Karge sought to determine the information that school administrators receive from university programs in regards to special education. They wanted to know what experience principals bring with them as they train and support teachers in their administrative roles. Finally they wanted to find out the confidence level of school administrators in their own abilities to support and train teachers in the area of special education (Lasky & Karge, 2006).

Two hundred and five principals from twenty-eight public school districts in southern California were selected to participate in the study. A survey instrument was mailed to each study participant (Lasky & Karge, 2006). The results showed that seventy-seven respondents had zero to five years of experience in the role as principal. Many of the respondents reported having children with disabilities in their classes when they taught, but that they had never attended an IEP meeting until they became a principal (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Principals

surveyed for this study reported that they spend five hours per week attending IEP meetings as part of their job responsibly. When asked how much direct experience they had with children with disabilities during their formal administration credential course work, seventy-three respondents reported no experience, seventy-two reported some experience, twenty-nine reported moderate experience, and twenty-seven respondents reported lots of experience (Lasky & Karge, 2006).

This study was weak in reporting the confidence levels of school administrators in regards to dealing with issues about special education. The study did report, however that 96% of study respondents believed inclusion facilitated educational and social development for students with and without disabilities (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Interestingly, school administrators in this study reported having minimal training and experience working with students with disabilities but maintained positive beliefs about including students with disabilities. The findings of this study are contradictory to other studies about school administrators and the correlation between attitudes toward including special education students and training and experience with special education students.

Praisner (2003) for example studied school administrators and their attitudes toward the inclusion of special education students. Her study consisted of 408 elementary school principals from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. She collected survey data. Praisner (2003) found significantly positive correlations between attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities and the number of special education credits, in-service hours, specific topics taken, and experience in relation to students with disabilities. At this point, it is imperative that we investigate literature about school administrator's preparatory programs and their role in preparing school administrators to work with special education students. Preparatory programs



are significant because their training could help a school administrator in their confidence in leading special education programs which in turn contributes to their beliefs about including students with disabilities.

School administrator preparatory programs have a role in ensuring that school administrators are prepared for the job of leading schools that include students with disabilities. The curriculum designers of principal preparation programs have not formed a link between special education administration and educational leadership (Crockett, 2002). McLaughlin (2004) suggested that effective leaders of special education programs should have an understanding of five key principles:

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

Crockett (2002) suggested that skills necessary for a school administrator to lead inclusive educational programs be taught and practiced in school administrative preparatory programs. The following is a framework for ensuring that skills are acquired in these programs.

### **Framework of Leading Inclusive Educational Programs**

The goal of leadership preparation in special education administration is to ensure that school administrators are prepared to implement and monitor specialized programming that supports students with disabilities (Crockett, 2002). Leadership programs that prepare educational administrators to work with special education programs should include four components. The components suggested by Goor (1997) are (a) essential beliefs, (b) knowledge, (c) skills, and (d) reflective behaviors. Crockett shows a guiding framework for the preparation of leadership in special education (see Figure 2).

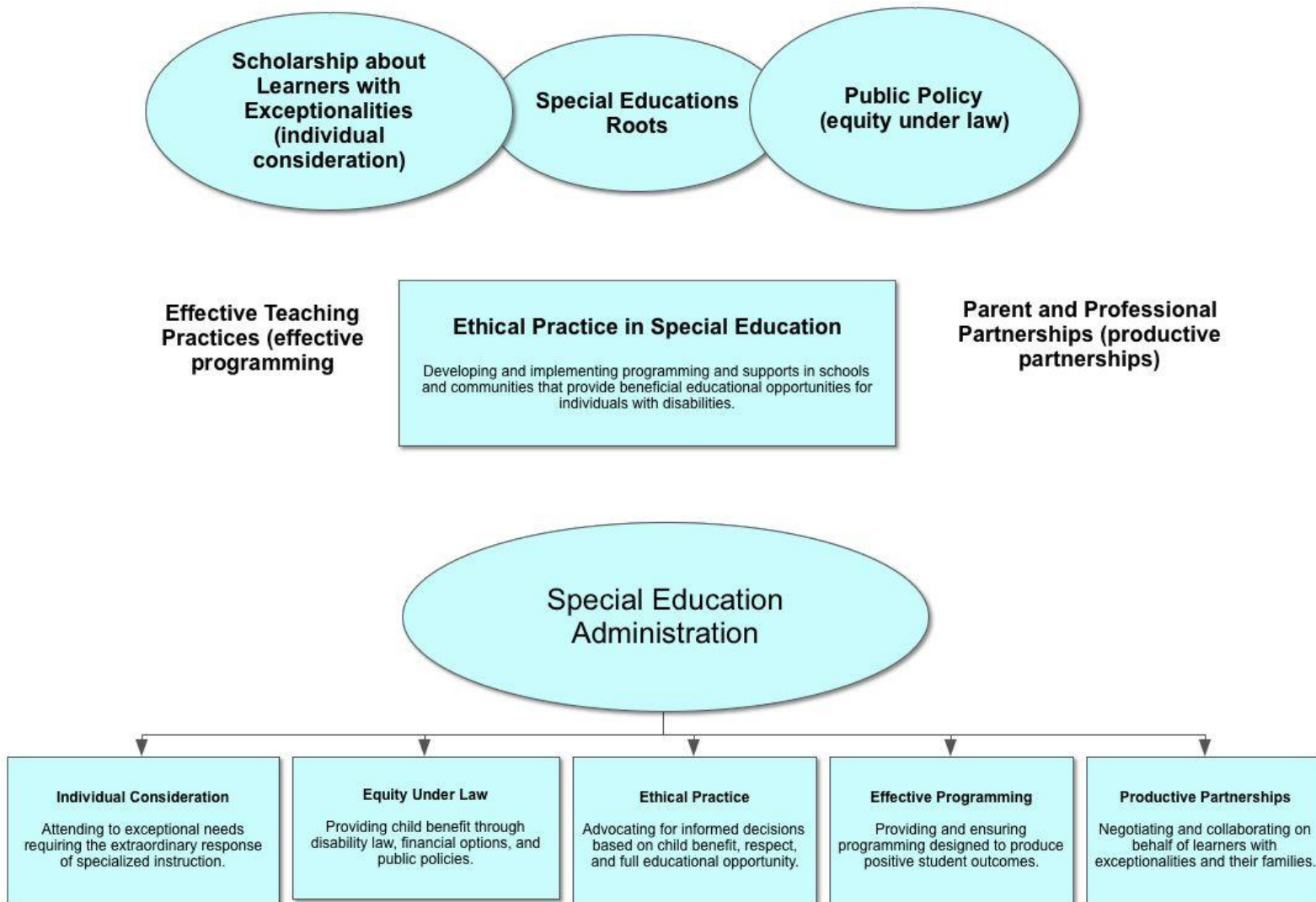


Figure 2. Framework for leadership in special education (Crockett, 2002).

The model framework for leadership in special education demonstrates the strong connection between educational administrators, teachers, students, parents, and professional partners in regards to special education programs. Leadership is the central component of the model, with the idea that leadership extends across a variety of professional roles (Crockett, 2002). Effective school administrator preparation programs focusing on special education incorporate educational units that prepare school administrators to develop individual students' abilities, elicit parental involvement, and promote effective teaching practices (Crockett, 2002). The framework for leadership in special education includes essential components to leading effective special education programs. Knowledge and understanding of the components of the framework relates to the development of a school administrator's positive or negative attitude toward inclusion programs for students with disabilities. Each component of the framework for leadership in special education will be expanded in the following sections. Although the framework written by Crockett is twelve years old, the components are still evident in IEPs that are written for students with disabilities in their education setting. Components are also evident in the laws we continue to follow in regards to special education student rights, and our ethical practice in how we deliver services to students with disabilities. The ability of school administrators to demonstrate the skills of the framework components could have an impact on their attitudes toward leading programs that serve students with disabilities.

### **Individual Considerations**

The principle of individual considerations focuses on addressing individuality and exceptional learning (Crockett, 2002). School administrator preparation should guide leaders to be attentive to the relationship between the unique learning and behavior needs of students with disabilities. School administrators should be able to guide their staff in developing specialized

instruction to address the needs of the special education population of students (Crockett, 2002). Students with disabilities vary in their characteristics and traits, therefore, special education has focused on the individual (Artiles, Hariis-Murri, & Rostenberg, 2010). As with typically developing students, special education students are very different from one another. Disability groups and the needs of various disability groups should also be taken into consideration. In the educational setting, the IEP is a document that attempts to address all individual concerns of a student with a disability. A school administrator's ability to be an effective IEP team member could contribute to school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. The role of the school administrator as an IEP team member is an essential responsibility of a school administrator who leads programs for students with disabilities. A school administrator must be well versed in the development of these plans as they are required by law to act as an IEP team member. This brings us to the next section of the framework which is very connected to the law.

### **Equity Under the Law**

The focus of this section of the framework is centered around preparing school administrators to provide special education students with appropriate education based on equitable public policies (Crockett, 2002). It is important to differentiate between the terms equality and equity. Equity is the quality of being fair (Herrera, 2007). Equality refers to the condition of being equal in quantity, amount, and value (Herrera, 2007). Equality under the law suggests that school administrators are prepared to correctly implement educational programs that follow disability law. School administrators who are responsible for ensuring equity under the law should have an understanding of public policies that support individuals with disabilities (Crockett, 2002).

School administrator preparatory programs could more adequately prepare school administrators to provide equity under the law by equipping them with the history of special education law. In the past, special education students were isolated from their non-disabled peers and did not have access to the general education curriculum. As mentioned previously, in 1997 amendments to IDEA placed more of an emphasis on special education students having access to the general education curriculum (Zigmond, 2003).

A school administrator's knowledge or lack of knowledge about the special education continuum of services would contribute to the placement decision for the student with special needs. Therefore, school administrator preparatory programs have an obligation to prepare school administrators in the area of equity under the law. Confidence of a school administrator in providing equitable educational services to students with disabilities could contribute to attitudes about inclusion. Ensuring that school administrators demonstrate ethical practices in leading programs that educate students with disabilities is another piece of this framework.

### **Ethical Practice in the Administration of Special Education**

According to Crockett (2002), special education administrators must be trained in ethical practices. This refers to the administrator's ability to "ensure universal educational access and accountability" (Crockett, 2002, p. 163). This principle is critical in preparing special education leaders to be moral administrators who are "capable of analyzing complexities, and advocating for child benefit, justice, and the full educational opportunity for every learner" (Crockett, 2002, p. 163). In preparing school administrators to work with special populations of students it is imperative that they understand their ethical obligations. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) provided an ethical framework for school leaders. Carl Lashley (2007) applies Shapiro and Stefkovich's ethical framework to special education and the leading of special education

programs in his theoretical publication *Principal Leadership for Special Education: An Ethical Framework*. Shapiro and Stefkovich believe that school administrators should make ethical decisions by viewing the dilemma through four lenses. The four lenses are the ethic of justice, the ethic of critique, the ethic of care, and the ethic of profession (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). The perspectives offered by Shapiro and Stefkovich in their framework is especially helpful in leadership of special education in that this realm of education presents complex issues that require ethical decisions by school administrators.

The ethic of justice refers to the laws that guide educational practices. The law piece is especially important in special education. In making decisions related to legal issues, school administrators should ask themselves if there is a law, right, or a policy that relates to the issue (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). The ethic of justice applies to the IDEA mandates on IEP team meetings. According to Lashley (2007), school administrators need to understand the IEP process as well as the democratic issues that undergird special education law. It is imperative that school administrators understand that the IEP is in place to protect the rights of the special needs student. IEP team meetings are effective if the educational leader understands the rights and requirements of the IEP and has the ability to translate legal rights in a way that meets the needs of the individual student (Lashley, 2007). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2001) point out that in many cases courts have not imposed certain restrictions in order to allow school officials the ability to use their discretion in making important administrative decisions. Given that special education issues vary based on individual student needs, this is beneficial to school administrators. However, a school administrator with little training or experience with special education issues could struggle with this.

The ethic of critique focuses on the benefactor of a law, rule, or policy (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). The intent of the IEP document is to benefit the special education student by providing goals, designating an educational placement, and ensuring appropriate supports and accommodations (Lashley, 2007). A job task of the school administrator is to become familiar with the legal content required in the IEP document (Lashley, 2007). The school administrator must also have an understanding of the needs of a special education student in gaining access to the general education curriculum (Lashley, 2007). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) propose another question in making ethical decisions under the ethic of critique. They suggest that school administrators ask the question, “Who are the silenced voices?” (p. 16). School administrators are essential in leading the IEP team to consider the needs of the student based on input from school professionals and parents. School administrators are pivotal in establishing parents as educational partners for their children (Lashley, 2007).

In applying the ethic of care to the administration of special education programs, a school administrator would ask, “What are the long-term effects of a decision I make today?” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005, p. 18). In accordance with the law, the IEP team makes decisions about instructional programming and of eligibility. This is a routine occurrence for IEP team members. It is the job of the school administrator to ensure that these teams keep the long-term effects of their decisions in mind (Lashley, 2007). School administrators are in the position to lead IEP teams to carefully consider the long-term effects of the decisions they make in IEP meetings (Lashley, 2007).

The final ethic in the framework, professional ethics, encourages school administrators to address the question, “What should I do based on the best interests of the students who may be diverse in their composition and needs?” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005, p. 26). The purpose of



the IEP is to design and implement an educational program based on the individual needs of the student (Lashley, 2007). Given this, Lashley (2007) asks, Can school administrators make decisions that serve the best interests of a diverse population of special education students? Can an educational administrator expect that all students with disabilities perform at the same level? Should the performance of special education students be compared to the performance levels of students without disabilities? (Lashley, 2007). Making decisions based on professional ethics forces school administrators to consider the needs of the diverse special education populations. It also focuses an administrator's attention to the delivery of effective instruction and the issues of equitable allocation of funding, time, and personnel resources (Lashley, 2007).

Shapiro and Stefkovich's ethical framework provide a guide for school administrators to make ethical decisions. The complex nature of leading special education programs can be difficult for school administrators to manage without proper preparation. These complex ethical issues could contribute to school administrator attitudes toward leading inclusive programs for students with disabilities. Effective school administrator preparatory programs that include the components suggested by Crockett (2002) could help school administrators gain the confidence they need to handle tough ethical dilemmas in the area of special education. Solving ethical dilemmas are one part of the complex nature of special education programs. Designing and implementing effective programming for students with disabilities can be complex as well.

### **Effective Programming**

In this section, literature was reviewed as it pertained to effective educational programming for students with disabilities. A school administrator's ability to evaluate and adjust programs for students with disabilities could be a contributing factor in their attitudes toward leading programs for students with disabilities. In the area of special education, effective

programming refers to the ability of school administrators to design and implement individualized programming to enhance a special education student's performance (Crockett, 2002). This guiding principle is needed to help focus school administrator preparation programs on the need to develop administrators who are skilled at supervising and evaluating educational programs (Crockett, 2002). School administrators of special education programs must be able to foster high expectations for all students, and to support research-based strategies that focus on obtaining positive results for special education students (Crockett, 2002).

As mentioned previously, the school administrator is in the position to influence resource allocations, staffing, structures, information flows, and operating processes (Praisner, 2003). School administrators are responsible for planning and implementing inclusive practices in their school buildings. In order to accomplish this task they need to be knowledgeable in effective instruction, assessment, and discipline to provide support and feedback to teachers as they provide educational services to heterogeneous groups of students (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998). A solid knowledge of special education policies and practices benefit the school administrator in that they are better able to influence resource allocations and to select appropriate staff for particular tasks. These school administrators are better able to support special and regular education teachers if they have a solid knowledge of special education issues.

In providing support for teachers, it is imperative that all teachers, including special educators have the content knowledge and pedagogy needed in order to meet mandates to provide students with disabilities with high-quality instruction (Leko & Brownell, 2009). A special educator's initial preparation and ongoing access to professional development affects his/her content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Leko & Brownell, 2009). Leko and Brownell (2009) reported research that showed that special education teachers have stronger than

average classroom management skills but they exhibit average to below-average classroom practices in reading. Leaders of special education programs and professional development staff have the challenge of supporting special education teachers in developing more in depth pedagogy and content knowledge (Leko & Brownell, 2009). According to DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walther-Thomas (2004), as many as half of all new special educators leave the field within the first three years because of poor administrative support, limited preparation, complex job responsibilities and overwhelming paperwork requirements. According to Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, and Harniss (2001) the problem is not recruiting special education teachers it is the training and work conditions that are provided to special education teachers that is the problem. A primary responsibility of school administrators is to support teachers in providing appropriate instruction for all students.

