

12-2011

## An examination of the preparation, experiences, and attitudes of effective school leaders of students with disabilities: Voices from the field

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/2826705>

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PREPARATION, EXPERIENCES, AND ATTITUDES  
OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:  
VOICES FROM THE FIELD

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Executive Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership**

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December 2011**

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## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

**Patricia Ann Schultz**

entitled

**An Examination of the Preparation, Experiences, and Attitudes of  
Effective School Leaders of Students with Disabilities: Voices from the  
Field**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership**

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**December 2011**

## ABSTRACT

### **An Examination of the Preparation, Experiences, and Attitudes of Effective School Leaders of Students with Disabilities: Voices from the Field**

by

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Research reflecting the preparation, experiences, and attitudes of effective school leaders of students with disabilities is scarce despite the fervent federal requirements changing special education over the past four decades. Although there is extensive literature on perspectives and contexts of disability, the legislative journey toward special education, inclusion and educational leadership, the expanding role of the principalship, principal attitudes on inclusion, and preparing educational leaders for inclusive education, a review of the related literature revealed an absence of the skill-set and disposition needed by school leaders who are improving academic achievement for students with disabilities.

This qualitative dissertation study documents and examines the preparation, experiences, and attitudes of two elementary school principals that have demonstrated success at improving student achievement among their special education population. The questions guiding this study are: (1) In what way does a school leader's leadership preparation program impact the education of students with disabilities? (2) In what way does a school leader's leadership experience impact the education of students with

disabilities? (3) In what ways do a school leader's attitudes and perceptions impact the education of students with disabilities?

Using a qualitative research methodology and narrative inquiry research methods, this study aims to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of such leaders. In-depth interviews, field notes, site observations, and reflexive journaling were used to illustrate and examine the dispositions of the school leaders.

This study is important because it will provide insight to those concerned about what is essential to make an education for students with disabilities not only an accessible one, but a quality one. It will also guide educational leadership programs in developing curricula for future school leaders as they face the challenges of implementing state and federal policy. It also adds to the growing literature in the fields of educational leadership and special education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is not until the culmination of a major venture that one stops to reflect upon that which has taken place. Only those who have followed similar paths can truly appreciate the emotions that surface when one begins to recognize all those individuals who have been instrumental to the accomplishment. Exceptional people have left their imprint on these pages as well as my life, and I am indebted to all of them. The following individuals are acknowledged with heartfelt gratitude:

My high school sweetheart, husband, partner, and best friend, Vernon, for your enduring love, patience, understanding, and support in the good times and the not so good times.

My unborn son for all the love taps on my tummy encouraging me to finish before your birth. I cannot wait to meet you in February and spend the rest of my life with you.

My parents, Richard and Frances Jankowski, for the constant tough love and assistance you have shown me during this process, which helped me persevere. You raised me to believe—good, better, best...never let it rest, until your good is your better and your better is your best!

My dissertation chair, Dr. Sonya Douglass Horsford, for her unconditional support, keen eye for detail, and unwavering encouragement.

Editor extraordinaire, Valerie Horseman, for her brilliant and inspiring editing.

The other members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Teresa Jordan, Dr. James Hager, and Dr. Linda Quinn, for your time, feedback, and valuable words of wisdom.

My professors and colleagues in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

The school leaders and staff members at the two schools I interviewed for my study.

My students, families, and staff at Helen J. Stewart Special School for teaching me more than I taught you.

Lastly, I would like to thank those who kept me in their prayers and believed in me.

This is for you.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“That’s so retarded!” “You’re a retard!” While these phrases may be commonly heard in schools, at malls, on the athletic field, and throughout U.S. popular culture, to individuals and family members of individuals with disabilities, they reflect the discrimination and hostility this population has experienced historically in all aspects of American life. In an effort to retire this offensive term, on October 5, 2010, President Barack Obama signed Rosa’s Law (S. 2781), replacing the term ‘mental retardation’ in Federal law with ‘intellectual disability’ in federal health, education, labor law, and policy. It replicates the law adopted in the state of Maryland when the family of Rosa Marcellino, a nine-year-old girl with Down syndrome, worked with their state representative to pass the legislation in the General Assembly and will likely affect how Americans refer to the millions of adults and children diagnosed with intellectual disabilities.

Compared with other countries, the U.S. has established itself as a leader in passing legislation that improves educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities. For example, the Republic of China did not pass its Persons with Disabilities Education Act until 1994, almost two decades after the U.S. passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (“Country Profile on Disability”, 2002) . And while the U.S. federal government should be applauded for its leadership in advancing educational access and opportunity to individuals with disabilities, there remains a vast disconnect between the development of such policies and their implementation (Fowler, 2009; Smith & Colon, 1998; Goor et al., 1997; Nevin, 1979; O’Reilly & Squires, 1985;).

A review of the literature highlights the many challenges facing school leaders tasked with meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities (Smith & Colon, 1998). Swift changes in policy, and in turn practice, have left school leaders behind when it comes to implementing federal requirements and meeting the unique, and sometimes significant, individual needs of the students now attending school (Gage, 1979; Smith & Colon, 1998). Most recent legislation has resulted in expanded roles and increased accountability expectations for school leaders. The literature reveals that our school leaders are ill-prepared to successfully provide quality instruction and management to special education programs (Lietz & Kaiser, 1979; Elliott & Riddle, 1992; Goor et al., 1997; Lashley, 2007; Low & Brigham, 2000). The focus on procedural compliance “often overshadowed efforts to provide quality” instruction (Lashley, 2007).

Nationwide, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), approximately 50,000,000 children attend school. Of this number, approximately 14% are diagnosed with disabilities, meaning one in every seven students in a classroom has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This demonstrates a significant shift in the role of special education in the United States, particularly since forty years ago, students with handicapping conditions did not have the right to the same education as their non-disabled peers. A journey into history creates a backdrop for the shaping of public perceptions and attitudes toward persons with disabilities.

### Background

In the 1951 movie *Christmas Carol*, the saintly Tiny Tim hobbled on crutches while his innocent, contagious personality blessed and brought tears to everyone. In the 1960s movie *Miracle Worker*, Helen Keller shocked the world with her intelligence in spite of

being deaf, blind, and mute. The scoundrel Captain Hook, who had a hook for a hand, attempted to bring demise to a magical boy in the 1953 movie *Peter Pan*. Darth Vader, with his mechanical breathing apparatus, was the villainous enforcer and the supreme commander of the brutal Galactic Empire in the 1977 movie *Star Wars*. Without a doubt, the media has played a role in shaping public perceptions of individuals with disabling conditions.

Over the years in U.S. media, images of Tiny Tim, Helen Keller, or even that of a poster child are a surefire way to tug at our heartstrings, while the portrayal of individuals with physical anomalies, such as Captain Hook and Darth Vader, are likely to instill mystery and fear. Even as film makers have depicted individuals with disabilities at the extremes of stereotypes: evil adversaries (Captain Hook, Darth Vader) or charity cases (Tiny Tim, Helen Keller), one can argue more generally that the media has historically perpetrated negative images and portrayals of individuals with disabilities, which has normalized the discrimination of and disregard for this community.

The physical, anthropological, paleontological, sociocultural, and archeological records provide sufficient evidence that individuals with disabilities have long been part of the human social scene (Covey, 1998) and that perceptions toward individuals with disabilities have been neither consistently positive nor negative. Rather, some perceptions of individuals with disabilities have undergone multiple transformations that parallel cultural changes in Western thought, science, religion, and medicine, while others have not. According to Bredberg (1999) many overviews of disability history have been drawn almost entirely from secondary sources, virtually without exception, from the perspective of the non-disabled expert treating the disabled patient. The

literature marginalizes disabled people through the ages and places them into models of disabilities that include a religious, a medical, and a rights-based model (Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997).

As the media educated the public's perceptions of individuals with disabilities, they also indirectly informed the field of education. Educational leaders, as well as leadership preparation programs, have marginalized the need to educate this population until disability interest groups, litigation, legislation, and politicians rallied for and transformed U.S. perceptions from neglecting and pitying those with disabilities to a movement of integration and inclusion.

#### Statement of the Problem

While the rich history and evolution of special education law, policy, and practice serve as an important framework for the study of educational leadership and its implications for special education, there remains a paucity of research exploring the relationship between educational leadership, more specifically, school principal leadership, and the education of students with disabilities. As accountability demands from the federal government have increased, so too has the depth of knowledge required of administrators concerning the successful education of students with disabilities. University-based leadership preparation programs historically have provided school leaders with only a course or two in special education law (Davis, 1980; Hirth & Valesky, 1990; Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994; Davidson & Gooden, 2001). Yet with minimal, if any, training, school leaders are forced to not only improve student achievement, but in many ways, reflect on their personal beliefs concerning the education of their students with special needs (Burrello, Schrup, & Barnett, 1992; Goor et al., 1997;



Praisner, 2003; Lowe & Brigham, 2000). As a result of this compliance approach, school leaders are not equipped with the instructional strategies necessary to ensure that students with disabilities are deemed proficient according to federally mandated high-stakes testing (Lashley, 2007). With the alarming statistic that one in seven students in an American classroom has a disability, it is critical that such programs effectively prepare school leaders, both instructionally and managerially, to meet the programmatic needs of students with disabilities.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research study is to document and examine the preparation, experiences, and attitudes of effective school leaders of students with disabilities. Using a qualitative research methodology (Glesne, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1981) and narrative inquiry research methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lyon & Laboskey, 2002), this study aims to capture the lived experiences and perspectives of such leaders in order to contribute to our understanding of how school leaders make meaning of such policies, as well as the populations they are designed to serve. These narratives and their voices may help inform our understanding of how the preparations, experiences, and attitudes of the school leader influence the education of students with disabilities, and in turn, the educational experience of all students.

### Context of the Study

The historical context of special education law, policy, and practice serves as an important framework for the study of educational leadership and its implications for special education. Over time, the public's perspective of disability has traversed from

complete neglect to objects of pity to a now federally-mandated movement for integration. These perspectives parallel the religious, medical, and rights-based models. Disability advocates, visionaries, politicians, and legislatures literally and figuratively opened the doors for individuals to ensure accessibility and equality in places of business and education. Federal legislation and policy have influenced individual and societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities, and, subsequently, the education of children with disabilities. While four decades of law and litigation have dictated educational solutions for schools, current trends are pointing toward a transformation of attitudes as well. This evolved perspective of disability has informed laws, policy, and practice as exemplified in Rosa's Law.

### Research Questions

In order to document and examine the preparation, experiences, and attitudes of effective school leaders of students with disabilities, the following questions will guide the study:

1. In what way does a school leader's leadership preparation program impact the education of students with disabilities?
2. In what way does a school leader's leadership experience impact the education of students with disabilities?
3. In what ways do a school leader's attitudes and perceptions impact the education of students with disabilities?

### Research Design and Methodology

To answer the aforementioned questions, I used a non-positivist, naturalistic inquiry approach using qualitative research (Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1981) and narrative

inquiry methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lyon & Laboskey, 2002) to examine the ways in which the leadership preparation, experience, attitudes, and perceptions of two elementary school principals in a large urban school district in the Intermountain West impacted the education of students with disabilities under their leadership. This study focused on schools with a record of significant improvement in the academic achievement of their special education population. Research participants were selected using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008) to better understand the leaders of schools associated with improving learning among their students with disabilities.

Data collection methods included interviews, observations, school artifacts, and the researcher's reflexive journal. One-on-one in-person interviews were conducted with two school principals, one assistant principal, two special education instructional facilitators, one special education teacher, and one school psychologist. These interviews were used to capture the site leader's attitudes, perceptions, and experiences in order to get a sense of how their leadership approaches and practices informed the education and academic achievement of their students with disabilities. Using narrative inquiry methods, the principals were asked to share their personal and professional experiences; these narratives were used to develop an analysis of each school leader's skills and perceptions as it relates to special education and students with disabilities.

According to Marshall & Rossman (1999), data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data. For an elegant, credible interpretation of the narratives, Marshall and Rossman's (1999) six phases of analytic procedures will be utilized. These include: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating

categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report. Each phase of analysis will bring the reams of collected data into manageable chunks, which is the essence of qualitative data analysis.

### Limitations and Delimitations

Due to time constraints, I selected to interview no more than seven participants from two schools for this study. Furthermore, there is no assumption that the data collected in this study can be generalized or expected to reflect the experiences of all principals of schools that serve students with disabilities. Rather, this exploratory study is designed to lay the groundwork for future research.

The narrative inquiry nature of this study poses additional limitations due to its reliance on participant reflection and selective memory. Marshall & Rossman (1999) caution that narratives may suffer from selective recall and filling in memory gaps through inference and reinterpretation of the past. Further, my standpoint as a principal at a special school that serves only students with significant disabilities presents the potentiality of bias, which is openly acknowledged in narrative inquiry since the role of the researcher includes telling stories of the research relationship to capture the whole story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, part of my analysis will require the utilization of my own standpoint in order to critically reexamine my own experiences and construct meaning from them based on the narratives and lived experiences of the study participants.

Though there are many potential limitations, this study may produce significant findings that can contribute to the research knowledge base in the area of school leaders

and how their leadership preparation, experience, attitudes, and perceptions inform the education of students with disabilities.

### Significance of the Study

In the past four decades, educating students with disabilities evolved from placement in institutions to placement in their local schools alongside their non-disabled peers, demonstrating a full continuum of options with full inclusion as an option. In this transformation of education, are principals alleviating or generating barriers?

Furthermore, do the skills, attitudes, and dispositions of the school leader inhibit or inspire the school staff to provide students with disabilities the same quality education being delivered to their non-disabled peers? It is crucial that principals' attitudes and dispositions toward providing a commensurate education to this population reflect the laws of special education to prevent loss of funding and possible litigation. Additionally, it is necessary to determine if school leaders are not only appropriately trained in special education law and its implementation, but also in the best instructional approaches to ensure student achievement is attained.

This study is intended to further the understanding of the skill-set that could be useful to principals as they implement inclusive programs on their campuses. It may also afford parents, disability interest groups, educators, special education directors, superintendents, and policy makers, insight into the essential components of an educational plan that reflects both accessibility and quality for students with disabilities. Results may assist stakeholders in determining whether or not they should support efforts to continue inclusion in its current form or find alternative methods for improving educating students with disabilities. Furthermore, this study may assist educational leadership programs and

professional development organizers in developing curricula that would be most beneficial to future school leaders as they face the challenges of implementing state and federal policy. The following definitions are provided to assist the readers with the content of this study.

### Definition of Terms

*Students with Disabilities:* Individuals with Disabilities Education Act defines a child with a disability as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment including deafness, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment including blindness, serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. An individual with a disability under Section 504 is identified as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as eating, walking or learning (OSEP, 2005b).

*Free Appropriate Public Education:* As defined by federal regulations, a Free Appropriate Public Education refers to “special education and related services that (a) are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; (b) meet the standards of the State Education Agency, including the requirements of this part; (c) include appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the state; and (d) are provided in conformity with an individualized education program (IEP) that meets the requirements under 300.320-300.324” (OSEP, 2010 p.61).

*Individualized Education Program:* An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is defined in federal regulations as “a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised...and that includes...a statement of the child’s present levels...a statement of measureable annual goals...a description of how the child’s progress toward meeting the annual goals...will be measured...a statement of the special education and related services...to be provided to the child...an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and...a statement of any individual appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the measure the academic achievement” (OSEP, 2010 p. 79).

*Special Education:* Federal regulations define special education as specially designed instruction provided at no cost to parents to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (OSEP, 2010 p. 145).

*Related Services:* Related Services is defined in federal regulations as “...transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. This term also includes school health services and school nurse services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training” (OSEP, 2010 p. 126).

*Least Restrictive Environment:* Least Restrictive Environment defines that (1) the child's placement be as close as possible to the child's home, and (2) the child is educated in the school he or she would attend if not disabled (IDEA Section 300.116).

*Mainstreaming:* Mainstreaming is not a legal term. The focus is on special education as a place children go to receive services. Often, students received their academic instruction in special classes and their time with nondisabled peers was spent in nonacademic activities such as lunch, recess, physical education, or art and music (Bateman, 2002).