In the area of effective programming, school administrators have the added stress of meeting state standards. The added pressure of ensuring that all students including the special education groups meet state standards of progress may contribute to negative attitudes of school administrators towards the inclusion of special education students. A school administrator's ability to design effective programs for all students is a direct measure of his/her success as a school administrator. The final section of Crockett's special education administration framework is establishing productive partnerships. Providing special education students with effective educational programs is a team effort. School administrators are better able to provide these programs when they are able to establish partnerships between the school, parents, and the community.

## **Establishing Productive Partnerships in Special Education**

The final principle in the framework addresses the need for leaders to be effective communicators, negotiators, and collaborators (Crockett, 2002). The skills of communication, negotiation, and collaboration are needed to advocate for the needs of students with disabilities and for their families (Crockett, 2002). Establishing productive partnerships is key to leading effective inclusion programs. IDEA and NCLB legislation has required that special education administrators adjust their administrative duties. In the past administrators were responsible for managing the delivery of instruction and related services for students with disabilities. IDEA and NCLB legislation forced administrators to begin managing collaborative teaching pairs which included a special education teacher and a general education teacher (Bays & Crockett, 2007).

Research shows that professional collaboration and facilitative principal leadership are the foundation of successful inclusive educational programs (Smith & Leonard, 2005). According to Bays and Crockett (2007), school administrators are responsible for negotiating interactions between stakeholders in order to ensure that students who have disabilities get what they need to learn. School administrators set the standards for the collaboration of special education teachers and regular education teachers. Both groups of teachers rely on the abilities of the school administrator to plan and implement activities in which the teachers become masters of collaboration in planning goals for special education students in inclusion programs. The added responsibility of facilitating collaboration between groups could be a factor of the development of positive/negative attitudes of school administrators toward educating student with disabilities.

In working to promote collaboration in inclusive environments, school administrators need to be diligent in their hiring practices. It is essential that teachers working in inclusive environments be willing to collaborate with other teaching professionals. A barrier for school administrators of inclusive educational programs is the lack of personnel prepared to provide quality inclusive services to students with disabilities and their families in least restrictive environments (Buell, Hallam, & McCormick, 1999). For the most part, special education teachers and regular education teachers have received training and support in separate areas (Buell, Hallam, & McCormick, 1999). The challenge for school administrators is to help their staff understand the expertise that each group of teachers possess and help them use all of their skills to create an all-inclusive educational environment. Successful inclusive programs are the programs in which the two groups of teaching professionals work collaboratively to provide the necessary services to students with and without disabilities (Buell, Hallam, & McCormick, 1999). The IDEA law mandates the partnership of the two groups of teaching professionals. The law states that special education teachers and regular education teachers will serve on IEP teams to determine education goals and services that will be provided for individual students with disabilities (Buell, Hallam, & McCormick, 1999). School administrators have a primary role in fostering the collaboration of special education and regular educators.

Establishing productive partnerships in special education involves school faculty and staff members but also involves parental relationships with school programs. Legislation requires that schools partner with parents of students with disabilities to develop educational programs (Shelden, Angel, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010). Research has established a positive link between parental involvement and student achievement (Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004).

Although the parental partnership in education is very important, parents view schools as uninviting and remain distant from schools (Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004).

In establishing relationships with parents, it is imperative that administrators work to gain the trust of parents. Research has shown that trust is vital in establishing collaborative relationships between school personnel and parents or guardians. Trust is also a factor in parents' attitudes toward educational programs and their willingness to be involved with their child's school (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010). Ethical behaviors and characteristics demonstrated by school staff members also contribute to the disengagement of parents in their children's educational activities (Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004). Research has shown that parental involvement leads to positive educational outcomes for students (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010). Establishing a trusting relationship with parents could be challenging. Parents of secondary students with disabilities have a history of working with school staff members. The relationships they have experienced in the past could have been positive or negative. Building a trusting relationship with parents who have negative experiences with school staff would be more difficult for school administrators. This challenge could have an impact on the attitude of school administrators in working with students with disabilities.

Praisner (2003) conducted a survey of elementary school principals in which she asked specific questions about preparation programs. Principals were asked questions about their knowledge and skills in the areas of family intervention and eliciting parent and community support for inclusion. Only 15.7% reported participating in course work or training in the area family intervention, and 16.2% reported participating in course work or training in the area of eliciting parent and community support. A qualitative study found that, "school principals who desire more effective collaboration between school and families of children with disabilities may

need to become more personally involved in the special education programs within their schools” (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010, p. 168).

In promoting partnerships between teachers or between the school and parents, it is very important that school administrators have a basic understanding of disabilities and that they understand the special education process (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2004). School administrator preparation programs should strive to support their students in gaining a basic understanding of special education and the issues revolving around special education.

Studies have shown that school administrator training and experience in the area of special education relates to their attitudes and beliefs of educating students with disabilities along the continuum of special education. Literature was reviewed in this section as it related to preparatory programs for school administrators who would lead special education programs in their school buildings. In this section Crockett’s (2002) framework for special education administration was reviewed and analyzed. Each section of the framework suggested a focus for school administrators in leading special education programs. The information presented in the sections on ethical practice, individual considerations, equity under the law, effective programming, and productive partnerships could contribute to a school administrator’s attitude and belief of educating students with disabilities. The extensive knowledge that school administrators need to effectively lead programs for special education students could be considered a challenge or barrier for school administrators who are responsible for many areas in their school buildings. In the following section literature was reviewed as it pertained to other perceived barriers in leading special education programs.

## **Perceived Barriers to Leading Effective Programs for Students with Disabilities**

Previous studies have investigated the reported barriers of school administrators in leading effective programs for students with disabilities. Hiring and maintaining highly qualified teachers, developing effective professional development for diverse groups of teachers, establishing a collaborative culture, implementing an effective co-teaching model, and leading special education programs in rural schools are the common barriers to leading special education programs as reported by school administrators. The following section takes a closer look at these reported barriers to leading effective special education programs.

### **Teacher Quality**

A perceived barrier to leading effective programs for students with disabilities is having personnel who are prepared to provide quality inclusive services (Buell et al., 1999). In this section, literature was reviewed based on its relevance to teacher quality and the role of school administrators in supporting both special educators and general educators in educating students with special needs. In supporting these groups of teachers, school administrators are required to train and manage teachers in the co-teaching setting. Literature was also reviewed in the section based on its relevance to co-teaching and the school administrator's role in co-teaching. The perceptions of special education teachers and general educators toward the practice of inclusion can positively or negatively affect a school administrator's attitude and belief about inclusion.

It is widely acknowledged that highly qualified teachers significantly increase student achievement; however, finding, training, and keeping good teachers have been a problem in special education (Billingsley, 2004). Billingsley (2004) published a theoretical paper in which she discusses factors for the difficulties in finding and maintaining good teachers in the field of special education. She states four factors that are associated with the teacher retention issue.



The four factors that are important to special education teacher retention are: (a) responsive induction programs, (b) deliberate role design, (c) positive work conditions and supports, and (d) professional development opportunities (Billingsley, 2004). School administrators of special education programs have a role in addressing these teacher retention factors for special education teachers as well as for general education teachers who work in inclusive classrooms.

In an effort to support all students in achieving academic success, school administrators are obligated to provide the appropriate training for special education teachers and regular education teachers. Leko and Brownell (2009) make the point that preparation for a special education teacher does not include instruction in content areas; therefore, they may lack the content knowledge they need in order to be effective in the inclusion classroom. General education teachers are prepared in their content area instruction; therefore, professional development designers should consider the needs and strengths of both groups of teachers. In designing professional development for special educators, Leko and Brownell (2009) suggest that school administrators realize that the training needs to be meaningful for special educators, provide manageable strategies for implementation, and occur within the context of the larger school reform efforts. Idol (2006) found that educators of inclusive settings desired more professional development in the area of inclusive education. The study conducted by Idol (2006) indicated that educators felt that professional development in the area of inclusive education should focus on:

- Supporting teachers in learning to make more appropriate instructional and curricular modifications

- Supporting classroom teachers in inclusive classrooms in a variety of ways, including the use of consulting teaching, instructional assistants, cooperative teaching, and teacher assistance teams.
- Provide more professional development to instructional assistants.
- Visit schools where inclusion is practiced.
- Use the same sound disciplinary practices regardless of whether the student is a student with disabilities or a student who is at risk for school failure.
- Use cooperative, heterogeneous learning groups.
- Use reading tutor programs. An example of this was the reading tutorial program in the library at an elementary school included in the study. (p. 90).

Professional development to address the needs of special education and regular education teachers is vital for the inclusion programs. School administrators and professional development designers should consider the suggestions of school staff members included in Idol's study.

In order to provide the needed support to teachers, school administrators need to continually be knowledgeable of research related to academic and behavioral intervention (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004). Research shows that instructional leaders, "who understand students with disabilities, IDEA, and NCLB requirements, and effective practices, are better prepared to provide students and teachers with appropriate classroom support" (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004, p. 4). As mentioned previously, the training and experience or lack of training and the experience a school administrator has in the area of special education can be a benefit or a barrier for leading effective inclusion programs.

School administrators who understand students with disabilities and the inclusive learning environment work diligently with teams of professionals to create balanced classroom rosters, manageable caseload responsibilities, and appropriate in-class support for students and teachers (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004). These are the school administrators who understand that traditional pull-out programs, whole-class ability grouping, and grade retention are not effective in supporting the academic needs of students with disabilities (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004). Successful school administrators use informal and formal means to help their faculty and staff develop effective teaching management, and decision-making skills (Crockett, 2002). School administrators who work to create balanced classroom rosters, manageable caseload responsibilities, and provide support to students and teachers are working to address a teacher retention factor that was mentioned previously by providing positive work conditions and supports (Billingsley, 2004). As mentioned previously, another factor in retaining good special education teachers is professional development opportunities. It is the role of a special education school administrator to design effective professional development opportunities.

In thinking about teacher quality, school administrators have the added challenge of finding, training, and maintaining highly qualified teachers who are able to work collaboratively to educate students with disabilities. The collaborative inclusive setting requires leaders who can facilitate stakeholders in working with one another to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive instructional programs (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004). An inability of a school leader to facilitate a collaborative culture is a barrier to leading effective inclusive programs. The lack of confidence in leading a collaborative educational environment could contribute to a school administrator's attitude about educating special education students.

## **Collaboration in Teaching Students with Disabilities and Co-teaching**

Hiring and supporting highly-qualified teachers for the inclusive education model is one part of the puzzle. School administrators would benefit from establishing a collaborative culture between these highly-qualified special education teachers and regular education teachers. This could prove to be challenging and could be considered a barrier for school administrators leading special education programs. Historically, special education teachers and regular education teachers have received training and support from separate systems (Buell et al., 1999).

A research synthesis of teacher perceptions of mainstreaming/inclusion was conducted by Thomas E. Scruggs and Margo A Mastropieri. They compiled survey data in which they found that two-thirds of general education teachers surveyed were in support of inclusive education, but only one-third felt they had adequate training, skills, or resources needed to accommodate students with disabilities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). In contrast, special educators reported that inclusion has resulted in less time to work individually with students they are responsible for (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The lack of acceptance of inclusion by both regular education teachers and special education teachers is a possible perceived barrier for school administrators leading effective inclusion programs. Although special educators and regular educators have not always embraced inclusive education, the education of students with and without disabilities depends upon the successful partnership of the two groups (Buell et al., 1999).

In order for school administrators to ensure successful collaboration between the two groups of teachers, they must assess needs and concerns of special educators and regular educators (Buell et al., 1999). Both special education teachers and regular education teachers need to know the roles of educational professionals in the cooperative teaching model, consultative teaching model, the resource room support model, and the paraprofessional support

model. Given the diversity in knowledge and experiences of special education teachers and regular education teachers, it is challenging for school administrators to bring these two groups of professionals together. School administrators may view the idea of collaborative culture as a barrier to leading effective inclusive programs.

School administrators play a pivotal role in encouraging teachers who have historically viewed their work isolation to begin to embrace collaborative educational models in which parents, administrators, and other staff members are encourage to provide input into educational practices (Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004). Rebecca Smith and Pauline Leonard (2005) conducted a study in which they utilized data collected from focus groups. The groups consisted of regular education teachers and special education teachers. General education teachers reported that they were unclear about the role of the special education teacher in their inclusion class. Special education teachers reported that general education teachers expected them to perform demeaning tasks such as making copies (Smith & Leonard, 2005). Setting clear expectations for both groups of teachers falls to the school administrator. Establishing clear expectations for the groups of teachers and finding time to provide professional development and monitor teacher performance is time consuming. This could be considered a barrier to leading effective special education programs.

Collaboration in the inclusive learning environment can exhibit itself though cooperative teaching teams or through a consultative mode. Co-teaching occurs when a general education teacher and specialist (special education teacher, reading specialist, or therapist) work together to instruct a group of diverse students (Friend, 2008). Co-teaching is described as a collaboration between the general education teacher and the special education teacher (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). In the co-teaching model the exact contribution of each professional varies

based on the situation, however the education program provided by the co-teaching pair could not be reproduced by one teacher (Friend, 2008). School administrators who are proactive in establishing an inclusive school community through the use of co-teaching will be more effective (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). There are several approaches to co-teaching. Some of the most widely used approaches are:

- one teacher is responsible for the teaching while the other teacher circulates throughout the room providing support
- station teaching, allows the teachers to divide the content and students into groups, splitting time with each group
- parallel teaching, allow the class to be divided and each teacher teaches their own group the same content
- alternative teaching, students are organized into groups, one large and one small, and each teacher instructs one of the groups (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010).

School administrators are responsible for scheduling teaching pairs, and monitoring their effectiveness. Knowledge of co-teaching approaches and methodologies would benefit school administrators. The ability to lead groups of teachers can contribute to teacher and school administrator attitudes toward inclusion.

Keefe and Moore (2004) conducted a qualitative study in which they used semi-structured interview questions to determine secondary teacher attitudes toward inclusive classrooms. The study included eight general and special education teachers who co-taught in a southwestern United States school. Three themes emerged from the study in regards to inclusive classrooms and teacher attitudes toward inclusion. The themes were the nature of collaboration, roles of the teachers, and outcomes for students and teachers (Keefe & Moore,

2004). Keefe and Moore (2004) found that in order for co-teaching to be effective, teachers need to be better prepared for the demand of co-teaching. They suggest that special education teachers have a deeper understanding on the content at the high school level. Keefe and Moore (2004) also believe that the general education teachers should have a better understanding of disabilities and the need for modifications. The information reported in the study by Keefe and Moore is important to this study because the focus on this study is secondary schools and the attitudes of school administrators in secondary schools toward inclusion. Teachers, both general education teachers and special education teachers and school administrators at the secondary level have many challenges when it comes to educating students with disabilities. The content at the secondary level is more complicated than the content at the elementary levels. Co-teaching has been utilized as a way to support the special education students with this difficult content. There are barriers to effectively utilizing co-teaching models.

A barrier to effective co-teaching models is finding enough time to collaborate outside of the classroom. This is especially an issue when special education teachers work with more than one regular education teacher (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). Special education teachers and regular education teachers are supposed to be equals in the co-teaching model; however, this seldom occurs (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, and McDuffie (2005) conducted several long-term qualitative investigations of co-teaching in science and social studies content areas at the middle school and high school levels. Mastropieri et al. (2005) found that course content and teacher knowledge was a substantial influence on co-teaching. Mastropieri et al. (2005) suggested that simpler content that was understood by the special education teacher led to a partnership between the special education

teacher and the general education teacher. The pair of teachers seemed to operate on a more equal basis (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

In contrast, if the special education teacher did not master the content such as chemistry or world history, the special education teacher behaved more like an aide than a teacher (Mastropieri et al., 2005). In other states, teachers are required to obtain a bachelor's degree in a content area other than education prior to obtaining licensure; in this case the special education teacher would have more content knowledge (Mastropieri et al. 2005). This is not the case in Alabama. Alabama school administrators have a challenge of finding special education teachers who have the content knowledge to be effective partners in the co-teaching situation. This could be considered a barrier to effectively leading special education programs and could contribute to attitudes and beliefs of educating special education students by school administrators.

In leading programs for students with disabilities, school administrators have the added task of managing groups of co-teachers. The basis behind co-taught classrooms is that students with disabilities were the students who are most likely left behind. An adaptation to help these students with disabilities was to receive one-on-one assistance from the special education teacher (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). The co-teaching model has advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is that co-teaching models allow students to have the attention of two teachers (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010, p. 649). This benefits students with disabilities, typically developing students, and students who have not yet been identified as having learning difficulties (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). Another advantage of the co-teaching model is the idea that students with disabilities lose the stigma and label of their disabilities when they were included in co-taught classes (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). Co-teaching models enable students with disabilities to be placed in their least restrictive environments.