*Inclusion:* Inclusion is not a legal term. Inclusion implies that students will be taught outside the regular education classroom only when all available methods have been tried and failed to meet their needs. If a student is pulled out of the general education classroom for instruction in another placement, the intent is for the pullout to be temporary and for the student to be reintegrated into the general education classroom as soon as possible (Bateman, 2002).

*Full inclusion:* Full inclusion is not a legal term. It implies that all children with disabilities are educated in the general education classroom, regardless of the nature or severity of their disabilities, for the entire school day.

*Continuum of Alternative Placements:* Continuum of alternative placements must be available to meet the needs of children with disabilities. They must include instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. Provisions for supplementary services must be provided in conjunction with regular class placement (34 C.F.R. 300.551).



*Adequate Yearly Progress:* The definition for making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or meeting AYP includes a set of indicators comprised of several elements: (1) proficiency level, (2) starting points, (3) increasing student expectations, (4) equal progress, (5) minimum “N”, (6) participation rates, (7) safe harbor, (8) additional academic indicator.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In order to dutifully examine the lived experiences and perspectives of school principals' preparation, experiences, and attitudes as they relate to improving academic achievement for students with disabilities, such discussion must be contextualized with historical and legal analyses. This chapter will begin with a macro view of disability across contexts. Next, I present the legislative journey toward special education, including major court cases promoting equality in education for students with disabilities. Then I provide a historical perspective of special education reform as it relates to inclusion and educational leadership. Finally, I introduce the body of literature surrounding the expanding role of the principalship, the principal's attitudes on inclusion, and how principals are being prepared for inclusive education.

#### Perspectives and Contexts of Disability

According to the National Service Inclusion Project (2004), a corporation for national and community service training and technical assistance provider, disabling conditions have always separated individuals from the mainstream experiences of culture and society. In the beginning of human existence, in hunter and gatherer cultures, those born with disabling conditions or those who acquired disabilities were killed or left to die because they would weaken the group and threaten its survival. This practice of infanticide was portrayed in the opening scene of Kubrick's 2007 movie *300* when a Spartan is observed visually inspecting a newborn for abnormalities. Once an abnormality or disability was identified, the baby was discarded. While infanticide of those born deformed was believed to be widely practiced throughout the ancient world,

Bredberg (1999) asserted that source material to confirm this practice is scant. According to Barnes (1997), the pursuit of physical and intellectual fitness was essential and there was little room for people with any flaw or imperfection.

### Disability in the Context of Religion

In the Middle Ages, the presence of a disability was deemed a punishment of sin or result from witchcraft. Similarly, the Greek culture linked impairment to sin, and the Jewish culture of the ancient world perceived such impairments as un-Godly and a consequence for wrongdoing (Barnes, 1997). In the Western Judeo-Christian society, the roots of understanding bodily difference have been grounded in the Bible (Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997). There are approximately 40 instances in which the term “cripple” is connected to sin (Barnes, 1997). In the religious model, labels for individuals with disabilities included: cripple, lame, dumb, deaf, mad, feeble, idiot, imbecile, and moron (Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997). In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, individuals with disabilities were confined to attics, basements, or institutions. They were considered pitiful people and unable to contribute to society, except to serve as objects of entertainment. For example, Browning’s 1932 horror flick *Freaks* depicts an entire cast of genuinely disabled people ridiculed in a circus. Individuals with disabilities collectively were assumed to be abnormal and feeble-minded, and many were forced to undergo sterilization. They were even victimized during the Holocaust and freely used as subjects in experiments. According to Evans (2004), hundreds of thousands of children and adults with disabilities were eliminated because they threatened the health and purity of the German race.

## Disability in the Context of Medicine

During the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, medical advances were made that enabled individuals with disabilities to survive, resulting in an overall increase in population. As medical and scientific knowledge expanded, the doctor and scientist replaced the priest as custodian of societal values and curing processes. According to Clapton & Fitzgerald (1997), in the medical model the notion of cripple was replaced with the newly created concept of “disability,” and the leadership of America’s first president with a disability, played an important role in reflecting and shaping this paradigm shift.

As the 32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States of America, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a pioneer in political advocacy for disabilities, even though he displayed his handicap, his inability to walk unassisted as a result of polio, as an abnormal, shameful condition. Viewed around the world as one of the greatest American presidents for his leadership in ending the Great Depression and during the Second World War, Roosevelt’s quick mind, wit, and determination took America through some of its toughest moments, in spite of his disability. During his administration, Roosevelt and his staff went to great lengths to prevent the public and media from seeing him in a wheelchair. While there are only a handful of photographs of President Roosevelt in a wheelchair, he was instrumental in the inception of the March of Dimes, an organization geared to help other people who live with the consequences of polio. According to Baker, Mixner & Harris (2007), Roosevelt subtly reinforced the longstanding negative perception of disability among the media, who knew of his condition, and the public, who didn’t. Throughout his life, President Roosevelt’s efforts focused on preventing the underlying medical condition rather than

embracing his own physical disability and demonstrating to the American people that it is possible to live a full life with a disability.

Paradoxically, war contributed to both medical and attitudinal advances in how our nation dealt with disabilities. Medically, in the 1940s the development of penicillin in World War II allowed soldiers to survive war injuries and return home. It also assured the survival of thousands who would have otherwise died from infection. The country expanded its commitment to rehabilitation programs and veteran services. In 1946, the Paralyzed Veterans of America was formed to promote medical care, and a President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped was created to assist veterans' transition from rehabilitation to meaningful employment (Baker, Mixner & Harris, 2007). Pioneers in medical sciences were advancing rehabilitation concepts to include physical and occupational therapy in order to rally a broad range of available services.

Medical advancements also improved and prenatal care led to the survival of infants with congenital disabilities who previously would not have survived. After the war, the health of children was better than at any other time of history as vaccines against polio, measles, and rubella were developed to control many childhood diseases. Tests were also developed to identify spina bifida, heart disease, and Down syndrome. According to the medical model, it was the individual, and not the society, who had the problem, and different interventions were aimed to provide the person with the appropriate skills to rehabilitate (Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997). Even though the medical field was progressing, the field of education continued to send individuals with disabilities to institutions to be with their "own kind".

## Disability and the Legislative Journey Toward Special Education

The notion of disability transformed from a religious or charity case to a medical model resulting in a socio-political construct within a civil rights-based discourse (Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997). The emphasis shifted from dependence to independence, as people with disabilities sought a political voice of their own. Before the passage of any laws or federal involvement, educating students with disabilities was driven primarily by visionaries, advocacy groups, and court rulings. Figure 1.1 charts the chronology of events that advanced rights and legal protections for individuals with disabilities.

In 1817, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet established the first school for students with disabilities known as the American Asylum for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb. Advocacy groups included the Council for Exceptional Children (1922), Cuyahoga Council for Retarded Children (1933), and the National Association for Retarded Citizens (1950). These groups established educational programs for specific handicaps, pressuring state politicians to pass legislation. The two other right-to-education cases, described later in this paper, included *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. District of Columbia Board of Education* (1972).

Special education's development in the United States during the 1960s was shaped by a multitude of significant social and educational initiatives. Among the most fundamental of these was the dramatic change in the nature and extent of involvement of the federal government, generated under the leadership of former President Kennedy, in developing public awareness and policy concerning disability (Osgood, 2005). President Kennedy's interest in special education derived largely from personal considerations—

his sister, Rosemary, had been identified as mentally retarded. While governmental activity generated significant and mostly positive publicity discussion regarding special education and exceptionality, residential institutions became subjects of intense scrutiny. Robert F. Kennedy critiqued two New York state institutions and the results shocked professionals, politicians, and the public. By the end of 1963, President Kennedy signed legislation for the creation of Community Mental Health Centers, thereby starting thereby starting the wave of de-institutionalization. The profound criticisms as to how individuals with disabilities were treated led to policy re-evaluation, which called for a more normalized approach to caring and educating this population of students (Osgood, 2005). Figure 1.2 charts the chronology of special education laws.

#### Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

Not until the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Public Law 89-10), did educating students with disabilities really garner national attention. The concern for equality of educational opportunity, in conjunction with other civil rights movements, swept the nation. It was during Johnson's presidency that numerous federal laws were passed reforming how students with disabilities were taught and how administrators were expected to lead. ESEA became the statutory basis upon which early special education legislation was drafted.