A disadvantage for this inclusive model is the availability of time for teachers to collaborate and plan. Carpenter and Dyal (2007) cite three possible remedies for the challenge of establishing shared planned time. Early release/late arrival of students would allow time for co-teachers to meet and plan (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). The use of substitute teachers to cover classes for teachers to plan and collaborate is a suggestion (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). A third suggestion is to allow the special education teacher to rotate his/her planning time. The special education teacher is often able to be flexible with his/her planning time. This would create time for the consultative special educator and the regular educator to collaborate (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). Finding time for teachers to collaborate is a barrier to the effective implementation of this type of inclusion model. Organizing time for the collaboration that is needed between these groups of teachers could be a difficult task. The difficulty of this task could contribute to the development of attitudes of school administrators toward educating students with disabilities.

The effectiveness of a co-teaching inclusive environment can be affected by teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is the belief that a teacher's actions will lead to an outcome. Teachers must feel empowered to apply new skills and competencies especially in educating diverse groups of students (Buell et al., 1999). It is important that regular and special education teachers have opportunities to experience some success in these settings through training and education (Buell et al., 1999). Empirical evidence has revealed that the construct of efficacy is a critical issue in teachers accepting special needs students in regular education classrooms (Buell et al., 1999). Research has shown that teacher efficacy is impacted by teachers' abilities to influence school policy and to provide input in decisions regarding student groupings and instruction (Buell et al., 1999). A study conducted by Powell and Hyle (1997) found that school administrators who were successful in leading inclusion programs articulated a clear vision, took

initiative and empowered others, they provide staff development, and monitored progress and helped to problem solve. A barrier to successful inclusive programs could be leading teachers who feel powerless. A school administrator's facilitative leadership style has been found to empower teachers in the inclusive process (Powell & Hyle, 1997). Leading special educators and regular educators through facilitative leadership may be difficult for some school administrators. This may contribute to the development of attitudes and beliefs of educating students with disabilities. As mentioned previously, a large number of Alabama schools are classified as rural. Rural schools face challenges in educating students with disabilities. These challenges may also contribute to school administrator views of educating students with disabilities.

### **Rural Schools Serving Students with Disabilities**

Urban, suburban, and rural schools face challenges when it comes to educating students with disabilities. Few studies have addressed the challenges of rural schools in the area of special education. A study conducted by Katherine M. Nagel, Glenda Hernandez, Sandra Embler, Margaret J. McLaughlin, and Frances Doh (2006) analyzed the characteristics of effective rural elementary schools for students with disabilities. The study used a cross-case research design. The study focused on sites in Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. The researchers identified schools as rural schools by using data from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data (CCD). Schools were then selected based on data that showed the school was high poverty and high performing. The majority of the schools that were selected in Maryland and Delaware had high percentages of students in special education (Nagel et al., 2006). This study gives its readers some insights into challenges that are faced by rural schools who serve students with special needs.

Challenges are faced by leaders of rural schools in educating students with special needs; the study conducted by Nagel et al. (2006) highlights some of the challenges. To begin the study, the authors of this study identified elementary schools in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland that performed above the state and district average on state assessments for all students and for students with disabilities (Nagel et al., 2006). Two methods of data collections were utilized. Classroom observations and in-depth interviews were both conducted for the study (Nagel et al., 2006).

Rural schools are often much smaller than their urban counterparts. Approximately 65% of rural schools receive Title 1 funds (Nagel et al., 2006). This requires that school administrators address issues such as shortage of qualified educators in the area of special education, meeting state standards, releasing teachers and administrators for professional development opportunities, and school funding (Nagel et al., 2006). Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) cited resistance to change, economics, and geographical location as barriers to inclusion programs in rural settings.

Because rural schools are located in less populated areas, school administrators have a difficult time finding enough special education professionals. Rural schools have reported that the special education population requires extra and expensive services and academic supports (Nagel et al., 2006). The extra academic supports include after school tutoring and enrichment activities which tend to drain the small districts of their limited funding (Nagel, et al., 2006). Finding time for professional development opportunities is tremendously difficult for school administrators of rural schools because of the lack of sufficient personnel or substitute teachers (Nagel et al., 2006).

Nagel et al. (2006) conducted a study to determine the characteristics of high poverty rural schools that are effective for students with disabilities. The results of the study showed that successful rural inclusion elementary schools: (a) emphasize high standards for student performance and behavior and access to the general education curriculum; (b) show a stability within the school community and have a willingness to work together; (c) have close ties between the school, parents, and the community; and (d) have flexible school instructional arrangements, are creative with their resources, and have support for at risk students (Nagel et al., 2006). Rural schools reported a variety of placement options for students with disabilities. In the larger schools, self-contained classes and resource rooms were available, while all students with disabilities were included in the general education classes of smaller schools due to the lack of personnel specializing in special education (Nagel et al., 2006). In some small rural schools, regular education teachers had limited access to special education teachers. Teachers in those settings had to make accommodations for special education students themselves. Some small rural schools report only having one special education teacher for the entire school (Nagel et al., 2006).

School administrators of the rural schools participating in the study conducted by Nagel et al. (2006) suggested that their strength was the stability of their staff and the willingness of staff members to work together. Stability refers to regular education teachers who stay in their positions. The turnover rate in the regular education teachers of the rural areas studied was minimal according to (Nagel et al., 2006). Nagel et al. (2006) found that the stability of staff fostered close relationships and supported high levels of collaboration between teachers and staff members. Collaboration of teachers is an effective practice in providing educational services to students with disabilities.

In some of the rural schools studied, the special education teachers were attached to specific grade spans and they attended weekly meetings (Nagel et al., 2006). Most of the principals studied were very involved with the special education process of their schools. These principals did not regard special education students as being different than the regular education students. A principal even acted as the chair of IEP meetings at the school she led (Nagel et al., 2006). Given this information it is critical that the issues facing principals of rural schools are addressed in an effort to analyze the attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge Alabama school administrators have in educating special education students.

As mentioned previously, parental involvement has been linked to high student achievement. The rural schools of this study reported high parental involvement levels. Parents were involved in these schools by volunteering in classrooms, raising money for various projects, designing and implementing various school activities, and attending PTA meetings (Nagel et al., 2006). A barrier to parental involvement at rural schools is the lack of public transportation for low income families (Nagel et al., 2006). Scheduling meetings and activities at times in which most parents can attend is another barrier to parental involvement (Nagel et al., 2006).

School administrators of successful rural inclusion programs have a focus of supporting at risk students. These school administrators are creative with their limited resources. Nagel et al., 2006) found rural schools who structured their K–3 classrooms into “families.” The families allowed students to progress at their own rates and they remained with the same teacher for three years (Nagel et al., 2006). One of the families was assigned a special education teacher who worked with all students in that particular family. Interestingly, the school administrator gave parents an option in the first and second grades. Parents could select a traditional classroom for

their child or they could select a multi-aged class (Nagel et al., 2006). Teachers of the multi-age program supported the initiative in that they believed the environment helped students who started school with skills that were behind the other students of the class (Nagel et al., 2006). Some aspects of rural schools could be a possible perceived barrier for school administrators; however, other aspects of rural schools could contribute to positive attitudes for school administrators and teachers who work in the rural school setting. Given that there is a high percentage of Alabama schools classified as rural, Nagel et al.'s study is very relevant. The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes of Alabama school administrators. Are the attitudes of rural Alabama school administrators similar or dissimilar to the attitudes of school administrators of other schools in Alabama?

There is a limited body of research about the perceived barriers to leading effective special education programs. The available research suggests that teacher quality, developing a collaborative culture, and the challenges of rural schools are perceived barriers. It has been shown that special education teachers do not stay in the teaching field for an extended amount of time; this limits the number of highly qualified special education teachers. In order for school administrators to develop a collaborative culture, they must be cognizant of the needs of all stakeholders including teachers, parents, community members, and students. Finally, there is a large number of schools in Alabama that are classified as rural schools. Rural schools present challenges in the area of leading special education students. Perceived barriers of school administrators toward leading effective special education programs may relate to the attitudes and beliefs they have in regards to special education.

## **Attitudes, Knowledge, and Beliefs of Principals Toward Inclusion**

The purpose of this study is to determine what factors relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward educating special needs students. In this section, a review of literature is presented that attempts to explain the effects of school administrator attitudes on the special education programs they lead. Research shows that school administrators play a key role in fostering attitudes towards inclusion programs (Smith & Leonard, 2005). Praisner (2003) states that school administrators are the in position to support increased opportunities for special education students in the inclusion setting. School administrator attitudes relate to their willingness to implement and monitor these inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities. Given this, effective inclusion programs incorporate teachers and support staff that have positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities.

School leaders shape the culture of their schools in respect to inclusive education. “A school’s culture is formed by the assumptions, values, and beliefs that predominate within its members and define how things are done” (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Another rationale for focusing on the attitudes and believes of school leaders is presented by Murtadha-Watts and Stoughton (2004). They presented a term called ‘cultural mirroring’. Cultural mirroring refers to a leader’s

... ability to speak and act across differences to reflect to the staff possible biases, prejudice, and stereotyping. Critical cultural mirroring is, for example, needed to raise the awareness that differential treatment is given to students based on their presumed deficits and teacher bias. (p. 4)

Leaders who are aware of their own personal bias, attitudes, and beliefs about inclusion programs are better able to model appropriate behaviors for the staff they lead. Critical cultural

mirroring not only applies to working with students from culturally diverse backgrounds but to students with special needs. Several researchers have investigated the attitudes, perceptions, and values of principals in respect to the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Dyal and Flynt (1996) surveyed Alabama public school principals about their perceptions of inclusion. The study sample consisted of 143 Alabama public school principals. A questionnaire was developed that contained items about respondent demographics and questions concerning principal perceptions of inclusion. One hundred and eight principals responded to the questionnaire. The data showed that ten percent of the principals surveyed believe that inclusion means “full” inclusion. The researchers did not discuss in detail the definition of full inclusion. Sixty-one percent of the respondents believe that a continuum of special education placement options fits their definition of inclusion (Dyal & Flynt, 1999). Dyal and Flynt (1999) also found that Alabama principals believe special education and regular education programs should be restructured. Fifty-four percent of the school principals believed that more funding is needed to develop an inclusive school (Dyla & Flynt, 1999). Finally, the study data showed that seventy-two percent of the principals believe that parents of students with disabilities are the most supportive of inclusive schools. This study was conducted during the 1994–1995 school year. Since this study there have been changes to special education law and accountability for schools.

Proponents of the full inclusion model believe,

Special education’s very existence is responsible for general education’s failure to accommodate the needs of many students, because it has served as a ‘dumping ground’ that has made it easy for general education to rid itself of its ‘undesirables’ and ‘unteachables’. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994)



This was not the belief of the Alabama school principals surveyed by Dyal and Flynt (1996). Alabama school principals preferred that a continuum of special education services be maintained (Dyal & Flynt, 1996). Of the Alabama school principals surveyed, only 2.6 percent would place students with special needs in regular classes full time (Dyal & Flynt, 1996). Dyal and Flynt's study of Alabama school administrators found that 60 percent supported inclusive programs that provided a continuum of services to special education students. Principals of the study believed that the services offered to special education students should include placement options in both regular and special education classes.

Additionally, the study found that 37.4 percent of the survey respondents preferred the traditional arrangement of mainstreaming children with mild disabilities and they supported self-contained special education programs for children with moderate, severe, and profound disabilities (Dyal & Flynt, 1996). This study showed that Alabama principals do not advocate for the full inclusion model and that these principals are resistant to major changes and seem more comfortable with the status quo (Dyal & Flynt, 1999). The study conducted by Dyal and Flynt is not as detailed as other studies about this topic. Another researcher conducted a study in which the administrators and teachers provided information about which disability groups they felt would benefit from the inclusion model.

School administrators were asked to determine appropriate placements for students with disabilities. The school administrators' placement decisions were compared to the placement decisions of special educators. The study first asked school administrators to define inclusion. Principals selected five descriptive items from a list of twenty-two that most closely matched their definition of inclusion. Sixty-seven percent of the high school principals selected supportive environment as essential to their definition of inclusion (Barnett & Monda-Amaya,

1998). School administrators in this study also indicated populations of students that would apply to their definition of inclusion. Ninety-seven percent of school administrators said inclusion would apply to students with learning disabilities (Barnett & Monday-Amaya, 1998). The study showed that thirty-six percent of principals believed that TMH (Trainable Mentally Handicapped) students fit their definition of inclusion and only twenty percent of principals selected SPH (Severe/Profound Handicapped) students (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998). Studies have shown that school administrators have reported more favorable attitudes toward including students with mild to moderate disabilities, whereas they have reported less favorable attitudes toward including students with severe and profound disabilities (Praisner, 2003). Education professionals view this as discrimination. Educational professionals have called for reforms in the area of including all students in the general education setting.

In order for Alabama to restructure special education programs and to transform their schools to achieve a goal of educating all students, school administrator attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions must be supportive of change initiatives. Several researchers in the area of school leadership suggest key factors that are necessary for school leaders to lead effective special education programs. Weishaar, Borsa, and Weishaar (2007) present factors that are similar to factors that were previously mentioned. Weishaar, Borsa, and Weishaar (2007) cite seven factors that are necessary for inclusion to be successful. The factors are:

1. Visionary leadership,
2. Collaboration,
3. Refocused use of assessment,
4. Supports for staff and students,
5. Funding,

6. Effective parental involvement, and
7. Curricula adaption and adoption of effective instructional practices.

School administrators resistant to change will have a difficult time restructuring special education programs to include these factors. Idol (2006) conducted a program evaluation in which she investigated and described how inclusion services were being provided in schools as they move towards more inclusive educational practices. The sample for the study consisted of eight schools. The executive director of special education programs for the participating school district selected the schools. The criteria for school selection were the school staff had to feel as though their educational approach was appropriate and that the school had a well-developed special education program (Idol, 2006). Idol (2006) collected both qualitative and quantitative data. She interviewed elementary and secondary educators and school administrators. She also collected and analyzed statewide test data.

The study showed that elementary school principals and assistant principals were in favor of inclusion. They were supportive of students with disabilities. They believed that they were able to effectively collaborate and worked well with teachers. The elementary school administrators were not in favor of full time inclusion of students with disabilities without extra support for the classroom teacher (Idol, 2006). The study showed that elementary educators had a range of attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. Some educators were willing to accept and try inclusion while others were very much in favor of inclusion (Idol, 2006). There was an indication that elementary educators had positive attitudes towards students with disabilities and they were supportive of them (Idol, 2006).

At the secondary level, school administrators reported that they were in favor of including students with disabilities into the regular education classrooms (Idol, 2006). A

principal of one school included in the study added that she thought inclusion was not appropriate for all students (Idol, 2006). The secondary principals reported that their attitudes towards students with disabilities were positive and that they were supportive of these students (Idol, 2006). Secondary educators reported that their attitudes towards students with disabilities were positive and that they were supportive of these students. Educators believed that students with disabilities should not be included in the regular education classrooms without some type of support (Idol, 2006). In her study, Idol (2006) asked educators their thoughts about the impact on regular education students in inclusive settings. Ten percent of the educators included in the study believed that regular education students are adversely affected by the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classrooms (Idol, 2006). The study conducted by Idol (2006) shows that school administrators have both positive and negative attitudes toward including all students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Other researchers have conducted similar studies that focus of school administrator attitudes toward inclusion.

Praisner (2003), for example, conducted a quantitative study in which she also investigated the attitudes and perceptions of elementary school principals on inclusion. Her sample consisted of 408 elementary school principals randomly selected from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Praisner utilized a survey to gain insight into the attitudes of school principals. The survey was called the Principals and Inclusion Survey (PIS) and was designed to determine the extent to which variables (such as training, experience, and program factors) were related to principal attitudes (Praisner, 2003). The study showed that 21.1% of the principals surveyed were clearly positive about inclusion, whereas 76.6% of the survey respondents indicated that they were uncertain about inclusion. Specifically, 76.6% of the principals were not strongly positive or negative but generally skewed toward a positive attitude (Praisner,

2003). Praisner's questionnaire included questions about including students with severe and profound disabilities. Praisner (2003) believed that the inclusion of these questions may have skewed her data toward a higher percentage of administrators reporting less than positive views of inclusion. One section of the questionnaire aimed at assessing a principal's experience with students with disabilities in connection to their attitude of inclusion. The study showed that the more positive a principal's overall experiences with individuals with disabilities, the more positive attitude they had toward inclusion (Praisner, 2003).