From 1965-1970, ESEA underwent numerous amendments. Public Law 89-313 authorized grants to state institutions and state-operated schools devoted to the education of students with disabilities. In 1966, Public Law 89-750 established the first federal grant program at the local school level and established the Bureau of Education of the Handicapped, which is known today as the Office of Special Education Programs. The

final federal special education legislation of the 1960s, Public Law 90-247, established a set of programs that supplemented and supported the expansion and improvement of special education services. Public Law 91-230, the last amendment for ESEA, included the Education of the Handicapped Act and established core grant programs for local education agencies. Although educating students with disabilities was still not mandated by federal or state law, the creation of the Bureau signified that change was on the horizon (Peterson, 2007).

Important Court Cases: *PARC and Mills v. Board of Education*

Before 1975, children with disabilities were denied an education solely on the basis of their handicapping conditions. Two prominent court cases, *PARC v. Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. D.C. Board of Education* (1972), creatively used the precedent of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) to apply the equal protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, extending the argument to students with disabilities. *PARC and Mills* legitimized Congressional action in 1975. The courts took the position that children with disabilities have the same right to access education as their non-disabled peers. Although there was no existing federal law that mandated this stance, some children with disabilities began to attend school as a result of these court decisions (Peterson, 2007). These seminal cases laid the groundwork for future federal legislation (Alexander & Alexander, 2009).

In fact, a near-dormant humanitarian impulse of the public was awakened by the *PARC and Mills* cases and spilled over to the legislative bodies of the country (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). An important, and indeed momentous, occasion was the concerted effort by the U.S. Congress to address the problem. Immediately following these two decisions, federal legislation, seeking to eliminate discrimination against individuals with



disabilities in both the workforce and the public educational system of the United States, was introduced in both chambers of Congress.

#### Free Appropriate Public Education

Passed in 1973, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Public Law 93-112, Section 504) was the first major legislative act to protect the civil rights of individuals with disabilities (Olguin, 2005). Included in the U.S. Department of Education regulations for Section 504 is the requirement that students with disabilities be provided with free appropriate public education (FAPE). The following year, the Educational Amendments of 1974 (Public Law 93-380), which was the grandparent of IDEA, established two laws. One was the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1974, which was the first to mention an appropriate education for all children with disabilities. The second law included the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as one facet of the law, affording parents and students over the age of 18 the right to examine records kept in the student's personal file.

By 1975, Congress determined that millions of American children with disabilities were still not receiving an appropriate education, finding that more than half of the handicapped children in the United States did not receive equitable educational services (Martin, Martin & Terman, 1996). That same year, President Gerald R. Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), also known as the Mainstreaming Law, which revolutionized the educational environment for children with disabilities. It mandated certain tenets: (1) a free appropriate public education (FAPE), (2) an individualized education program (IEP), (3) special education services, (4) related services, (5) due process procedures, and (6) the least restrictive environment (LRE) in

which to learn. Congress authorized immediate implementation of all sections on a priority basis, first by addressing the needs of children with disabilities who were currently receiving no educational services at all, and second by upgrading the services to the children with the most severe disabilities whose needs were inadequately served (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was the core source of Federal funding for special education and it was aimed at ensuring access to public education for all students with disabilities. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, along with aforementioned Supreme Court cases, finally mandated all school districts to educate students with disabilities.

In 1982, *Board of Education v. Rowley* defined free appropriate public education (FAPE) as being specifically designed to meet the unique needs of the child and allow the child “to benefit” from the educational program. The Act, as interpreted by the Supreme Court, requires no substantive measures regarding the level of education. Therefore, the state does not have to maximize the potential of the child; only provide a program that benefits the child (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). The Supreme Court stated, “We therefore conclude that the ‘basic floor of opportunity’ provided by the Act consists of access to specialized instruction and related services which are individually designed to provide education benefit to the handicapped child” (*Board of Education v. Rowley*, 1982).

The reauthorization of EAHCA included the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983 (Public Law 98-199) and established services to facilitate school-to-work transition through research and demonstration projects, created parent training and information centers, and provided funding for research in early intervention and early

childhood special education. Public Law 99-457 required states to extend free appropriate education to pre-school children with disabilities and established early intervention programs for infants and toddlers with handicapping conditions. In 1986, the Handicapped Children's Protection Act (Public Law 99-372) was added, enabling parents and guardians of children with disabilities to receive attorney's fees if they are successful in litigation against state or local agencies.

#### Americans with Disabilities Act: A Rights-Based Model

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) overwhelmingly passed both houses, ensuring that individuals with disabilities, including school-aged children, had access to public and private entities. Importantly, the disability community fought hard to ensure the legislation included protections for people with all types of disabilities. The law included broad protections against discrimination in employment, as well as in public and private accommodations (Baker, Mixner & Harris, 2007). ADA also adopted the Section 504 regulations as part of its statute, affording the 504 regulations the full weight of a federal statute. As a result, 504 plans for individual students have become more common in school districts. According to Szymanski (2009), the ADA shifted the theoretical basis of disability rights from a medical/charitable model to a civil or human rights model. Because of the adoption of ADA and other disability rights legislation, the United States has been viewed internationally as a pioneer in disability rights (Thornburgh, 2008). Since the passage of ADA in 1990, approximately 40 countries have enacted their own disability discrimination laws, some of which reflect a shift in approach from a welfare model to civil rights law, such as ADA (Katner, 2003).

## Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

In 1990, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments (Public Law 101-476), renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1990, established the language of “people first” replacing “handicapped child” with “child with disability”. School districts were now required to look at outcomes and assist students with disabilities in transitioning from high school to postsecondary life (Peterson, 2007). Rehabilitation counseling and social work services were included as related services under the law. Finally, the services and rights under this law were expanded to more fully include students with autism and traumatic brain injury.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act went through numerous amendments from 1992-1997. In 1992, Public Law 102-119 addressed the infants and toddlers with disabilities program. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 (Public Law 105-17) strengthened the role of parents, ensured access to the general curriculum, assisted educational agencies with addressing costs, ensured schools were safe, encouraged parents and educators to work out differences, and gave increased attention to racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity to prevent inappropriate identification. The IDEA 1997 reauthorization called for students with disabilities to be included in state and district-wide assessments. Also, regular education teachers were now required to be members of the Individual Education Program (IEP) team. The underlying theme of IDEA '97 was to improve the effectiveness of special education by requiring demonstrable improvements in educational achievement for students with disabilities.

## No Child Left Behind and Special Education

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) updated ESEA and called for all students, including students with disabilities, to be proficient in math and reading by the year 2014, and for schools and school districts to make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) toward this goal. Not only were schools and districts required to make AYP, but also each school’s subgroups (e.g. Whites, African Americans, low-income students, and students with disabilities) were required to pass. Under this new law, schools and districts that did not make AYP goals were subject to various sanctions that increased with each passing year (Fowler, 2009).

That same year, former President Bush ordered the creation of the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education. As part of the president’s charge to find ways to strengthen America’s four decades of commitment to educating children with disabilities, the Commission held hearings and meetings throughout the nation to listen to the concerns and comments from parents, teachers, principals, education officials, and the public. In 2002, the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education shared major findings and proposed major recommendations to revitalize special education for children and their families. The Commission’s major findings included the following:

1. Process and compliance are often placed above results.
2. The wait-to-fail model of special education trumps prevention and intervention.
3. Lack of scientifically-based approaches in general education results in inappropriate placements.

4. Parents do not feel empowered and lack options and recourse when their child fails to make progress in special education.
5. A culture of compliance has diverted too much attention from the first mission of schools: educating every child.
6. Many of the current methods of identifying children with disabilities lack validity resulting in misidentification.
7. Teachers, parents, and education officials desire better preparation, support, and professional development related to the needs of serving these children.
8. The current system does not always embrace evidence-based practices.
9. Compliance and bureaucratic imperatives supersede academic achievement and social outcomes, which fails too many children in school and beyond.

In response to these findings, the Commission produced a report addressing each of the nine major findings and their ramifications. The report uncovered central themes of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and how they needed to become driving forces behind future IDEA reauthorizations. These included an insistence on high academic standards and excellence, pressing for accountability for results at all levels, ensuring yearly progress, empowering parents, supporting and enhancing teacher quality, and encouraging educational reforms based on scientifically rigorous research. Figure 1.3 depicts the recommendations that formed the foundation of the report.

On December 3, 2004, President Bush signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (Public Law 108-446). The focus of IDEA reauthorization continued to be increasing the academic achievement of students in special education, specifically progress monitoring. The biggest changes called for more accountability at

the state and local levels, as more data on outcomes was required. Another notable change involved school districts streamlining the special education process and providing adequate instruction and intervention for students to help keep them out of special education.

On February 17, 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), a historical moment in special education because it doubled the current federal allocation of funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) totaling 12.2 billion dollars. Not since 1975, when IDEA was first passed, has the federal government demonstrated such a financial commitment to special education.

Before signing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, President Gerald R. Ford expressed some concerns about the effect of the law. He worried that it would create new complexities and administrative challenges for public education. More than a quarter of a century later, while his concerns were realized, his greatest expectations of children with disabilities being served in public schools alongside their nondisabled brothers, sisters, and friends also became a reality.

Four decades of laws have taken students with disabilities out of institutions and placed them alongside their non-disabled peers in public schools. Presidents, advocacy groups, policy makers, and educational professionals have revolutionized the field of special education with legal mandates, terminology, acronyms, and now federally-mandated accountability systems. Access has been achieved. Over the past decade, the challenges in special education have shifted from an issue of access to an issue of quality. This change from access to quality of instruction has also transferred the main

responsibility of educating students with disabilities to the school leader. No Child Left Behind listed the expectation of proficiency status without considering the shifting role of the school leader and how that leader must now provide supports necessary to raise the level of the quality of instruction for all students in the school, including students with disabilities. An analysis of inclusive leadership, increasing demands of the principal, the role of the attitudes of principals, and leadership preparation illustrates the crisis our school leaders are facing.

### Inclusion and Educational Leadership

School leaders not only need to know prominent laws and special education court decisions, it also behooves them to know what is not in the law. The words “mainstreaming,” “inclusion,” and “full inclusion” are not in Public Law 94-142 (EAHCA, 1975), Public Law 101-476 (IDEA, 1990), or their implementing regulations (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). What does appear in the mandate is “least restrictive environment” and “continuum of alternative placements”. The origins of the least restrictive environment mandate can be traced to the concept of normalization, which stipulates that persons with disabilities should be entitled to the same life experiences as persons without disabilities (Sawyer et al., 1994). According to Alexander & Alexander (2009), IDEA advances the general philosophy that students with disabilities should be educated with typically developing children in the normal educational setting whenever possible. In essence, each student has a legal right to be educated in the least restrictive environment possible, but what constitutes least restrictive is decided on a case-by-case basis. The federal mandate also provides for a continuum of alternative placements. Figure 1-4 contextualizes the progression, at one end of the continuum is the regular



education classroom as the least restrictive environment and at the other end is the institution, the most restrictive. The term integration is used to describe the placement of students with disabilities in educational settings that are part of the general education system. The term is used inconsistently and is frequently confused with mainstreaming or inclusion. However, all of these terms refer to the same basic concept: making the educational placement for students with disabilities part of the general education setting and maximizing their contact with students without disabilities (Sawyer et al., 1994).

#### From Isolated to Integrated Educational Settings

In a 1962 examination of the structure of special education in American schools, Maynard Reynolds proposed a triangle-like framework to describe the various levels and programs serving students with special needs. His framework suggested that many of these students could be served in the regular classroom, especially if provided with supplementary services. With the triangle base labeled “most problems handled in Regular Classroom”, Reynolds’ pyramid then ascended as follows: special assistance in the regular classroom, resource room, part-time special class, full-time special day class, special day school, and residential institutions, hospitals, or treatment centers. Reynolds (1962) asserted that the flow toward more isolated settings should occur with the severe disabilities and “only as far as necessary” and that students should move to integrated settings “as soon as possible”. Reynolds (1962) acknowledged that “it is inexcusable to delay or deny special services when they are needed”, but also argued that “it can be a disturbing experience for a child to be placed in a special class or another other type of special program. The prevailing view is that normal home and school life should be preserved if at all possible”. Reynolds’ view thus clearly, if indirectly, challenged the

then-common view that the most effective way to improve special education services was to organize more segregated settings. Reynolds' 1962 triangle-like framework looks like a flip version of the federal mandate that was passed decades later, as well as the continuum of placement options outlined in Figure 1.3.

After Reynolds' introduction of placement options, a multitude of studies and commentaries were published that questioned the efficacy of special classes. The results of such investigations proved conflicting and ultimately inconclusive. G. Orville Johnson (1962) noted the enormous amount of time, resources, and expectations invested in running segregated special classes, but pointed out what he considered strong evidence that special classes were inferior in terms of academic achievement and not significantly better in personal and social development. Paradoxically, he argued that this placement had specially-trained teachers, smaller classes, and programs that were designed for the students' unique needs; whereas similarly disabled students did not have "these advantages and have been forced to remain in the regular grades (Johnson, 1962). The skepticism about the effectiveness of segregation represented a small, but ultimately potent perception in special education, one that by the end of the decade captured the mind and questioned the soul of the field (Osgood, 2005).

A seminal publication in U.S. special education was Lloyd Dunn's 1968 article entitled "Special Education for the Mildly Retarded--Is Much of It Justifiable?" which questioned special education for students who are mildly mentally retarded. Lloyd Dunn created a controversy among the educational community when his article attacked the prevailing structure of education for the handicapped. Dunn (1968) suggested that the segregation of children into special classes was more of a function of relieving pressures

of regular classroom teachers and administrators. Their segregation into special classes allowed the “normal” children to be served in more or less a normal manner in the regular classroom (Dunn, 1968).

While Dunn’s article has been widely cited, it was by no means the only commentary that questioned traditional practices and fundamental assumptions of special education. In 1986, Madeleine Will, who was then the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, proposed that children with mild to moderate learning and behavior problems would be best served in general education classrooms, as long as specialized educational support systems were in place (Will, 1986). Known as the Regular Education Initiative, regular education advocates tried to merge special and general education into one inclusive system by increasing the number of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms and strengthening the academic achievement for all the students (Fuchs, 1993). The goal was to improve regular classroom teaching and learning processes by infusing special education resources, thereby making such settings more responsive to student diversity.

Although regular education proponents bantered about the elimination of the bottom of the continuum, that is, closing residential and day schools, the reform was only meant for the mildly or judgmentally handicapped children, not children who are deaf, blind, severely disturbed, or deeply retarded (Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987). Will’s call for a “shared responsibility” between general and special education may, in part, have prompted many state and local educators to place students with mild to moderate disabilities in general education classrooms (Sawyer et al., 1994).

## Special Education Reform and “Inclusive Schools”

Increasingly, special education reform has been symbolized by the term “inclusive schools”. Like the regular education initiative, which grabbed the field’s attention, the newer term seemed to defy straightforward interpretation, allowing “inclusion” to mean different things to people who wish different things from it. For the group that wants it least, it is a trendy form of hocus-pocus. To those who want more, it means a decentralization of power and the concomitant empowerment of teachers and building level administrators (Fuchs, 1993). While regular education advocates rallied for more cooperation between special and general education, the full inclusionist’s mantra has been the elimination of special education. Thus, even though the terminology continues to evolve, there appears to be a sustaining general agreement that children with disabilities should be placed in regular classrooms whenever possible.

The Supreme Court has yet to rule on these inclusion issues. Circuit courts struggle to formulate a clear test to determine when the placement of a disabled child into a general educational environment is appropriate (Crossley, 2000). However, the congressional desire for children with disabilities to attend school in the regular classroom was given substantial support in the 1997 amendments (Alexander & Alexander, 2009). This change effectively shifts the burden to the school district, specifically the school leader.