Studies have shown that some educational administrators are supportive of the inclusion of all students while other administrators believe that some disabilities groups are not successful in inclusion settings. A purpose of this study is to determine a relationship between experience with students with special needs and a school administrator's attitude toward including students with special needs in regular education classes. Could the experiences of the school administrators included in these studies have been negative and therefore influence their belief that students with disabilities should not be included in regular classes? A special education administrator interviewed for a qualitative study conducted by Doyle (2001) supported the belief that inclusion was an effective model for students with mild disabilities and that students with more severe disabilities should be included in elective types of classes such as art, music, and PE for socialization purposes. Another study revealed the view of school administrators in educating students classified as mentally retarded. School administrators reported they believed that students classified as mild, moderate, or severe mentally retarded would have a poor chance of being successfully included in regular education classrooms (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998). Although these studies have reported a belief that students with severe and profound

disabilities cannot achieve academic success in the general education setting, there are studies that report another view of educating these types of students.

In contrast, several studies have shown that some educational administrators believe that all students can learn in the inclusive setting. A study conducted by Downing and Williams (1997) revealed that school principals did not feel there are barriers to including all students in general education classroom settings. However, the same study suggested that some principals are concerned about the needs of all students being met in the general education setting (Downing & Williams, 1997). Downing and Williams (1997) interviewed elementary school principals, general educators (K–6), and special educators at different levels of inclusive educational programming. Principals cite several benefits to the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education settings. Social skill acquisition, opportunities to learn appropriate behaviors, and a sense of belonging or friendships are among the benefits that some school principals feel are obtained by including students with disabilities in the regular classroom (Downing & Williams, 1997). There is a feeling that regular education students benefit from the inclusion of special education students. According to research, principals believe that regular education students benefit in that they have the opportunity to teach and help others (Downing & Williams, 1997).

A school administrator's belief about inclusive educational programs affects his/her ability to be effective special education instructional leaders. A qualitative study conducted by Bays and Crockett (2007) found that one group of school administrators viewed special education as instruction that was not different than other types of instruction. This group of school administrators did not feel the need to investigate other instructional methodologies in order to improve the success of students with disabilities. In the same study, another group of

school administrators defined special education as an individualized set of instructional strategies and education approaches that meet the needs of special education students (Bays & Crockett, 2007). The perception of the second group of school administrators interviewed for the study enabled them to provide instructional leadership that was more supportive to the needs of diverse learners in the inclusive setting, while the first group of school administrators provides a more generic type of leadership (Bays & Crockett, 2007). A third group of school administrators interviewed for the study believed that special education issues are best left up to the special education teachers to handle. This group of school administrators described their special education leadership role as hands off or collaborative (Bays & Crockett, 2007).

School administrator perception of students with disabilities is influenced by their experiences in working with this group of students. Furthermore, school administrators may have difficulties accepting all children if they have little or no experience with diverse groups of students (Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010). A school administrator's perception of special education determines the type of special education leader they will be. How can inappropriate school administrator perceptions of special education be altered to support inclusive educational environments?

A school administrator's attitude and belief about the success of inclusion programs can be influenced by their perception of barriers that block their efforts to educate students with disabilities. For example, some school administrators believe that a barrier to inclusive education is their state special education funding formula (Katsiyannis & Conderman, 1995). School administrators cite "lack of training, anti-inclusion attitudes, fear of loss of services or loss of job, lack of teacher preparation for inclusion of university course work, lack of understanding or lack of information regarding inclusion, existing categorical teacher

certification standards, large general education class size, a lack of a vision, and a lack of available state exemplary models” (Katsiyannis & Conderman, 1995, p. 5) as barriers to their efforts to educate students with disabilities. In order for the perceptions of school administrators to change in regards to inclusive programs, state agencies must work to support school administrators in removing the barriers of special education.

It has been shown that school administrators are highly influential in the success of inclusion programs. In reviewing studies on the topic of school administrator attitudes toward inclusion, several studies have documented that school administrators have positive and negative attitudes toward the inclusion model. What are the causes of these attitudes towards inclusion? Cindy Praisner (2003) attempted to identify the influences of school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. In her study, Praisner (2003) found a significant correlation between a school administrator’s experience and attitude. School administrators report more positive attitudes toward inclusion when they report more experience with special education students. Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) reported that an administrator’s experience and educational background contributes to their view of inclusive education. Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) found that administrators with less than seven years of experience and special education qualifications had more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities than did administrators with more years of experience and no special education qualifications. The number of in-service training and special education college credits relate to the attitudes of principals towards inclusion (Praisner, 2003). School administrators report positive attitudes when they report special education credits and training in the area of special education.

School administrators’ perceived barriers of inclusive education affect their attitude toward inclusion. Downing and Williams (1997) conducted a qualitative study about the



perceptions of school principals of inclusive settings. The most frequently mentioned barrier was negative attitudes of general education teachers, special education teachers, or parents. Some study participants believed that a barrier was the concern that the needs of all students would not be met in inclusive educational settings (Downing & Williams, 1997). Respondents felt that the inclusive environment was not the appropriate settings for students with severe disabilities (Downing & Williams, 1997).

Study participants gave researchers insights to potential benefits of including students with severe/profound disabilities in the regular education classes. Special educators interviewed for the study explained that students with severe/profound disabilities benefit from the “rich learning environment.” Special education students benefit from being included in regular education classes because they are exposed to a classroom rich in language. Everyday classroom language is important for students with disabilities (Downing & Williams, 1997). Respondents of the study gave several more benefits to students with disabilities being included in regular classes. They believed that the regular education students became the behavior models for students with disabilities (Downing & Williams, 1997). Special education students would exhibit more appropriate behaviors if they were allowed to be included with students who exhibit appropriate behaviors. Downing and Williams (1997) found that educators believed that regular education students benefit from the inclusion of students with disabilities. Study participants stated that regular education students benefit in that those students gain an appreciation and acceptance of diversity (Downing & Williams, 1997).

Downing and Williams (1997) reported on the support needs and teaching strategies that are needed to implement effective inclusion of students with severe disabilities. Educators believe that a full time person in the classroom should support students with severe disabilities.

The majority of study respondents reported on the importance of training for general education teachers, special education teachers, and aides (Downing & Williams, 1997). In connection to teaching strategies, over half of the respondents mentioned the use of adaptations in educating special needs students. Several respondents mentioned multi-modal or hands-on instruction, the use of a partner or peer support, and one-on-one instruction (Downing & Williams, 1997). Five principals in the study reported effective instructional strategies were the same for all learners (Downing & Williams, 1997). This finding emphasizes the lack of special education training for principals of inclusion programs. As mentioned, knowledge in the area of special education has been shown to relate to school administrator attitudes toward inclusion.

Hunt and Goetz (1997) reported on a qualitative research study in which researchers investigated the characteristics of people involved in the movement toward inclusive schooling. Interviews were conducted on influential school personnel. Participants in the study included the superintendent, a special education administrator and coordinator, parents of special education students, general education teachers, principals, and special education inclusion facilitators (Hunt & Goetz, 1997). The participants in the study were targeted based on their experience in facilitating successful inclusive education programs. Data was collected through interviews and then analyzed. Data analysis revealed emerging themes in the movement to include students with disabilities in the regular education classes (Hunt & Goetz, 1997). Data indicated that an emerging theme was that the inclusive movement was effectively supported by staff members who believed that including students with disabilities in the regular education classroom was a moral imperative and that a morally driven commitment to children had broader social implications for students with disabilities (Hunt & Goetz, 1997). The moral implications of educating students with disabilities have not emerged as a theme in much of the literature

regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. Other themes that emerged in this study were that positive relationships were connected to the success of inclusion programs. Inclusive education programs that supported positive working relationships by bringing staff together to facilitate growth, sharing success stories, selecting willing participants of inclusive education and by developing a sense of self-efficacy in contributing to student success emerged as characteristics of successful inclusive programs (Hunt & Goetz, 1997). Other emerging themes of the study were that effective inclusion programs included staff members who had a positive regard for students with disabilities. Study participants believed that students with disabilities are “whole people with needs more similar to than different from those of their classmates” (Hunt & Goetz, 1997, p.10). Participants of this study also believed that self-efficacy and worth has positive effects on children. Study participants also believed that and that their role included being change agents of social change (Hunt & Goetz, 1997).

Regardless of a school administrator’s belief of the inclusion of students with disabilities, school administrators cannot deny that they are agents of social change. It is agreed upon that teams of professionals are needed to plan and implement inclusion practices (Downing & Williams, 1997). School administrators suggested effective professional development in the area of teaching strategies is an important component of inclusion programs (Downing & Williams, 1997).

### **Relevant Studies**

A survey instrument was created by Bailey (2004) in order to gather data about principal attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. The survey, Principals’ Attitudes toward Inclusive Education (PAITE), was used by Umesh Sharma and Emily W. S. Chow in

2008 to study principal attitudes toward inclusion in Hong Kong. Sharma and Chow (2008) utilized stratified random sampling to identify the target sample. A total of one hundred and thirty completed questionnaires were analyzed.

### **Conclusion**

A review of literature sheds light on school administrators and their ability to lead special education programs (Crockett, 2002). As stated previously, the preparation in the area of special education has influenced the attitudes of school administrators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. School administrators have a multitude of responsibilities. School administrators are held responsible for the academic needs of all students. In order to meet the demands of educating all students, school administrators should understand the legal issues of supporting students with special needs, they must be able to support all teachers in their efforts, and they must engage parents and community members (Crockett, 2002).

Researchers have utilized qualitative and quantitative research methods in an attempt to identify the characteristics of effective inclusion programs. The majority of the quantitative researchers utilized questionnaires to illicit data and information about the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of school administrators (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003; Sharma & Chow, 2008). Engaging school administrators in structured interviews about their attitudes about inclusion might yield more information. Adversely, the education of students with disabilities is a highly controversial topic and strictly regulated by legislation, which might make some school administrators leery of responding to structured interviews honestly.

Studies have shown that school administrators and educators of effective inclusion programs have positive attitudes towards students with disabilities (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003;

Sharma & Chow, 2008). They are supportive of the learning needs of these students, and they believe all students can learn. The research has also revealed barriers to establishing effective inclusion programs. The barriers included employing highly-qualified special educators, school funding, meeting state standards, and involving parents and community members (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003; Sharma & Chow, 2008).

Engaging regular education teachers and special education teachers in collaborative planning and teaching efforts is also considered a barrier to inclusive education programs. General education teachers and specialist including special education teachers contribute to the inclusive education environment in a variety of ways (Friend, 2008). Each group of teachers (general education teachers and specialist including special education teachers) has concerns about their role in the co-teaching model of education. Professional development designers, which include school administrators, should consider the needs and concerns of special education teachers and regular education teachers. Professional development can help to resolve some issues in regards to the content knowledge of special education teachers and can help to establish the roles of educational professionals in inclusive models.

The dual system of education that has been created by the teacher preparation programs is an area that should be addressed in future studies. It is impossible to believe that training special education teachers and regular education teachers in separate systems would lead to an effective collaborative co-teaching model when teachers enter an inclusive educational program to begin their teaching careers. School administrator preparation programs and their role in training school administrators in the area of special education is an area of concern for future studies (Crockett, 2002). Future studies should also focus on the inclusion of students with severe/profound disabilities in regular education classrooms. Based on research, the majority of

school administrators, regular education teachers, and special education teachers believe that students with severe/profound disabilities would not benefit from the inclusive educational programs (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003; Sharma & Chow, 2008; Dyal & Flynt, 1996).

An analysis of the attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of school leaders charged with leading inclusion programs is essential for ensuring that students with disabilities are educated in the most appropriate educational settings. School administrators who have been engaged in positive experiences with students with disabilities are more likely to provide students with the least restrictive environments (Praisner, 2003; Sharma & Chow, 2008). Is it possible for school districts to provide opportunities for school administrators to be engaged in the positive relationships with students with disabilities in an effort to establish a positive school culture of educating students with disabilities?

In chapter two, information was presented about special education law, school administrator preparation to lead special education programs, barriers to leading effective special education programs, and attitudes toward educating students with disabilities. The information was presented based on its relevance to the purpose of the study which was to determine if there is a relationship between school administrator experience with special education, school administrator training, teacher training, years of school administrator experience and attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes. Information was also presented in this chapter based on its relevance to determining the perceived barriers toward effectively education students with disabilities. The next chapter focused on the method of this study. The methodology of the study will be described in detail.

## CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

As discussed in the literature review, there is a limited amount of research that focuses on secondary school leadership and the secondary school administrators' attitudes toward including students with various disabilities in the general education classroom. Several research studies have focused on secondary school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion (Bailey, 2004; Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Bays & Crockett, 2007; Dyal & Flynt, 1996; Powell & Hyle, 1997; Praisner, 2003; Sharma & Chow, 2008). Most studies about the topic of school administrator attitudes toward inclusion focus on elementary schools. The educational content at the secondary level is more difficult; therefore, the gap between special education students and regular education students is more pronounced. Legislation has outlined regulations for including students with disabilities in the general education setting; however, the legislation can be misinterpreted (Crockett, 2002). The misinterpretation of the law can occur when a school administrator has had negative experiences with students with disabilities or when a school administration has had limited training in the area of special education (Praisner, 2003).

Although inclusive educational practices for students with disabilities have been a focus in public schools, school administrators continue to search for answers to improve practices in the area of special education. The purposes of this study were to determine if there is a relationship between school administrator experience with special education, school administrator training, professional development, years of school administrator experience and

attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes. Another purpose of the study was to determine the perceived barriers toward effectively educating students with disabilities.

Chapter three includes a description of the procedures the researcher followed, the research design, the instrument used, the participants, the sample size, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis procedures. In the following sections of this chapter the research questions are listed, a description of the study participants are outlined, and the research instrument is described in detail. Data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and the limitations of the study conclude this chapter.

### **Research Design**

A correlational research design was implemented for this study. A correlational research design is used to determine relationships between variables (Johnson, 2001). Correlational research is a type of nonexperimental quantitative educational research method. Correlational research was used to identify factors that relate to positive and negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. A survey developed by Bailey (2004) was modified and utilized to collect data from middle school, junior high school, and high school principals and assistant principals about their attitudes toward including students with disabilities in the general education setting. Analysis explored the relationship between school administrator attitudes and experience, and training, about students with disabilities.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions guide this study:

1. What factors relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion programs?



2. What is the relationship between the professional and background variables school administrators, and their attitudes toward inclusion?

3. What are the perceived barriers to effectively leading inclusion programs for students with disabilities?

### **Participants**

A target population of all middle school, junior high school, and high school assistant principals and principals in Alabama public schools were selected. Alabama school administrator contact information was obtained by using the Alabama Department of Education website. The target sample consisted of 913 Alabama secondary level school administrators including school principals and school assistant principals. Study participants gave consent to participate in the survey by participating in the on-line anonymous survey. The on-line survey link was sent electronically to all middle school, junior high school, and high school administrators in the state of Alabama.

### **Instrumentation**

#### **Description of the Instrument**

Bailey (2004) developed a survey entitled Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education (PAITE). The PAITE was used to collect information about the attitudes of Alabama school principals and assistant principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The original survey instrument created by Bailey (2004) included 30 items about school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. Twelve items on the original survey instrument were questions related to professional background characteristics, one item that sought to elicit an overall attitude of school administrators, and three open-ended questions pertaining to school administrator opinions about inclusion.

In developing the survey instrument, Bailey (2004) decided to eliminate seven survey items. He believed that a survey item about the access to other professionals such as occupational and speech therapists were of little value in determining a school administrator's attitude toward inclusion. He eliminated a survey item about regular education students' academic benefits of inclusion. A survey item pertaining to students with disabilities disrupting other students was also eliminated. One survey item about the policy of inclusion was eliminated. Bailey deleted three survey items pertaining to school funding and inclusion programs. The survey items were "Because special schools are better resourced to cater for special needs students (5) these students should stay in special schools," "Schools have sufficient teaching resources to cope with inclusion" (23), and "There is sufficient funding to permit effective inclusion" (30). Bailey (2004) argued that these survey items focused on resource allocation and not the needs of the child. These survey items were included in the current study survey instrument. In order to investigate factors that relate to school administrator attitudes toward inclusion, survey items should present possible factors that could relate to attitudes including school funding. The survey instrument for the present study included 26 items about factors that could possibly relate to school administrator attitudes toward inclusion, 8 items about professional background characteristics, 1 item about the overall attitude toward inclusion, and 3 open-ended items about school administrator opinions of inclusion. Auburn University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research approved my request to collect data (see Appendix A).