### Inclusive Education and the Expanding Role of the Principalship

One in every seven students in a U.S. classroom has an Individual Education Plan (IEP). As a nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), approximately 50,000,000 students are being schooled. Of this number, approximately fourteen (14) percent are diagnosed with disabilities. Forty

years ago, students with handicapping conditions did not have the right to the same education as their non-disabled peers. Swift changes in policy have left school leaders behind when it comes to implementing federal requirements and meeting the unique, and sometimes significant, individual needs of the students now attending school. Most recent legislation has resulted in expanded roles and increased accountability expectations for school leaders. The literature reveals our school leaders are ill- prepared to successfully provide quality instruction and management to special education programs. The focus on procedural compliance “often overshadowed efforts to provide quality” instruction (Lashley, 2007).

Despite progress, and more than two decades after implementing Public Law 94-142, principals claim they “do not understand special education” (Smith & Colon, 1998). Gage (1979) asserted the requirement for mainstreaming contained in nearly all regulations has “caught many principals unprepared, confused, and angered.” Goor et al. (1997) found that “principals often feel unprepared for their roles in the administration of special programs in their schools.” Elliott and Riddle (1992) revealed that many principals do not have the background knowledge to effectively supervise special education staff and “may not have the knowledge to evaluate whether or not a special educator is carrying out the job in a competent manner”.

School leaders are now required to provide appropriate individualized education programs for all students with disabilities and to do so in ways that protect their procedural and substantive due process rights while providing for placement within the least restrictive alternative (Nevin, 1979). Lietz & Kaiser (1979) investigated the ideal and real influence of building principals in twenty-seven key operational decision-making

tasks identified by the Council for Exceptional Children. Building principals were delegated a primary role in nine operational and decision-making tasks and a support role in twelve others. Most principals lacked knowledge of the instructional and programmatic needs of children with disabilities. In fact, Smith and Colon (1998) found that principals had no desire to understand special education and would choose to delegate this responsibility whenever possible. Unfortunately, these designees are usually even less familiar with special education issues. When designees are in charge, decisions may be made that do not safeguard students' and parents' rights (Goor et al., 1997), which in turn may lead to court battles and other forms of disagreement due to ignorance of the law (Smith & Colon, 1998).

IDEA's tenets expanded the principal's role in serving children with special needs. The obligations were clear that school leaders need to understand and comply with special education laws and regulations, develop knowledge about children with disabilities, supervise programs as well as the instructional personnel in these programs, conduct program reviews and assessments, and report to parents (O'Reilly & Squires, 1985). According to Robson (1981), the principal is expected to take major responsibility in direct service to pupils and in all supervisory and evaluation aspects of personnel administration. Ten years after IDEA, Lashley (2007) confessed that while school leaders looked after the day-to-day operations of special education classrooms, they were not expected to contribute to the quality of teaching or learning that occurred within them. The programs that originated with legislative mandates and passed through the central offices of each school district are now in individual school buildings, and the school leader responsible for the quality, in all aspects, is the principal (O'Reilly &

Squires, 1985). The principal is seen as the instructional leader for all programs within the school, including special education services (Goor et al., 1997).

When the U. S. Congress passed NCLB, states were presented with a prescribed accountability model with the goal that all students, including students with disabilities, achieve grade-level proficiency in reading and language arts and mathematics by 2014. Under NCLB, achievement at the school, district, and state levels is measured against a state-developed AYP accountability standard. The performance of each subgroup of students (racial and ethnic minorities, low income, English language learners, and students with disabilities) is disaggregated, reported separately, and measured against the same standards and expectations. Because of the increased alignment of NCLB and IDEA 2004, principals are responsible for the educational performance of students who have disabilities and for providing the procedural safeguards that special education law has always required (Lashley, 2007). Nevertheless, administrators are not being adequately prepared to supervise the instructional methodologies of special educators (Low & Brigham, 2000).

#### Principal Attitudes on Inclusion

Some leaders operate schools based on a paradigm that embraces students with disabilities. However, the literature reveals that school leaders' perceptions are based on students' limitations rather than possibilities. For principals to be effective special education instructional leaders, they must examine their belief structures to determine the viability of adopting more accepting and inclusive paradigms (Goor et al., 1997). Examining and altering beliefs require exposure to new ideas, personal reflection on

actions, and a commitment to change that requires time and is a process rather than a specific event (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987).

The principal's attitude toward special education and the concern expressed for the needs of children with disabilities influence the success of special programs (Burrello, Schrup, & Barnett, 1992). Goor et al. (1997) suggested that several core beliefs are necessary to provide the framework for school administrators to accept children with disabilities and include them successfully in schools. These essential beliefs, such as the inherent ability for all children to learn, set the stage for successful integration of children with disabilities. It is believed that if a principal's attitude reflects the core beliefs of a diverse society, more opportunities will be realized for all children, even those with the most challenging needs.

Davis (1980) examined principals' attitudes toward mainstreaming and evaluated principals' judgments of how students with various disabilities acquired success in their schools. The results indicated that when the student was labeled mentally retarded, the principal's perception was that they would have a poor chance of being successfully mainstreamed. Successful mainstreaming programs were unlikely to be available in schools where principals did not have expectations of success and understanding of children with disabilities. Center, Ward, Parmenter & Nash (1985) examined principals' attitudes towards the integration of disabled children into regular schools. The analysis of the ratings for each educational and behavioral disability specified indicated that the principals were positive only about integrating children who demanded neither extra competencies nor extra-curricular duties from the regular class teacher. Cline (1981) also examined principals' attitudes toward and knowledge of mainstreaming. When asked to



select the most appropriate placement from descriptions of students with disabilities, principals demonstrated a lack of awareness regarding the nature and needs of students with disabilities.

Villa et al. (1996) researched the perceptions of 680 licensed general and special education teachers and administrators related to the full inclusion of all students, including students with moderate and severe disabilities. Respondents from 32 school sites favored the education of children with disabilities in general education through collaborative relationships among all educators. For both general and special educators, “administrative support and collaboration were powerful predictors of positive attitudes toward full inclusion” (Villa et al., 1996).

Cook, Semmel & Gerber (1999) investigated the attitudes of 49 principals and 64 special education teachers regarding the inclusion of students with mild disabilities. Results indicated that principals and special education teachers hold significant differences of opinion regarding inclusion. Principals supported, to a significantly greater degree, the sentiments that students with mild disabilities improve their academic achievement when placed in the optimally effective environments of a general education classroom with supports and services. However, findings indicated a lack of support for these ideals among special educators, which are the professionals with the most training and experience regarding the education of students with mild disabilities.

Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) surveyed 115 principals’ attitudes toward and knowledge of inclusion. Results indicated that principals generally viewed inclusion as most appropriate for students with mild disabilities. Issues related to administrators’

awareness of practices that facilitate inclusion and how prepared they are to implement and support inclusive education also surfaced.

Most recently, in a survey of 408 elementary school principals, the findings of Praisner (2003) demonstrated the importance of principals' attitudes for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms at their school sites. Principals who had previous successful interactions with children with disabilities were more likely to continue to support LRE and inclusive practices. Results indicated that only about one in five principals conveyed positive attitudes toward inclusion, while most remained uncertain. Praisner also stressed the need for preparation programs to address inclusion as part of the required training for principals.

If the principal supports the integration of students with disabilities, then program success is more likely. On the other hand, if the principal is not supportive, the chances of developing an integrative program are diminished (Payne & Murray, 1974). Lowe & Brigham (2000) assert the principal's attitude toward special education students, as well as his or her ability or inability to supervise their instruction, will ultimately determine the efficacy of the school's special education services.

#### Preparing Educational Leaders for Inclusive Education

Haller et al. (1994) examined the consequences of principals' graduate training in educational administration for school effectiveness and found no evidence to suggest that it improves the effectiveness of schools. However, as the field of special education becomes more complicated and litigious, principals are under increasing pressure to know the laws relating to special education and how to implement them at the school level (Davidson & Gooden, 2001). Unfortunately, despite the increased responsibilities

for principals, the literature makes it clear that the training on special education issues in administrator preparation programs is minimal. Hirth and Valesky (1990) suggested that higher education institutions are not adequately preparing administrators to meet the demands of managing special education programs.