The first 26 items of the survey are questions with a five-point Likert-type scale. Likert scales, semantic differential scales, rating scales, Thurstone scales, and Guttman scales can be used to measure attitudes (Gay et al., 2006). I chose to use a Likert-type scale for this study.

The ordinal scale of the Likert-type questions consist of: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree. However, one question had a four point Likert-type scale. The survey item was “If you were asked to categorize your feelings about inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom), which of the following four positions would you choose” (Bailey, 2004)? The scale for this survey item included (1) strongly opposed, (2) opposed, (3) supportive, and (4) strongly supportive. This survey item was included as it was written in the original survey instrument created by Bailey (2004).

The next eight questions in the survey were demographic and professional background type questions. The demographic questions are variables that potentially related to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion. These questions focus on education, years of experience in the area of special education, years of teaching experience, years of administrative experience, and characteristics of the schools in which these principals and teachers work. Specifically, the survey items pertaining to school characteristics ask school administrators about student enrollment of the schools they lead, the type of school they lead, and the classification (rural, suburban, urban) of the school they lead. Literature has suggested that years of experience in the area of special education is a variable that is related to the attitude or belief of school administrators.

### **Construct Validity**

Construct validity is the degree to which the research instrument measures what is intended to be measured (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Bailey (2004) created the PAITE and ensured its validity. The following section describes Bailey’s method in determining validity for his survey instrument.

In developing the PAITE scale, Bailey (2004) first examined literature about including students with disabilities in regular schools. Secondly, he collected qualitative data by interviewing three principals (Bailey, 2004). The literature review and principal interviews produced an initial pool of sixty-four survey items (Bailey, 2004). Bailey then carefully considered each survey item and discussed the survey items with professionals who were experts in inclusive education. Through this process he narrowed the survey to thirty items. In order to balance the response set, seventeen of the thirty items were negatively worded (Bailey, 2004). The final step in developing the scale was to organize survey items into concept clusters (Bailey, 2004). The concept clusters included academic, social benefits and disruption, access to professionals, functional descriptors for diagnostic types, funding and resources, levels of challenging behavior, professional training programs, social justice, policies and alternative programs, and workload and management issues (Bailey, 2004). Once all of the questions were organized, Bailey conducted a pilot study of his survey. This study was based on a pencil-and-paper survey. The sample for the pilot study consisted of 1367 school principals in Queensland, Australia (Bailey, 2004). The return rate of the respondents was 644 out of 1367 or 47%. In order to maintain construct validity with the modified survey instrument I employed expert judgment.

Expert judgment supports content validity (Gay et al., 2006). Ten experts were selected to review Bailey's survey, the PAITE instrument. Five elementary principals, two elementary assistant principals, one elementary supervisor, one elementary director of special education, and one secondary director of special education were selected to review and provide feedback for content validity. The elementary principals and assistant principals were selected based on their experiences as Alabama school administrators. The elementary supervisor was selected based on

the fact that he has building level administration experience and experience in a central office position. The director of secondary special education was selected as an expert based on her knowledge and experience in the field of special education. A link to the survey was electronically mailed to the experts. The experts were asked to take the survey and then to make suggestions and recommendations.

Several suggestions were made by the experts about items included on the survey. One respondent suggested defining mild, moderate, and severe disabilities in the context of the survey items. That respondent explained that he was not an expert in the field of special education and was unsure how to respond to the survey items that included the terms ‘mild’, ‘moderate’, and ‘severe’ disabilities. Another respondent who is an expert in the field of special education made the suggestion to re-word the survey item that read: “All students with disabilities should be included in the general education classroom.” She believed that respondents would have a difficult time with this question given that educating students with disabilities is not “all or nothing.” This survey item was re-worded in the following way: “Most students with disabilities should be included in the general education classroom.”

In Bailey’s (2004) validity study five factors emerged among attitudes toward inclusion. Bailey (2004) conducted a factor analysis in order to determine the factors. Bailey (2004) excluded the survey items pertaining to resources. The current study included the survey items pertaining to resources; therefore, the current study includes six factors instead of five factors. The six factors were teacher workload and management, inclusion benefits, level of disability, professional development, resources, and placement. (Bailey, 2004). These factors align closely with the professional literature about the attitudes of principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. Given the extensive validation study that

Bailey (2004) conducted, the PAITE is a useful scale for measuring the attitudes of school principals toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. For the purpose of this study, factor analysis will be conducted in order to examine inter-item correlation.

### **Reliability**

The degree to which a test measures consistently what is being measured is known as reliability (Gay et al., 2006, p.139). Cronbach's alpha was used to support reliability in this study. Cronbach's alpha is typically used to show reliability of survey instruments (Gay et al., 2006). Cronbach's alpha measures the internal consistency of test items and how they relate to one another and to the test as a whole (Gay et al., 2006). According to Gliem and Gliem (2003), Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient is to 1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). No test-retest reliability measures were conducted on Bailey's (2004) PAITE survey instrument. A Cronbach's alpha of .92 was reported. According to Bailey (2004), .92 is very high given that .80 is generally reported as being acceptable for effective instruments. In the following section, I describe my data collection procedures for this study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

A list of principal and assistant principal e-mail addresses was obtained through the Alabama State Department of Education. I sent a letter via e-mail to Alabama school principals and assistant principals at the middle school, junior high school, and high schools. I also sent a letter via e-mail to Alabama principals and assistant principals in schools that included 6<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (see Appendix B). The letter explained that a survey about school administrator attitudes toward the inclusion of students with

disabilities would be sent via e-mail to principals and assistant principals in the school district. A cover letter explaining the survey objectives and the anonymity of the survey was included at the beginning of the electronic survey. The cover letter included a link to the survey.

Researchers have found that pre-notification for e-mail surveys increases response speed (Murphy, Daley & Dalenburg, 1991; Sheehan & McMillan, 1999; Taylor & Lynn, 1998). A second e-mail with the on-line survey was re-sent two weeks later. A third e-mail was sent to the school principals a month later. Researchers have found that post-notification or follow-up contact has increased the response rate on e-mail surveys by 25% (Sheehan & Holy, 1997).

The survey was disseminated using Qualtrics. Qualtrics is an electronic survey service. Electronic dissemination of the survey was selected based on economic reasons and for proficiency reasons. A study conducted by Shannon, Johnson, Searcy, and Lott (2002) found that study participants were in favor of using email or web-based surveys. Fifty-three percent of the study participants were employed at a college or university, thirteen percent worked as consultants, ten percent worked for testing organizations, eight percent worked for school systems, and the remaining eight percent were employed by state or federal agencies or private industry. Eighty-five percent of the study participants reported that they would respond to a web-based survey if they simply had to click on the URL address (Shannon et al., 2002). A Qualtrics web-based survey will allow me to download the information into a format that can be analyzed; therefore, a web-based survey will be more proficient. Finally, using a web-based survey would reduce the cost of distributing a survey through the traditional mailing method.

In this study, data was collected about factors that relate to principals and assistant principals and their attitudes toward inclusion. The factors that related to the attitudes of these professionals toward inclusion include: special education experience, education and professional

development in the area of special education, leadership style, and types of disabilities. The information gained from the study will provide an understanding of how inclusive programs in Alabama can be better implemented and how school principals should prepare for inclusive education (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).

### **Data Analysis**

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22 computer program was used to analyze the data for the purposes of this study. The data was analyzed based on the three guiding research questions of this study.

#### **Research Question 1: What factors relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion programs?**

In order to determine if a relationship exists between factors and school administrator attitudes, a Pearson Correlation will be utilized. The factors that will be analyzed for this survey item are teacher workload, inclusion benefits, level of disability, professional development, resources, and placement. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), Likert scale data produce continuous variables which can be analyzed by calculating the Pearson Correlation.

#### **Research Question 2: What is the relationship between the professional background variables of school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion?**

In order to analyze the data for this research question, a Pearson Correlation will be used to compare background variables; age, years of teaching experience, years of school administrator experience and student enrollment with the mean attitude score of study participants. The Pearson Correlation is most appropriate for determining relationship among continuous variables (Gay et al., 2006). To analyze the background variables — gender, type of school, urbanicity, and special education qualification — a one-way ANOVA will be employed.



The mean attitude score will be the dependent variable and each of the background variables will be independent variables.

**Research Question 3: What are perceived barriers to effectively leading inclusion programs for students with disabilities?**

Two open ended response items were included on the PAITE that will address this research question. The sixteenth survey item on the survey asks study participants to state their opinion about the greatest disadvantage of inclusion. This survey item will elicit information from school administrators about their views of barriers to inclusion. The eighteenth survey item, “To make inclusion work effectively, what are two absolute essentials?”, could also elicit information from study participants about their views of barriers to inclusion. The open-ended survey item responses will be analyzed for common responses from study participants.

**Limitations**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of school administrators in regards to including students with disabilities in regular education classes. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, a limitation of the study is a phenomenon called social desirability responding. Social desirability responding refers to survey respondents reporting information that would make them be viewed in a positive light regardless of their true feelings (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

**Summary**

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of middle school, junior high school, and high school principals and assistant principals in Alabama about the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. A previously developed survey entitled Principals’ Attitude toward Inclusive Education (PAITE) was used for this study. Survey items align with

themes that were presented in the literature review about special education law, school administrator training/experience, and barriers to effective inclusion practices. Construct validity was established by the developer of the PAITE in a validation study. Reliability was also established by Bailey (2004), the creator of the survey.

The survey was electronically mailed to 913 middle school, junior high school, and high school assistant principals and principals in the state of Alabama. Qualtrics, a web-based survey system, was used to collect survey data. Qualtrics system tools were used to extract data. SPSS was then used to analyze the data based on the three research questions of this study.

## CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

### **Introduction**

Educational administrators are in the position to design and implement effective inclusive educational programs for students with disabilities. Their attitudes toward educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environments affect their ability to lead special education inclusive programs. Educational administrators at the secondary education level have added challenges in leading special education programs in that content in the general education setting is more difficult than academic content at the elementary education levels. Although legislation regulates the placement of special education students in their least restrictive environments, educational administrators have some discretion in how the law is carried out in their school buildings. Inclusive education is a “value-based practice that attempts to bring students, including those with disabilities, into full membership within their local school community” (Udvari-Solner, 1996, p. 101). A school administrator’s values can support or hinder an inclusive program.

School administrator attitudes impact a student’s increased opportunity to be served in the general education setting or it can limit efforts to reduce the segregated nature of special education services (Praisner, 2003). Factors have been shown to relate to the reported attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion of students with disabilities. These factors include a school administrator’s views of teacher work load and teacher classroom management skills, the benefits of inclusion and the level of disability, school resources, professional development, and

placement of special education students. Professional qualifications and background characteristics of school administrators have also been shown to influence the attitudes of including students with disabilities in the general education setting.

Based on current literature in the fields of educational leadership and inclusive education, several goals were established for the current study. The first goal was to determine factors that relate to the attitudes of Alabama secondary school administrators toward the inclusion of special education students in the general education setting. The second aim of the study was to determine if a relationship exists between professional background variables of Alabama secondary school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion. Thirdly, it was hoped that the study would uncover perceived barriers to including students with disabilities in the general education classroom setting. A modified version of the survey instrument created by Jeff Bailey (2004) entitled Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education (PAITE) was utilized to elicit attitudes of school administrators in regards to inclusive education. The survey modifications were explained in Chapter three. The PAITE was sent electronically to 913 Alabama secondary school administrators. Inferential statistics were performed in order to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion programs?
2. What is the relationship between the professional background variables of school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion?
3. What are perceived barriers to effectively leading inclusion programs for students with disabilities?

## Participants

One hundred and twenty-two Alabama secondary assistant principals and principals completed the PAITE, for a 13% response rate. Approximately 25.4% of the participants were middle school or junior high school assistant principals or principals (n = 31); 59.8% of the participants were high school assistant principals or principals (n = 73); 10.7% of the participants were assistant principals and principals of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade schools, kindergarten through twelfth grade schools, sixth grade through twelfth grade schools, or seventh grade through twelfth grade schools (n = 13), 1.6% of the participants were career technical school assistant principals or principals (n = 2), and 2.5% of the participants were alternative school assistant principals or principals (n = 3). The groups of participants matched the target group for the study. In regards to school administrator experience, approximately 23% of the participants had between one and three years of school administration experience (n = 27), 27.4% had between four and seven years of school administrative experience (n = 32), 23% of the participants had between eight and eleven years of school administrative experience (n = 27), and 26.4% had twelve or more years of administrative experience (n = 31). Table 1 describes the participants of this study by specific demographics.

Table 1

*Description of Study Participants by Demographics*

Item Description	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	66	58
Female	48	42
<b>Urbanicity</b>		
Urban	17	15
Rural	67	58
Suburban	31	27
<b>School Level</b>		
Middle School/High School	30	26
High School	69	60
Pre K–12, K–12, 6–12, 7–12, Middle/High School	12	10
Career Technical School	2	2
Alternative School	2	2
<b>Special Education Qualification</b>		
Yes	22	19
No	93	81

**Data Analysis Results**

The data was analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics including Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlation coefficient, one-way ANOVA, mean, and standard deviations were calculated in order to understand the data and to determine the answers to the three research questions for this study.

Table 2 describes the variables of this study in terms of means and standard deviations. As explained previously, the variables were level of disability, inclusion benefits, teacher workload and management, professional development, resources, and placement. The PAITE survey included a five point Likert-type scale with the following description: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. The data showed that study participants neither agree nor disagree that teacher workload and management ( $M = 3.57$ ) affects the practice of inclusion. Alabama secondary school administrators agreed that there are benefits to inclusion based on the mean score of the inclusion benefits ( $M = 4.06$ ) factor data. The data connected to level of disability ( $M = 3.60$ ) demonstrated that study participants neither agreed nor disagreed that the level of disability affects the practice of inclusion. In the area of professional development ( $M = 2.82$ ) showed that study participants disagreed with the idea that professional development affects the practice of inclusion. Study participants reported that they disagreed ( $M = 2.65$ ) with the idea that resources affect the practice of inclusion. Finally, study participants reported nearly agreeable attitudes ( $M = 3.98$ ) that placement of students in the various educational placements along the continuum of special education services affects the practice of inclusion. In the area of teacher workload, data indicated that study participants disagreed ( $M = 2.93$ ) that including students with special needs in the classroom creates few additional problems for teachers' class management. School administrators neither agreed or disagreed ( $M = 3.68$ ) that including students with disabilities in the regular education classroom is unfair to regular teachers who already have a heavy workload. They also neither agreed or disagreed ( $M = 3.57$ ) that special education students would take up too much of the teacher's time.

Table 2

*Mean and Standard Deviations of the Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education (PAITE)*

Item Description	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Teacher Workload and Management</b>	3.57	.65
Q1_3 Including students with special needs creates few additional problems for teachers' class management.	2.93	1.06
Q2_1 Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	4.03	.80
Q3_4 Including students with special needs is unfair to regular teachers who already have a heavy work load.	3.68	.89
Q4_3 Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher's time.	3.57	.90
<b>Inclusion Benefits</b>	4.05	.68
Q2_5 Students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion.	3.90	.80
Q2_6 Regular students will be disadvantaged by having special needs children in their classroom.	3.75	.86
Q4_1 Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	4.22	.75
Q4_2 Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	4.05	.85
<b>Level of Disability</b>	3.60	.46
Q1_4 Students who cannot read normal size print should not be included in regular classrooms.	4.72	.56
Q1_7 Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	4.20	1.08
Q3_2 Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication devices/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	4.18	.62
Q3_6 Students with severe disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	2.67	1.02
Q3_7 Students with moderate disabilities should be Included in regular classrooms.	3.88	.69
Q4_4 Students with severe speech difficulties should not be included in regular classrooms.	4.02	.88
(table continues)		
Q1_6 Students who are continually aggressive towards their fellow students	2.23	1.00



Item Description	<i>M</i>	SD
should not be included in regular classrooms.		
Q2_7 Students who are continually aggressive towards school staff should not be included in regular classrooms.	2.13	.96
Q3_1 Special needs students whose achievement levels in basic skills are significantly lower than their same age peers should not be included in regular classrooms.	3.54	.96
<b>Professional Development</b>	2.82	.72
Q1_1 Regular teachers are not trained adequately to cope with students with disabilities.	2.42	1.09
Q2_4 Teacher aides are trained adequately to cope with Students with special needs.	2.42	.99
Q3_3 Regular principals are trained adequately to cope with students with disabilities.	2.50	1.03
<b>Resources</b>	2.65	.70
Q3_5 Schools have sufficient teaching resources to cope with inclusion.	2.21	1.04
Q4_5 There is sufficient funding to permit effective inclusion.	1.74	.93
<b>Placement</b>	3.98	.89
Q2_3 Special needs students belong in special schools where their needs can be met.	3.92	.96
Q1_5 Because special schools are better resources for special needs students, these students should stay in special schools.	4.01	.99

In the area of inclusion benefits, school administrators agreed that both special education students ( $M = 4.22$ ) and regular education students ( $M = 4.05$ ) benefit socially from inclusion. School administrators neither agreed or disagreed ( $M = 3.90$ ) that special education students benefit academically by being included in the regular education classroom. They also neither agreed or disagreed ( $M = 3.75$ ) that regular education students will be disadvantaged by having students with special needs in their classes. Results in the disability level section showed that school administrators believe that certain disability groups should be included in the regular

education setting where other disability groups should not be included in the regular education setting. Study participants agreed ( $M = 4.42$ ) that students with physical disabilities should be included in the regular education setting. They reported that they agreed with students with visual impairments ( $M = 4.72$ ) being included in the regular education setting. School administrators reported that they agreed ( $M = 4.20$ ) that students with mild disabilities should be included but they neither agreed or disagreed ( $M = 3.88$ ) with students who have moderate disabilities being included in the regular education classroom.