Hirth and Valesky (1991) conducted a nationwide survey that examined requirements of university administrator education programs for developing competence in the areas of special education and special education law. Findings from the 66 responses indicated that universities were “confused about endorsement requirements and did not adequately prepare administrators to confront special education issues” (Hirth & Valesky, 1991). “While the vast majority of principals have responsibility for supervising and evaluating special educators, only 33% of all state licensure programs for general education administrators require knowledge of special education law, and... 57% of the endorsements offered by the universities have no requirement for knowledge of special education” (Hirth & Valesky, 1991). Not only are administrators frustrated with the IDEA provisions, they also lack sufficient knowledge to ensure compliance with those provisions.

Hirth & Valesky (1990) and Davidson & Gooden (2001) found that principals’ knowledge of special education law was not sufficient to ensure that costly legal mistakes will not occur. Sirotnik & Kimball (1994) followed a national study of 23 administrator preparation programs and concluded that special education was not adequately discussed and the preparation programs tended to minimize course work and legal information. “Special education is treated inadequately (if at all) in programs designed to prepare school administrators” (Sirotnik & Kimball, 1994). If principals are key figures in

providing appropriate support and education to teachers, they must receive preparation in appropriate instructional approaches for students with disabilities. Davis (1980) surveyed 345 principals regarding their attitudes toward mainstreaming and related training. An inspection of Davis' data revealed "51.9% have never taken a single course in the field of special education...32% of the total group indicated that they had received no exposure to the education of handicapped children in their formal school administration training program" (Davis, 1980). These findings were consistent throughout much of the literature.

Building level principals across the country are required to assume increasingly greater responsibilities relative to the education of students with disabilities despite minimal training and preparation. Based on the literature, it appears that the principal is the school's instructional leader and must not exclude special education from that system. Failure to ensure that principals are able to identify best practices ensures that the quality of instruction that every child receives is left to chance and that is unacceptable (Lowe & Brigham, 2000).

### Summary

This literature review served to set the topic of special education legislation and the role of the school leader within the context of existing research. This chapter began with a broad scope of how disability contexts evolved with the changing political backdrop. A historical perspective of special education reform and inclusion was then examined. This chapter also examined the literature on the expanding role of the principal, their attitudes on inclusion, and their leadership preparation as it relates to special education. This

review set the stage for my own research on this topic which will be detailed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document and examine the lived experiences and perspectives of school principals' preparation, experiences, and attitudes as they relate to improving academic achievement for students with disabilities. It is important to capture these first-person narratives and perspectives on matters of special education policies and instructional programming because they can contribute to our understanding of how school leaders make meaning of such policies, as well as the populations they are designed to serve. These narratives and their voices may help inform our understanding of how the preparations, experiences, and attitudes of the school leader influence the education of students with disabilities, and in turn, the educational experience of all students.

#### Research Questions

The study examined the perceptions of two school leaders to determine what they believe they do that supports/translated into success for students with disabilities. The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what way does a school leader's leadership preparation program impact the education of students with disabilities?
2. In what way does a school leader's leadership experience impact the education of students with disabilities?
3. In what ways do a school leader's attitudes and perceptions impact the education of students with disabilities?

## Research Design and Methodology

To answer these questions, I used a non-positivist, naturalistic inquiry approach using qualitative research (Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1981) and narrative inquiry methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lyon & Laboskey, 2002) based on my interest in exploring the perceptions and experiences of the study participants concerning the leadership philosophy and approach to serving the needs of children with disabilities. Qualitative research was the most appropriate design for this study because attitudes and dispositions are predominately individually constructed and interpreted. Qualitative research relies on the views of participants in a natural setting where the researcher serves as an instrument of data collection and attempts to interpret the individual experiences (Creswell, 2008; Glesne, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). According to Creswell (2008), qualitative research is an

inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon.

To learn about the phenomenon, the researcher asks participants broad, general questions, collects the detailed views of participants in the form of words and images and then analyzes the information for description and themes. From this data, the researcher interprets the meaning of the information, drawing on personal reflections and past research (p. 645).

As such, qualitative researchers must interact and talk with participants to better understand their constructed realities (Glesne, 1999).

Through narrative inquiry researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of those experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As a distinct form of qualitative research, a narrative typically focuses

on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2008). Narrative inquiry attempts to capture the “whole story,” whereas other methods tend to communicate understandings of studied subjects or phenomena at certain points (Webster & Mertova, 2007). According to Connelly & Clandinin, (1990), one theory in educational research holds that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives and that narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. This general notion of humans being storytelling organisms translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories. As such, narrative inquiry is an effective method to learn about the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of these school principals who are improving academic achievement for students with disabilities.

#### Participant Selection

The aim of this study required the participation of school principals who demonstrated success at improving student achievement among their special education population. Conducted in a large urban school district in the Intermountain West, I used purposeful sampling as a means to “intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008). In this case, it was to identify school principals who met the following criteria: (1) demonstrated four (4) consecutive years of proficiency; (2) under the same principal; (3) with the highest reduction in non-proficient students with IEPs.



### Criteria 1: Consecutive Proficiency among Special Education Students

Student achievement was measured using the state-wide assessment results as it is the only achievement data available. Under state's system for assessing students, the Proficiency Examination Program (PEP), the students take tests specific to their grades and programs. PEP includes the following assessments: High School Proficiency Examination in Reading and Mathematics; Writing Assessments; Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS); Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED); Criterion-Referenced Tests in Reading, Mathematics, and Science (CRT); Language Proficiency Assessment; the state's Alternate Assessment; and National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). Study participants satisfied the following criteria established by me, the researcher.

Using the state's Department of Education 2006-2010 English and language arts (ELA) and mathematics proficiency data for the 213 elementary schools in this large urban school district, after filtering out schools that had less than ten students with IEPs, only 147 schools in the IEP ELA data and 145 schools IEP math data remained. Due to federal accountability mandates and high-stakes testing requirements, school proficiency percentages data are available from 2002 to 2010. In 2005, this state added 4<sup>th</sup> grade as a required grade level to assess which caused a differentiation in data when compared to the previous years. For the sake of this study, data from 2006-2010 were analyzed and schools demonstrating four consecutive years of proficiency filtered the possible participants further. Six (6) IEP ELA and twelve (12) IEP math schools maintained consecutive years of proficiency status in the IEP subgroup, one of which maintained proficiency in both ELA and math, therefore totaling seventeen (17) schools.

## Criteria 2: Consecutive School Leader

Equally important to this study were the schools that maintained the same school principal during the four consecutive years of being identified proficient. Since this large urban school district has a high administrative turn-over rate, sustaining the same school leader for all four years of data was important to identify the impact the school leader has had on the education of students with disabilities. After this criterion was applied, nine (9) schools remained.

## Criteria 3: Highest Reduction in Non-Proficient Students

Of those nine (9) schools, a final criterion was applied to rank the schools according to the highest reduction in non-proficient students with IEPs. The following table outlines the selection criteria to determine participant and site selection. To maintain some degree of anonymity, schools have been listed by their state school code. All of this data can be accessed by the public from the State Department of Education.

213 Elementary Schools filtered at 10	
ELA (147 elementary schools)	Math (145 elementary schools)
Four consecutive years of proficiency (sorted by state identification number)	
ELA (6 elementary schools) 2131* 2152 2169 2218 2242 2297	Math (12 elementary schools) 2109 2115 2119 2131* 2149 2161 2176 2214 2243 2251 2254 2260
Maintained same principal for 4 consecutive years	
ELA (3 elementary schools) 2131* 2242 2297	Math (7 elementary schools) 2115 2131* 2176 2243 2251

	2254 2260
Highest reduction in non-proficient students	
2243—61.40% (Math) 2176—59.63% (Math) 2251—47.93% (Math) *2131—42.87% (Math) 32.29% (ELA) 2242—32.07% (ELA) 2115—26.41% (Math) 2254—26.41% (Math) 2297—22.99% (ELA) 2260—22.01% (Math)	

Letters were sent to the two principals with the most diverse group of specialized programs (2243 and 2251) inviting them to participate in the study. Subsequent telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence confirmed each participant's availability and ability to be interviewed. Due to time constraints, two schools made up the sample for this study.