School administrators reported that they typically disagreed ( $M = 2.67$ ) that students who have severe disabilities should be included in the regular education classroom setting. It is important to note that the standard deviation was 1.02. This suggests that there was a wide variation and less agreement between study participants. It was reported that school administrators agreed with students who have communication disorders ( $M = 4.18$ ) and speech difficulties ( $M = 4.02$ ) being included in the regular education classrooms. Data showed that school administrators neither agreed or disagreed ( $M = 3.54$ ) with students with intellectual disabilities being included. School administrators reported that they disagreed ( $M = 2.23$ ) with students who have emotional/behavior disorders being included in the general education classroom setting.

The study participants reported that they strongly disagreed ( $M = 1.74$ ) with the statement, "There is sufficient funding to permit effective inclusion" (Bailey, 2004). School administrators also reported that they disagreed ( $M = 2.21$ ) with schools having enough teaching resources to cope with inclusion. In line with the resource topic, school administrators agreed ( $M = 4.01$ ) that special schools have more resources, therefore, special needs students are better

served there. Finally, school administrators neither agreed nor disagreed ( $M = 3.92$ ) that special needs students' needs are better met at special schools.

### **Internal Consistency Reliability**

Cronbach's alpha coefficients measure the internal consistency of an instrument. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the instrument that was used in this study was .86, which is a strong Cronbach's alpha coefficient. According to Gliem and Gliem (2003) the closer the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0, the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the factors of this study ranged from .68 to .81. There are various reports of the acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Researchers report that a Cronbach's alpha in the range of .70 to .95 is considered acceptable. A lower Cronbach's alpha coefficient could be due to a low number of items (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The entire sample ( $n = 155$ ) was used for analysis. The reliability coefficients for the factors of this study are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

#### *Reliability*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b><math>\alpha</math></b>
Factor 1: Teacher Workload and Management	4	.69
Factor 2: Inclusion Benefits	4	.81
Factor 3: Level of Disability	10	.73
Factor 4: Professional Development	3	.70
Factor 5: Resources	2	.68
Factor 6: Placement	2	.84

In order to provide descriptive statistics for the variables in this study, a Bivariate Correlation was calculated for variables. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), when two variables are correlated, the result is a correlation coefficient. The coefficient is a decimal and ranges from -1.00 to 0.00 to +1.00. The coefficient indicates the size and the direction of the relationship. Table 3 shows a moderate positive relationship between resources and professional training ( $r = .65$ ). Resources and professional development had the most positive relationship in this study. Teacher workload and placement had a moderate positive relationship as well ( $r = .60$ ). As shown in Table 4, other factors had relationships; however, some had much weaker relationships. The Pearson correlation coefficient did not indicate a relationship between resources and inclusion benefits ( $r = .22$ ).

Table 4

*Bivariate Correlations between Factors*

	<b>Factor 1: Teacher Workload and Management</b>	<b>Factor 2: Inclusion Benefits</b>	<b>Factor 3: Level of Disability</b>	<b>Factor 4: Professional Training</b>	<b>Factor 5: Resources</b>	<b>Factor 6: Placement</b>
Factor 1: Teacher Workload and Management	1.00	.33**	.47**	.45**	.51**	.60**
Factor 2: Inclusion Benefits		1.00	.51**	.38**	.22*	.51**
Factor 3: Level of Disability			1.00	.46**	.35**	.58**
Factor 4: Professional Training				1.00	.65**	.57**
Factor 5: Resources					1.00	.60**
Factor 6: Placement						1.00

\*p &lt; .05, \*\*p &lt; .01

## **Factors Related to the Attitudes of School Administrators**

The first research question of this study was, What factors relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion programs? In order to determine if a relationship existed between factors and school administrator attitudes a Pearson Correlation was conducted between variables that have been shown to relate to the attitudes of school administrators and an overall attitude score. The Pearson Correlation is a test that is conducted when variables meet the following assumptions: level of measurement, related pairs, absence of outliers, normality of variables, linearity, and homoscedasticity (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The level of measurement and Pearson Correlation refers to the idea that variables are continuous. In this study, the data collected were responses to Likert-type scale survey items. Likert-type scale data produce continuous variables which can be analyzed by calculating the Pearson Correlation (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The Pearson Correlation is used when the relationship between variables is linear (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

The overall attitude score consisted of the mean score of two survey items. The first survey item that was used to calculate the overall attitude score was, “Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported” (Bailey, 2004). The second survey item used to calculate the overall attitude score was, “If you were asked to categorize your feelings about inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom), which of the following four positions would you choose?” (Bailey, 2004). In a previous study, Sharma and Chow (2008) found that school administrators reported slightly negative attitudes toward inclusion based on the entire PAITE instrument. The study found that school administrators reported more positive attitudes toward inclusion when they were asked a general question. Therefore, the attitude mean score for this research question only utilized the

responses to the two general questions listed above about inclusion. Table 5 displays the results of the Pearson Correlation between factors and Alabama school administrator reported overall attitudes toward inclusion.

Table 5  
*Pearson Correlation Overall Attitude Score and Factors*

		Overall Attitudes Mean	Teacher Workload	Inclusion Benefits	Level of Disability	Professional Training	Resources	Placement
Overall Attitudes Mean Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.27**	.55**	.40**	.07	.16	.40**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003	<.001	<.001	.46	.07	<.001

**Background Variables and their Relationship to Principals’ Attitudes toward Inclusion**

The second research question of this study was, “What is the relationship between the professional background variables of Alabama school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion?” (Bailey, 2004). In order to analyze the data for this research question a Pearson Correlation was used to compare background variables — age, years of teaching experience, years as a school administrator, and student enrollment — with the mean full scale attitude score. The mean full scale attitude score was based on all of the Likert-type survey items from Bailey’s (2004) PAITE survey instrument. There were 27 Likert-type scale items on the PAITE. Table 6

shows the correlation coefficients between the background variables and the mean full scale attitude score. The data collected for this study showed that years of teaching experience ( $r = -.02$ ) and years of school administrative experience ( $r = -.18$ ) were weakly negatively related to Alabama school administrator attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Table 6

*Mean Attitude Score for Alabama School Administrators and their Continuous Background Variables*

		<b>Full Scale Attitudes Mean</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>School Administration Experience</b>	<b>Student Enrollment</b>
Full Scale Attitudes	Pearson	1	-.12	-.02	-.18	.21*
Mean Score	Correlation					
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.	.23	.88	.07	.03

In order to analyze the categorical background variables — gender, type of school, urbanicity, and special education qualification — a one-way ANOVA was conducted. Researchers must justify the use of the one-way ANOVA by ensuring that data utilized for the test meets certain assumptions. First, the dependent variable should be measured at the interval or ratio level. The data utilized for this analysis does meet this assumption. The dependent variable is the reported attitude of Alabama school administrators based on a Likert-type survey. The dependent variable is measured at the continuous level. Next, the independent variable should consist of two or more categorical groups. The independent variables analyzed for in this section are gender, urbanicity, school level, and special education qualification. These variables



consist of two or more categories. Thirdly, there should be no significant outliers. The presence or absence of outliers can be determined by creating a scatterplot of variables. The scatterplots for gender, urbanicity, type of school, special education qualification, and the attitude mean does not show any outliers. Fourthly, the dependent variables should be normally distributed for each category of the independent variable. Finally, there needs to be homogeneity of variances (Lund & Lund, 2013). In order to ensure that the assumptions of the one-way ANOVA test are met, post hoc tests were conducted.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted using the mean full scale attitude score as the dependent variable and each of the background variables as the independent variable. Table 7 displays the ANOVA significance values between genders. According to the data there were no significant differences ( $p = .74$ ) between males and females and their attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Table 7

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Attitude Toward Inclusion by Gender*

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
Between Groups	1	.02	.02	.11	.74
Within Groups	112	20.33	.182		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>20.35</b>			

Table 8 displays data results for a one-way ANOVA by urbanicity. The results showed a significant difference ( $p = .01$ ) in the attitudes toward inclusion for urban, suburban, and rural school administrators. Tukey's post hoc test demonstrated that administrators from urban areas

had significantly more positive attitudes toward inclusion ( $p = .02$ ) than school administrators from suburban areas. Tukey's post hoc test also demonstrated no significant differences in the attitudes of school administrators from urban school settings and rural school settings ( $p = .61$ ).

Table 8

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Attitude Toward Inclusion by Urbanicity*

<b>Urbanicity</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Between Groups	2	1.54	.77	4.56	.01
Within Groups	112	18.89	.17		
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>20.43</b>			

Table 9 shows the results of a one-way ANOVA by school level. There was no difference ( $p = .68$ ) in the reported attitude of school administrators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities at the various Alabama school secondary levels. There was a variation in school administrators who responded from the various school levels. For example, there were only two study participants from career schools and only two study participants from the alternative type of school. The low study participant number could have an effect on the ANOVA results.

Table 9

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Attitude Toward Inclusion by School Level*

<b>School Level</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>
Between Groups	4	.42	.12	.58	.68

Within Groups	110	20.00	.18
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>20.43</b>	

Table 10 shows the data collected and analysis through a one-way ANOVA by special education qualification. Based on the analysis, there was a significant difference ( $p = .01$ ) between the attitudes of school administrators who have a special education qualification and school administrators who do not have a special education qualification.

Table 10

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Attitude Toward Inclusion by Special Education Qualification*

<b>Special Education Qualification</b>	<i>df</i>	<b>SS</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<i>P</i>
Between Groups	1	1.29	1.29	7.60	.01
Within Groups	113	19.14	.17		
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>20.43</b>			

**Perceived Barriers to Effectively Leading Inclusion Programs for Students with Disabilities**

The third research question of this study was, “What are the perceived barriers to effectively leading inclusion programs for students with disabilities?” (Bailey, 2004). Three open-ended response questions were included in the PAITE survey instrument that address this research question. Question number 16 on the survey instrument was, “In your opinion, what is the strongest argument for having inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom)?” Several themes emerged from the open-ended response items. Table 11 shows the response of the first open-ended question and the themes that emerged. There were

many responses from Alabama school administrators that pertained to the social benefits to both regular education students and students with disabilities. Other school administrators reported that a benefit to inclusion is the access to high qualified teachers. They stated that access to highly qualified teachers was beneficial in that students with special needs were exposed to the same content as their regular education peers. Access to highly qualified teachers is included in special education law. Given this, school administrators also responded to this question with comments about law requirements and special education students. A few school administrators responded with comments about including students with disabilities in the general education classroom but were not sure that it would benefit every disability group.

Table 11

*Responses to First Open-Ended Question and the Themes That Emerged*

*In your opinion, what is the strongest argument for having inclusion?*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
<p><b>Social Benefits for Special Needs Students and Regular Students</b></p> <p>“Building a strong social connection between regular education students. This connection will provide an opportunity to view life from a different perspective or different eyes. This will lend itself to all being able to cope and react better in the real world”</p> <p>“When students finish high school, they will have to function in society. Inclusion helps both regular and special education students learn social and academic skills to be successful in the real world.”</p> <p>“All student benefit socially and emotionally from being able to work together in a regular classroom setting.”</p>	49
<p><b>Academic Success</b></p> <p>“Success breeds success. Students are exposed to the curriculum of grade level. They are receiving instruction in which individual student goals can be set for attainment.”</p>	22

Theme	Number of Responses
<p>“I believe standards are raised when all students have exposure to the standards.”</p> <p>“The content teachers are more adept at teaching their assigned content.”</p>	
	(table continued)
<b>Least Restrictive Environment based on Level of Disability</b>	<b>8</b>
<p>“Students should be educated in their least restrictive environment. Students with mild to moderate disabilities can often be successful in the inclusion classroom with their accommodations and modifications listed in their IEPs”</p> <p>“Students with mild to moderate disabilities often learn skills to overcome disabilities and benefit from the challenges of regular classroom instruction.”</p>	
<b>Educational Rights</b>	
<p>“All students deserve a free and appropriate education.”</p> <p>“Students with disabilities have the right to be included with same age peers.</p>	
<p>“I believe public education’s mission should be to educate all students to the fullest degree possible. Allowing students with disabilities in the regular classroom and to be full partners with their non-disabled peers in evidence of democracy at work. Public education removes barriers that no other national phenomenon does.”</p>	10
<b>Teacher Benefits</b>	<b>4</b>
<p>“Inclusion requires teachers to differentiate instruction.”</p> <p>“It allows teachers to work collaboratively to meet the needs of all students in the classroom”</p>	
<b>No Benefit</b>	<b>1</b>

The second open-ended response question that was included on the survey instrument was, “In your opinion, what is the greatest disadvantage of inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom)? (Bailey, 2004). In reviewing the responses of Alabama school administrators for this open ended response item, several themes emerged. Many school administrators believed that inclusion can effect the level of education that regular

education students receive in an inclusion class. Other responses to this question were connected to a concern with lack of resources. Several administrators commented about level of disabilities and the belief that certain disabilities create distractions in the regular education classroom.

Another disadvantage reported by Alabama school administrators was a lack of teacher training in the area of special education. Interestingly, a few school administrators reported that a disadvantage to inclusion would be that special education students are segregated from other students with disabilities. Table 12 shows the response to this question by theme.

Table 12

*Responses to Second Open-Ended Question by Theme*

*In your opinion, what is the greatest disadvantage of inclusion?*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
<b>Lack of Funding/Resources</b>	32
<p>“There are not enough resources to be able to supply the needed number of aides to offer the extra support that may be needed.”</p> <p>“Special education services are often not given enough support (instructional aides, materials, etc) to meet the needs of the students with disabilities (moderate to severe).”</p> <p>“If there isn’t enough supplemental material and at least an aide in the classroom it is very hard, especially if the student is very far below grade level or a discipline issue.”</p>	
<b>Disruptions in the Regular Classroom</b>	22
<p>“Severe behavior issues can distract from the learning environment and can cause all students to fall behind.”</p> <p>“Some special education students are a serious disruption to the learning of the other students.”</p> <p>“The disruptions from meltdowns or the loss of instructional time.”</p>	
<b>Teacher Training</b>	18

Theme	Number of Responses
<p>“Teachers are not adequately trained to work with inclusion students.”</p> <p>“Teacher training for general education teachers”</p> <p>“Inadequate teacher training. Are we providing all that the student(s) with disabilities needs?”</p>	16
<p><b>Achievement Gap</b></p> <p>“One of the greatest disadvantages is that inclusion is often at the expense of the more gifted students. Teachers spend time developing lessons for average and special needs students and often do not have time to create/give feedback/grade enrichment activities for upper-level students.”</p> <p>“Realistically at the high school level it becomes difficult to differentiate all instruction at a spectrum ranging from 12th grade level to 3rd. This issue is not as acute at the elementary level when you may have a range of 2nd to 5th reading-levels – but, 2nd–3rd is a different struggle.”</p> <p>“It can be a disadvantage for students who have such large gaps in their curricular knowledge or have low intellectual functioning that it does not always maximize their time learning. Blanket inclusion doesn’t serve anyone well.”</p>	21
<p><b>Type of Disability/Placement</b></p> <p>“If the student’s disability is severe enough that they do not understand what is going on in the classroom, they should not be in the inclusion classes.”</p> <p>“Students with disabilities may not receive all the specific attention that they need in the general education classroom.”</p> <p>“Some disabled children do not benefit from being in the regular education classroom.”</p>	4
<p><b>No Disadvantages</b></p>	4

The final open-ended response item on the survey instrument was, “To make inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the/regular education classroom) work effectively, what are two absolute essentials?” (Bailey, 2004). Alabama school administrators reported that effective inclusion programs should have collaboration between the special education teachers and regular education teachers. They believe that funding and teacher training are also essential

components of effective inclusion programs. Positive attitudes of teachers working in inclusion programs are also essential. School staff that has high expectations for all students was also reported as essential to an effective inclusion program. Table 13 shows the results of the third open-ended question. The numbers of responses are larger for this question because the question asks for respondents to supply two absolute essentials for effective inclusion.

Table 13

*Responses to Third Open-Ended Question by Theme*

*To make inclusion work effectively, what are two absolute essentials?*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
<b>Funding/Resources</b>  “Better paid special needs professionals (aids as well as collaborative teachers)” “More funding” “Small class size” “Smaller case load size for special education teachers”	61
<b>Professional Development</b>  “Better trained regular education teachers as far as inclusion” “Support to meet the demands of IEP for regular ed teachers” “The teacher and the aide should be adequately trained to deal with specific disabilities”	58
<b>Positive Attitudes Toward Inclusion</b>  “Strong teacher attitudes that the process can work” “Buy in from teachers and administrators” “Teachers must have an open mind and understand that everyone can learn” “Teacher acceptance of a disabled child in his/her classroom and willingness to do whatever it takes to help all children”	27



<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
<b>Collaboration</b>	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Teamwork between the inclusion teacher and regular ed teacher”</li> <li>“Cooperation and communication among the two teachers in what is best for the student”</li> <li>“Great regular education teachers and great special education teachers who work collaboratively for all students”</li> </ul>	
<b>Administrative Support</b>	13
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Supportive administration”</li> <li>“Holding teachers accountable”</li> <li>“Effective leadership”</li> </ul>	
<b>Effective Teachers</b>	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Excellent teachers who are well trained with instructional strategies”</li> <li>“Qualified teachers”</li> <li>“Effective teacher”</li> </ul>	
<b>Students with Mild Disabilities</b>	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The student has the ability to take in and retain information at some level and is not a physical threat to other students”</li> <li>“Include only students with learning disabilities not behavior issues”</li> </ul>	
<b>Effective Program Management</b>	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Pair both the regular and special ed teacher very carefully”</li> <li>“A well-thought out plan to ensure all needs are met for ALL students”</li> <li>“Placement on ability level”</li> </ul>	
<b>Knowledge of the Special Education Process</b>	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Knowledge of special ed laws”</li> <li>“Knowledge of the IEP by all staff involved”</li> <li>“IEPs that are workable”</li> </ul>	
<b>High Expectations for All Students</b>	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Knowing what the students are capable of”</li> <li>“Have expectations for all students”</li> <li>“Meet students at their level”</li> </ul>	

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>
<b>Parent Support</b>	<b>2</b>
“Supportive parents who all work together”	
<b>Nothing Would Make Inclusion Effective</b>	<b>1</b>

In analyzing the data collected for this study through the PAITE survey instrument, one can conclude that the results were in line with previous research studies and literature in the area of inclusion and special education. Results showed that Alabama school administrators have a mix of positive and negative attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education setting. Alabama school administrators reported several barriers to effectively leading inclusion programs, which included teacher training, resources, and teacher workload. The following chapter will present a discussion of the results and implications of the study results.

## CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

School administrators are responsible for leading, managing, and implementing programs for all students including students with disabilities (Sage & Burrello, 1994). Special education programs are regulated by legislation in terms of providing a least restrictive educational environment for students with special needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). An educational administrator's understanding of least restrictive environment could influence their decisions in developing special education programs in their school buildings. A school administrator could potentially interpret special education legislation in regards to the least restrictive environment based on their attitude about including students with disabilities in the regular education setting. A change in the mindset of educational professionals is dependent on the positive attitudes of the key stakeholders, school administrators (Baily, 2004; Praisner, 2003).

Research has shown a relationship between school administrator professional characteristics such as having a special education degree or qualification and their attitudes toward the placement of special education students in inclusion settings. Other professional characteristics such as years of administrative experience and teaching experience have been shown to relate to attitudes toward inclusion (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003; Sharma et al., 2008). In order to understand the attitudes of school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion, researchers have determined factors that relate to the reported attitudes of school administrators.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into Alabama secondary school administrator attitudes toward including students with disabilities in the regular education setting

through a quantitative survey research study. Alabama school administrator attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting directly impacts the types of programs and opportunities they establish for students with disabilities. The focus of this study was to answer the following research questions:

1. What factors relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion programs?
2. What is the relationship between the professional background variables of school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion?
3. What are perceived barriers to effectively leading inclusion programs for students with disabilities?

Chapter five presents a summary of this study. Problems of the study are reviewed as well. This chapter includes a discussion of conclusions drawn from the data presented in chapter four. Also included are implications and recommendations for further research will conclude this chapter.

### **Review of Study Participants and Methodology**

The study participants included one hundred and twenty-two Alabama secondary assistant principals and principals. Approximately 25.4% of the participants were middle school or junior high school assistant principals or principals (n = 31); 59.8% of the participants were high school assistant principals or principals (n = 73); 10.7% of the participants were assistant principals and principals of pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade schools, kindergarten through twelfth grade schools, sixth grade through twelfth grade schools, or seventh grade through twelfth grade schools (n = 13), 1.6% of the participants were career technical school assistant principals or principals (n = 2), and 2.5% of the participants were alternative school assistant

principals or principals (n = 3). In regards to school administrator experience, approximately 23% of the participants had between one and three years of school administration experience (n = 27), 27.4% had between four and seven years of school administrative experience (n = 32), 23% of the participants had between eight and eleven years of school administrative experience (n = 27), and 26.4% had twelve or more years of administrative experience (n = 31). Participants of the study were Alabama secondary school administrators during the 2015–2016 school year.

A correlational research design was implemented for this study. A survey developed by Bailey (2004) entitled the Principals' Attitude toward Inclusive Education (PAITE) was utilized for the study. The PAITE survey items were input into the electronic survey system Qualtrics. The electronic survey link was sent to all Alabama secondary school administrators via electronic mail. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data in order to answer the research questions of the study. The data for the study was analyzed by using the Pearson correlation coefficient, one-way ANOVA, means, and standard deviations.

To answer the first research question, the Pearson correlation between variables was used. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to show a presence or absence of a relationship between variables of the study. Through this analysis, it was determined which factors relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion programs. In order to answer the second research question of the study, the Pearson correlation coefficient and one-way ANOVA was used to analyze the data. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to demonstrate a presence or absence of a relationship between a school administrator's age, years of teaching experience, years as a school administrator, and student enrollment with the mean attitude score. A one-way ANOVA was utilized to determine the presence or absence of a relationship between a school administrator's mean attitude score and gender, urbanicity of the school, school level,

and special education qualification. The third research question was answered through the examination of the open-ended survey items. Several themes emerged by analyzing the open-ended response survey items. The succeeding section will present the major findings of the data analysis for this study.

### **Implications and Discussion**

Results show that Alabama school administrators have a neutral or undecided attitude toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Praisner, (2003) found that the largest percent of school administrators at the elementary level included in her study sample were uncertain about inclusion. Sharma and Chow (2008) found that school administrators have a slightly negative attitude toward inclusion. In this study, participants were asked to report on their overall feelings of inclusion by rating their feelings as, (1) strongly opposed, (2) opposed, (3) supportive, or (4) strongly supportive. Figure 1 shown previously displays the reported responses of the study participants.

### **Factors Related to School Administrator Attitudes toward Inclusion**

The data revealed expected results for research question one, what factors relate to the attitudes of school administrators toward inclusion programs. The mean and standard deviations for the survey items included in the PAITE instrument were utilized to answer research question one. Factors that relate to the attitudes of school administrator attitudes toward inclusion programs are teacher workload and management, inclusion benefits, level of disability, professional training, resources, and placement options. These factors were investigated as factors that could relate to school administrator attitudes in previous studies (Baily, 2004; Praisner, 2003, Sharma & Chow, 2008). Data shows that the most significant positive relationship was between Alabama school administrator attitudes toward inclusion and inclusion

benefits ( $r = .553$ ). Level of disability and placement were equally related to the attitudes Alabama school administrators ( $r = .399$ ). Interestingly, teacher workload and management ( $r = .273$ ), resources ( $r = .158$ ), and professional development ( $r = .069$ ) had the least significant relationship to Alabama school administrator attitudes toward inclusion.

These findings are interesting in that school administrators are in agreement that students with and without disabilities benefit socially from inclusion practices. Surprisingly, teacher workload and management had one of the least significant relationships. Do school administrators not view teacher workload as a disadvantage to inclusive programs because improvements have been made with co-teaching practices? Resources and professional development also had no significant relationship to Alabama school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. This view may stem from the fact that special education funds are highly regulated by the federal government. School administrators may view resources and professional development as appropriate for leading a successful inclusion program.

In discussing factors that influence school administrator attitudes toward inclusion, it is helpful to review the mean scores of individual survey items. Alabama school administrators responded positively to the survey item about students with disabilities and the social benefits for these students. The mean score for that survey item was  $M = 4.22$ . In a previous research study, Sharma and Chow (2008) reported  $M = 3.81$  for the same survey item about social benefits to students with disabilities being including in the general education setting. Another study conducted by the author of the survey instrument found school administrators agreed ( $M = 4.03$ ) that special needs students benefit socially from inclusion (Bailey, 2004). Given the mean analyzed for this study and for the previous studies, the results are similar. The study participants of the previous studies conducted by Sharma and Chow (2008), Bailey (2004) and



the current study reported nearly agreeable attitudes, and agreeable attitudes in regard to the social benefits of students with disabilities being included in regular education classes.

School administrators also responded most positively to the survey item about students who cannot read normal size print. The mean score for this survey item was  $M = 4.72$ . Sharma and Chow (2008) reported  $M = 3.31$  and Bailey (2004) reported  $M = 4.24$  for the same survey item that was used in their study. School administrators also responded positively to a survey item about including students with mild disabilities in the regular education classroom. On the survey item pertaining to mild disabilities the mean score was  $M = 4.20$ . In the study conducted by Sharma and Chow (2008) study participants reported  $M = 3.77$ . The study conducted by Bailey (2004) showed a mean score of  $M = 4.16$ . Again the current study results and the results of the previous studies are similar in the view of including students with mild disabilities in the general education setting, they are agreeable ( $M = 4.20$ ;  $M = 4.16$ ), and nearly agreeable ( $M = 3.77$ ) to this idea.

Three items on the PAITE had the lowest mean scores. The survey item pertaining to sufficient funding for inclusion programs elicited a mean score of  $M = 1.74$ . The mean score  $M = 1.74$  indicates that school administrators strongly disagree that there are sufficient funds to effectively run inclusion programs for students with disabilities. In the study conducted by Sharma and Chow (2008) the mean score for the same survey item was  $M = 1.92$ . Bailey (2004) reported a mean score of  $M = 1.53$ . Again, the results of the current study and the previous study are similar. Both groups of study participants report disagreeable attitudes toward the idea that there is sufficient funding to support effective inclusion programs.

The next lowest mean score for a survey item was for the survey item about continually aggressive students. This survey item was calculated with a mean score of  $M = 2.13$ , which

indicates that the study participants disagree with the inclusion of aggressive students in the general education classroom setting. Sharma and Chow (2008) did not report this survey item as having a low mean score. Sharma and Chow's (2008) study was conducted in Hong Kong. The fact that Hong Kong school administrators did not report a low mean score for the survey item about aggressive students may indicate a low prevalence of aggressive special education students in Hong Kong schools. However, Bailey (2004) did report this survey item as having a low mean score ( $M = 1.98$ ). The current study and Bailey's (2004) study rank study participant scores on this survey item reflected a large proportion of disagreement.

The third lowest mean score was a survey item about sufficient resources for inclusion, wherein the study participants report a mean score of  $M = 2.21$ . This indicates study participants disagree that there is sufficient resources for inclusion programs. Bailey (2004) reported a mean score of  $M = 1.53$  for this survey item. Sharma and Chow (2008) report a mean score of  $M = 1.91$  for this survey item. Both the current study participants and the previous studies participants report disagreeable attitudes toward the idea that schools have sufficient resources to support inclusion.

### **Professional Background Variables and School Administrator Attitudes toward Inclusion**

The second research question focused on the presence or absence of a relationship between professional background variables and school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. The professional background variables analyzed for this study were years of teaching experience, years of school administrative experience, special education qualifications, gender, age, type of school, student enrollment, and school level. A Pearson correlation was used to determine a relationship or lack of a relationship between school administrator attitudes and age, years of teaching experience, years of school administrative experience, and student enrollment. A one-

way ANOVA was used to determine a relationship or lack of relationship between school administrator attitudes toward inclusion and gender, urbanicity, school level, and special education qualification.

This study found that years of teaching experience ( $r = -.02$ ) and years of school administrator experience ( $r = -.18$ ) had no significant relationship to school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. Sharma and Chow (2008) found similar results in their study. They concluded that years of teaching experience ( $r = -0.21$ ) and years of school administrator experience ( $r = -.01$ ) had no significant relationship to school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. Praisner (2004) found no significant relationship between school administrator attitudes toward inclusion and years of experience in regular education, special education, or elementary administration. Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) also found no significant relationship between positive or negative attitudes toward inclusion and the number of years in school administrator or special education teaching experience.

Student enrollment was another professional background variable that was studied. The results showed student enrollment ( $r = .21$ ) and school administrator attitudes toward inclusion were weakly positively related. Interestingly, Sharma and Chow (2008) found that student enrollment ( $r = -.21$ ) are weakly negatively related. Sharma and Chow (2008) report that school administrators with lower student enrollment had more positive attitudes toward inclusion than did school administrators with higher student enrollment. Sharma and Chow (2008) suggest this might be the case because smaller student populations may be easier to manage than larger school populations.

Gender, urbanicity, school level, and special education were professional background variables analyzed by utilizing a one-way ANOVA. No significant differences were found

between a school administrator's gender and school administrator attitudes toward inclusion. Praisner (2003) found no significant differences between gender and their attitude toward inclusion. In analyzing data about school administrator attitudes toward inclusion and school level, the data shows no difference in the reported attitudes of school administrators and school level. There were differences in the reported attitudes of school administrators from urban, rural, and suburban schools.

The data shows that school administrators from suburban schools reported more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. This data is not surprising because literature shows school administrators in rural and urban schools have more challenges in leading effective inclusion programs than school administrators from suburban schools. Livingston, Reed, and Good (2001) utilized survey research and sampled school principals in rural South Georgia. They found school administrators from rural settings favored the traditional placement of the self-contained setting for students with severe disabilities. However, this study found school administrators from rural settings have more positive views of inclusion than did school administrators of urban and suburban school settings.

The final professional background variable analyzed for this study was special education qualification. The data for the professional background variable special education qualification shows a significant difference between the two groups of school administrators (school administrators with a special education qualification and school administrators without a special education qualification). Praisner (2003) found school administrators who are exposed to special education through professional development opportunities and special education credits reported more positive attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities. Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) found school administrators with less than seven years of teaching experience and a

special education qualification reported more positive attitudes than school administrators with more years of experience and no special education qualification.

Special education related tasks are part of a school administrators job responsibilities. However, studies have shown the majority of school administrators have never taken a single course in special education and had no exposure to children with disabilities in their formal training (Cline, 1981; Davis, 1980). It is important to note that the studies conducted by Cline and Davis were conducted over 30 years ago. School administrators who have earned degrees in the area of special education or who have extensive professional development in the area of special education have views that differ from school administrators with fewer education credentials in the area of special education. Several studies have shown positive correlations between special education credits (special education degree or professional development hours) and reported attitudes of school administrators (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003). Previous research studies have shown that a school administrator's lack of understanding of the special education process is a barrier to leading effective inclusive programs for students with disabilities.

### **Perceived Barriers to Effective Inclusive Programs**

Currently, research is limited on school administrator perceived barriers to leading effective inclusive education programs. In order to encourage positive change in inclusive educational programs for students with disabilities, one must first identify school administrators' perceived barriers to leading inclusive programs. Two open-ended questions included on the PAITE survey instrument elicited responses about school administrator perceived barriers to leading inclusive programs. The themes that emerged from the open-ended response survey items were:

- Lack of Funding/Resources
- Lack of Effective Professional Development
- Lack of Effective Teachers
- Lack of Collaboration (Between Teachers and School Administrators)
- In Appropriate Placement of Students in the General Education Classroom Based on Disability Type
- Not having High Expectations for All Students
- Widening Achievement Gap
- Lack of Parent Support
- Lack of Effective Program Management/Administrative Support
- Lack of Knowledge of the Special Education Process

A previous study reported school administrators delegated special education responsibilities to others because they did not understand the process of inclusion (Powell & Hyle, 1997). Funding and the abilities of school systems to provide educational staff with effective professional development are barriers in many areas of education. However, funding in the area of special education is not only used for professional development, technology, and supplies but also for the ability of a school system to hire paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals provide support to a student with a more severe disability in the general education classroom setting. The lack of appropriate support in the general education classroom may be a reason school administrators report that inclusion should only be used for students with mild disabilities.

Praisner (2003) found school administrators selected least restrictive placements in regular education classes for students with speech and language impairments, physical disabilities, other health disabilities, specific learning disabilities, deaf/hearing impairments, and

blind/visual impairments. School administrators in her study selected more restrictive environments outside of the regular education classroom for students with serious emotional disabilities and autism. Dyal and Flynt (1999) found Alabama school administrators support inclusion programs for students with mild disabilities and they support self-contained special education programs for students with moderate, severe, and profound disabilities. The current study participants reported they disagree with students with severe disabilities being included in the general education classroom as well.

The type of disability has been shown to effect a school administrators view of including a student with a disability in the general education classroom setting. Previous studies have shown school administrators believe that including students with disabilities benefits general education students and students with disabilities in the area of social skills (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003; Sharma & Chow, 2008). However, it has been argued including students with disabilities in the general education setting puts general education students at an academic disadvantage.

School administrators have reported they believe inclusion negatively effects general education students. Several court cases have been presented in which special education students were disruptive and aggressive in the general education setting (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). School administrators' experience with aggressive and disruptive special education students could contribute to a belief that inclusion is not the appropriate setting for special education students. The current study participants reported that disruptions in the classroom and aggressive students who are included in the regular education classroom are barriers to effective inclusion programs. The achievement levels of students with disabilities who are included in the general education classroom was also reported by study participants as a barrier to inclusion.

Study participants reported the gap in achievement level of some students with disabilities as a barrier to effective inclusion programs. Study participants reported that they neither agree nor disagree ( $M = 3.54$ ) that special needs students whose achievement levels in basic skills are significantly lower than their same age peers should not be included in regular classrooms. However, students with and without disabilities are required to show progress on state mandated assessments. Students with disabilities benefit academically from the inclusive educational setting in that they are taught by highly qualified content area general education teachers. Several studies have reported that the degree of the students' disability does affect the academic benefits of the inclusion educational setting. In many cases the level of disabilities is not as much a barrier to inclusion as in the collaboration between highly qualified educational professionals. Educational professionals could work collaboratively to close the achievement gap for students with special needs. Study participants view a lack of collaboration between educational professionals as a barrier to leading inclusive programs.

General education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals work as a team to provide educational services to students with various degrees of disabilities. Recruiting and hiring professionals in the fields of general education, special education, and paraprofessionals has been a challenge for educational administrators. Highly qualified teachers significantly increase student achievement (Billingsley, 2004). Selecting and keeping highly qualified special education teachers is difficult. According to DiPaola, Tschannen-Morgan, and Walther-Thomas (2004), as many as half of all new special educators leave the field within the first three years. One reason this occurs is because of complex job responsibilities and overwhelming paperwork requirements. General education teachers also have complex job responsibilities and paperwork requirements.



Teacher workload and classroom management can be viewed by school administrators as a challenge to including students with disabilities in the general education setting. However, school administrators who understand students with disabilities and the inclusive learning environment work with teams of education professionals to provide appropriate support for students with disabilities and are able to create a balanced learning environment for students with and without disabilities (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004).

School administrators in charge of leading special education programs lead general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. These groups of educational professionals have varying degrees of training in the area of special education. A school administrator's view of the preparedness of these groups of educational professionals could contribute to positive or negative attitudes toward the inclusion of special education students as well. Several studies included an examination of school administrator special education credentials and their relationship to their reported attitudes. These studies also examine a school administrator's view of teacher and paraprofessional training in the area of special education (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003; Sharma et al., 2008).

School administrators reported several perceived barriers to leading effective inclusive programs, for students with disabilities. Regardless of the perceived barriers to leading inclusive programs one research believes that the effectiveness of inclusion depends on the characteristics and needs of specific students and on the quality of the program (Zigmond, 2003). A quality inclusive program depends on many factors. A school administrator's attitude toward inclusion is one factor that influences the quality of an inclusive educational program for students with disabilities.

## **Conclusions**

Study participants report an overall neutral/undecided attitude toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom setting. Factors that were shown to contribute to study participants view of inclusion were teacher workload and management, inclusion benefits, level of disability, professional development, resources, and placement. Professional and background characteristics that contributed to the overall reported attitudes of study participants were age, gender, teaching experience, school administrator experience, student enrollment, school level, urbanicity, and having a special education qualification. Finally, several barriers to leading effective inclusive educational programs emerged. Based on the results of this study, there are suggestions for further studies in order to more fully understand the attitudes of school administrator attitudes toward inclusive educational programs. Suggestions for further studies and recommendations on utilizing the study results in practice will be detailed in the following sections.

## **Implications for Practice**

Principal preparation programs fall short of providing principals with the link between educational leadership and special education. Effective principal preparation programs should incorporate course work and training to support principals in practicing ethically, considering individual needs, maintaining equity under the law, effectively programming, and establishing productive partnerships (Crockett, 2002). By including those components, principals will be better prepared to handle ethical dilemmas and to provide the most appropriate and beneficial educational programs for students with disabilities. Training and preparation of principals contributes to a principal's attitude in working with students with disabilities. Study results have shown school administrators report more positive attitudes toward inclusion when they have had

exposure to special education concepts through professional development and/or a special education credits (Praisner, 2003). The current study results have also shown that more positive attitudes are reported by school administrators who have a special education qualification or have had exposure to special education concepts through professional development. Given these results, educational leadership programs would benefit by requiring more special education credits in their programs.

In 1996, Dyal and Flynt conducted a study of Alabama school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion. Their study revealed that Alabama school administrators who participated in the study preferred inclusive schools, however they did not support full inclusion. The participants of the study seemed resistant to change and seemed more comfortable with pullout programs for students with disabilities (Dyal & Flynt, 1996). The results of the current study showed that study participants had more positive attitudes toward inclusion in certain areas. Although the overall attitude of inclusion was neutral/undecided, study participants reported positive aspects of inclusion. They reported that students with and without disabilities benefit from the social aspects of inclusion. Study participants suggested that students with mild disabilities benefited from inclusion as well.

The majority of the current study participants and the study conducted by Dyal and Flynt (1996) were from rural school settings. Research has shown school administrators of rural schools have more challenges than school administrators in other types of schools. Interestingly, study participants of rural schools reported more positive attitudes than did school administrators in other settings. More information could be elicited from Alabama rural schools in the area of special education. This information could provide a plan of action for other school settings and influence attitudinal changes in other school settings.

Previous research has focused on elementary level school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion. This study focused on secondary level school administrators and their attitudes toward inclusion. Study results showed study participants were concerned about the achievement gap and special education students who are included in the general education classroom. While the achievement gap is much smaller at the elementary level, it becomes expansive at the secondary level. The concern of the study participants and the achievement gap is a legitimate concern that may be shared by other educational professionals in the area of special education. The study results could be used as a discussion point for encouraging educational professionals to create a solution for this problem.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The placement of students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment has been shown to relate to school administrators knowledge of special education concepts. The current study and previous studies found that a school administrator who has knowledge of the special education process is more likely to place a special education student in a more inclusive environment (Praisner, 2003). Given this information, further research is needed to analyze the effectiveness of school leadership graduate programs in relation to special education. Research is also needed to analyze the effectiveness of professional development in the area of special education for school leaders. Previous research has shown that educational programs for school leaders have been weak in training school leaders to handle issues with special education (Crockett, 2002). Newer studies might show improvements in graduate programs ability to preparing school leaders to deal with special education issues including closing the achievement gap for students with disabilities.

The achievement levels of some students with disabilities are significantly lower than their grade placement. This achievement gap was reported by school administrators as a barrier to leading effective inclusive educational programs for students with disabilities. Further research is needed in order to close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their regular education peers. The achievement gap could be a direct result of a special education student's placement in the elementary level. Further research is needed to study the effects of collaborative efforts of elementary and secondary level school administrators in closing the achievement gap. This study exposed several other factors that contribute to a school administrator's attitude toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. These factors may also contribute to the achievement gap. The factors include teacher workload and management, level of disability, professional development, resources, and placement.

Collaboration between regular education teachers, special education teachers, and school administrators was reported by the current study participants as essential to effective inclusion programs for students with disabilities. Engaging educational professionals in a collaborative school culture could ease the workload of regular education teachers, special education teachers, and school administrators in regards to effectively educating students with disabilities. Research is needed to analyze collaborative cultures in relation to special education inclusion programs. As with many educational processes, collaboration requires resources.

The lack of resources, was listed by educational school administrators as a barrier to leading effective inclusion programs for students with disabilities (Dyal & Flynt, 1996; Praisner, 2003). Funding and resources support special education students in hiring high qualified regular education teacher, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals. Funding is used to purchase educational supplies including assistive technology to support special education

students in the regular education classroom. Currently, school systems follow federal guidelines and receive federal funds based on the number of special education students they serve. Further studies are needed to investigate the efficiency that school systems utilize these funds to support special education programs. Other studies are needed to investigate the success of school systems in obtaining and utilizing grant opportunities to support special education programs.

Equity in school funding is a major topic in education today. Research has focused on school funding in high poverty school districts verses school funding in the more affluent school districts. In relationship to the current study school funding in schools in rural, urban, and suburban school setting could be a topic for future research studies. Many schools in Alabama are classified as rural schools. Interesting, the current study shows that school administrators from rural schools report more positive attitudes toward including students with disabilities. Further research is needed to investigate this phenomenon.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The segregation of special education students in restrictive educational settings has sparked the interest of advocacy groups, parents, educators, and educational policy makers. Understanding the attitudes of Alabama educational administrators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting is the first step to providing all special education students in Alabama with the most beneficial and appropriate educational programs. This study revealed that teacher workload and management, inclusion benefits, level of disability, professional development, resources, and placement relate to school administrator reported attitudes toward inclusion. Professional background characteristics and demographics have also been shown to relate to the reported attitudes of school administrators. Identifying the factors and professional characteristics that relate to school administrators attitudes could give

educational policy makers and educational professionals ideas for creating educational policy and programs for special education students. As a special educator of 14 years, I have seen first hand the benefits of inclusion. This study has shown that school administrators believe inclusion has social benefits for both special education students and regular education students. In many cases, given the appropriate educational placement, special education students will show improvement in academic areas as well.

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APPENDIX A

Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

**Default Question Block****INFORMATION LETTER  
For a Research Study entitled**

*“Secondary Educational Administrator Attitudes toward Educating Students with Disabilities in the Inclusion Setting”*

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine the attitudes of secondary school administrators toward the inclusion of students with disabilities and to determine barriers to leading effective inclusion programs for students with disabilities. The study is being conducted by Kimberly Moates, under the direction of Dr. Lisa Kensler, Associate Professor in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology. You are invited to participate because you are a school principal or assistant principal in an Alabama public secondary school and are 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to answer on-line survey questions. The survey includes 43 questions. Your total commitment will be approximately 20 minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are that the topic of educating students with disabilities is a sensitive subject. This could elicit discomfort. Also the nature of a principal and assistant principal’s job is demanding which leaves little time to complete a survey. Completing a survey could cause minor discomfort to some participants. To minimize these risks, we will keep the survey short and the manner in which the survey questions are written reduces the discomfort of answering questions about a sensitive subject.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect to gain some insight into your school’s inclusion practices. We/I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described. Benefits to others may include being made aware of inclusion practices of Alabama public secondary schools.

Will you receive compensation for participating? You will not receive any compensation for your participating in this study.

Are there any costs? If you decide to participate in this study, there are no costs to you.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by closing your browser window. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Once you’ve submitted anonymous data, it cannot be withdrawn since it will be unidentifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Education Foundations, Leadership, and Technology.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by keeping the data password protected on Dr. Lisa Kensler’s computer. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, published in a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional meeting.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Kimberly Moates at (706) 676-7273 or Dr. Lisa Kensler at (334) 844-4460.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966



or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW. YOU MAY PRINT A COPY OF THIS LETTER TO KEEP.

Kim Moates 01/05/2015  
Investigator Date

Co-Investigator Date  
The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from February 25, 2015 to February 25, 2018. Protocol #15-042 EX 1502

IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY, PLEASE CONTINUE BY CLICKING THE NEXT BUTTON.

When considering the practice of inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom), to what extent do you agree with the statements below? Please complete each item by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Regular teachers are not trained adequately to cope with students with disabilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students with physical disabilities (crutches/wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Including students with special needs creates few additional problems for teachers' class management.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students who cannot read normal size print should not be included in regular classrooms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Because special schools are better resourced for special needs students, these students should stay in special schools.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students who are continually aggressive towards their fellow students should not be included in regular classrooms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**When considering the practice of inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom), to what extent do you agree with the statements below? Please complete each item by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special needs students belong in special schools where all their needs can be met.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher aides are trained adequately to cope with students with special needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regular students will be disadvantaged by having special needs children in their classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students who are continually aggressive towards school staff should not be included in regular classrooms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**When considering the practice of inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom), to what extent do you agree with the statements below? Please complete each item by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Special needs students whose achievement levels in basic skills are significantly lower than their same age peers should not be included in regular classrooms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication devices/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regular school principals are trained adequately to cope with students with disabilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Including students with special needs is unfair to regular teachers who already have a heavy work load.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Schools have sufficient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5/13/2016

Qualtrics Survey Software

Schools have sufficient teaching resources to cope with inclusion.

Students with severe disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.

Students with moderate disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.

**When considering the practice of inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom), to what extent do you agree with the statements below? Please complete each item by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher's time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students with severe speech difficulties should not be included in regular classrooms.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is sufficient funding to permit effective inclusion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**To assist in the analysis of the responses, please provide a little information about your background and your school.**

**What is your school administrative position?**

Principal

Assistant Principal

Other

**What type of school do you lead?**

Middle School/Junior High School

High School

Other

**How would you classify your school?**

Urban

Rural

Suburban

**What is your age?**

**Gender**

Male

Female

**Teaching experience (excluding administrative experience)**

**Completed years as a school administrator**

**What is your student enrollment?**

**Do you have a special education qualification, e.g. Undergraduate Degree, Masters Degree?**

Yes

No

**If you were asked to categorize your feelings about inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom), which of the following four positions would you choose?**

Strongly Opposed



Opposed



Supportive



Strongly Supportive



**In your opinion, what is the strongest argument for having inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom)?**

**In your opinion, what is the greatest disadvantage of inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom)?**

**To make inclusion (education students with disabilities in the regular education classroom) work effectively, what are two absolute essentials?**

## APPENDIX B

### Cover Letter to Principals and Assistant Principals

**Secondary Educational Administrator Attitudes Toward Educating Students with Disabilities in Inclusion Settings Study**

**Be part of an important educational leadership research study.**

**Are you a principal or assistant principal in an Alabama middle school, junior high school, or high school?**

If you answered *YES*, then you are eligible to participate in this study.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the relationships between school administrator professional characteristics and attitudes toward including secondary students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. Another purpose of this research study is to determine the perceived barriers toward educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. **The survey takes only 20 minutes.**

Click the following link to participate in this study.

**[https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_eFpxf8mPrjBf8ah](https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eFpxf8mPrjBf8ah)**

**PRINCIPALS PLEASE FORWARD THIS E-MAIL TO YOUR ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS.**

**IF YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT REQUIRES PRE-APPROVAL AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDIES, PLEASE RESPOND TO THIS EMAIL WITH THE INFORMATION THAT I NEED TO REQUEST PERMISSION FROM THE DISTRICT.**

This study is being conducted by Kim Moates, Auburn University graduate student in the department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology.

**If you have questions about this study**, please contact Kimberly Moates at (706) 676-7273 or Dr. Lisa Kensler at (334) 844-3020.