### Data Collection

Data collection methods included in-person, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, field notes, site observations, and a reflexive journal. In addition to the school leaders, the Special Education Instructional Facilitator (SEIF) was also interviewed with regard to the special education programming at the site and the school leader's dispositions as it relates to students with disabilities. These narratives, as co-constructed by the participants and the researcher, are intended to deepen our understanding of the school leader's skills and perceptions as it relates to special education and students with disabilities. Data sources included: building floor plans, school improvement plans, school accountability reports, operating budgets, school newsletters, and website information. Exploratory telephone and email interviews were conducted with administrators and faculty to better prepare for the in-person interviews. During these interviews, the study purpose and the criteria for

participant selection was reviewed. A formal letter was then emailed/mailed to the participants inviting them to participate in the study. After receiving preliminary consent and mailing an electronic and/or hard copy version of the informed consent form for them to review, each participant consented prior to his/her initial in-person interview. This process included a thorough review of the consent form, followed by the participant signing the form as an indication of their consent.

In the spring of 2011, I spent a day at each school site to interview the principal and faculty, conduct a facility observation, and collect artifacts. Two additional neighborhood environmental scans were conducted within the next month. I captured each participant's stories and responses through audio-recorded, in-person, semi-structured interviews that lasted between one to three hours. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed according to a review of the related literature, the research questions that guided the study, and the researcher's experience in working with students with disabilities. The flexibility of the semi-structured, open-ended interview format allowed respondents to engage and expand upon their feelings and emotions throughout the interview process.

Pre-interview jitters set in as I was preparing to meet and interview the participants, based on their documented success and well-regarded reputations in the school district; I was immediately put at ease with both school leaders. I connected with each participant, except one, and was informed after the interviews that I recruited one of the teachers years prior. The struggle I experienced in one interview was due to skepticism and overall negativity. At first, the participant did not want to be audio-taped, but when I explained that I would be the only one to listen to the tapes, he signed the consent. In

every other instance, each participant was eager to share story after story about their school and their resulting success with student achievement.

Immediately after each in-person interview, time was allocated for reflexive journaling. The reflexive journaling allowed me to reflect on the observations, impressions, thoughts, and frustrations of the participants, their compelling stories, as well as personal reactions and perceptions that developed throughout the conversation. This journaling also ensured that my potential bias was minimized and my role as the researcher was kept in check. Prior to the actual use of the interview protocols described above, the questions were vetted on colleagues and professors to gain greater clarity. The entire process was piloted with a local, willing public elementary school.

### Trustworthiness

To establish credibility, the data was triangulated by using interview audio recordings, field notes, interview transcripts, a site facility map, and a reflexive journal. Member checks were conducted electronically in order to clarify previously collected participant perspectives. Glesne (1999) defined member checking as “sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with the research participants to make sure you are representing them and their ideals correctly.” To minimize researcher bias, a reflexive journal was utilized to collect data. In accordance with the structure set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the journal included: “(1) the daily schedule and logistics of the study; (2) a personal diary that provides the opportunity for catharsis, for reflection upon what is happening in terms of one’s own values and interests, and for speculation about growing insights; and (3) a methodological log in which methodological decisions and accompanying rationales are recorded.” The reflexive journal confronted the role as

a human research instrument and clarified any researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glesne, 1999).

### Role of Researcher

The process of narrative inquiry began with the establishment of a collaborative research relationship between the researcher and practitioners. “When both researchers and practitioners tell stories of the research relationship, they have the possibility of being stories of empowerment” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This general notion of humans being storytelling organisms translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories. Narrative inquiry is the best method to learn about the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of these two school leaders who are improving academic achievement for students with disabilities.

As a self-identified school principal of a special education school that exclusively serves students with significant disabilities, the lived experiences of comprehensive campus principals providing instructional leadership to students with disabilities is of importance to me. The mutual passion for the educational profession and excellence for all students, including students with disabilities, bridged a relationship to co-construct narratives with thick and rich descriptions.

### Data Analysis

According to Marshall & Rossman (1999), data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data. A narrative inquirer spends many hours reading and rereading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within different sets of field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Like other qualitative methods, narrative inquiry relies on criteria other

than validity, reliability, and generalizability. Although the language and criteria for narrative inquiry are still under further development, Connelly & Clandinin (1990) have identified apparency, verisimilitude, and transferability as possible criteria. For an elegant, credible interpretation of the narratives, Marshall and Rossman's (1999) six phases of analytic procedures will be utilized. These include: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report. Each phase of analysis will bring the reams of collected data into manageable chunks, which is the essence of qualitative data analysis.

When beginning this analysis, I started by organizing all the data. To ensure the participant's stories were captured and portrayed accurately I chose to transcribe all the interviews myself, with the assistance of voice recognition software. I listened to each interview audio tape a second time to ensure the messages were accurately translated. Thus, reliving each interview a total of three times, I felt completely immersed in the details and nuances of the data. The responses were filled with rich and thick descriptions that resulted in more than 75 pages of transcribed data. Throughout the data collection process, I recorded the categories, patterns, and themes that manifested among the collection of interview transcripts. A taxonomy was used to organize and illustrate the categories and themes that emerged collectively from the interviews and observations.

#### Limitations of the Study

The use of narrative inquiry methods could pose limitations for this study due to its reliance on participant reflection and selective memory. Marshall & Rossman (1999) cautioned that narratives may suffer from selective recall and filling in memory gaps

through inference and reinterpretation of the past. Further, my standpoint as a principal at a special school that only serves students with significant disabilities presents the potentiality of bias, which is openly acknowledged in narrative inquiry since the role of the researcher includes both researchers and practitioners telling stories of the research relationship to capture the whole story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, part of my analysis required the utilization of my own standpoint in order to critically re-examine my own experiences and construct meaning from them based on the narratives and lived experiences of the study participants. Furthermore, there is no assumption that the data collected in this study can be generalized or expected to reflect the experiences of all principals of schools that serve students with disabilities. Rather, this exploratory study is designed to lay the groundwork for future research.

Despite these potential limitations, this study offers important findings and new understandings that will contribute to the research knowledge base concerning the leadership preparation, experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of school leaders, and their subsequent impact on the education of students with disabilities.

#### Significance of the Study

This study was intended to further the understanding of the skill-set that could be useful to principals as they implement inclusive programs on their campuses. It may give insight to parents, disability interest groups, educators, special education directors, superintendents, and policy makers, into what is essential to make a quality education for students with disabilities. Results may assist stakeholders in determining whether or not they should support efforts to continue inclusion in its current form or find alternative methods for improving educating students with disabilities. Furthermore, this study may



assist educational leadership programs and professional development organizers in developing curricula that would be most beneficial to future school leaders as they face the challenges of implementing state and federal policy.

### Summary

In conclusion, with the collection and analysis of the multiple data sources described above, grounded in literature on school leadership and special education, this researcher seeks to contribute to the extant research on educational leadership, leadership preparation, and the education of students with disabilities. An analysis of the data unveiled school leader perceptions and behaviors that further define effective school leaders in their ability to ensure that all students with disabilities receive not only an accessible education, but also a quality one. In the next chapter, I present key study findings as responses to the research questions, emphasizing the ways in which the leadership preparation, experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of the participating principals informed their leadership practice and education of students with disabilities.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

This chapter describes the lived experiences and perceptions of public elementary school leaders who have demonstrated significant improvement in the academic achievement of their special education student population (i.e. students with learning disabilities, speech impairments, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments, emotional disturbances, autism, developmental delays, and multiple impairments). As presented in Chapter 3, the research questions guiding this narrative inquiry are as follows:

1. In what way does a school leader's leadership preparation program impact the education of students with disabilities?
2. In what way does a school leader's leadership experience impact the education of students with disabilities?
3. In what ways do a school leader's attitudes and perceptions impact the education of students with disabilities?

Using these questions as a heuristic, in this chapter, I present the study findings through rich descriptions of (1) the school communities that served as the research sites, (2) the school leaders and staff members who served as research participants, and (3) answers to the research questions that emerged from the data collected from multiple data sources including: in-person interviews, field notes, site observations, and a reflexive journal. Through purposeful sampling, more specifically criterion sampling, study participants were required to satisfy criteria established by the researcher. Using the state's Department of Education's 2006-2010 data for the 213 public elementary schools in this

large urban school district, the search criteria were limited to principals of schools that demonstrated each of the following: (a) four (4) consecutive years of proficiency; (b) under the same principal; (c) with the highest reduction in non-proficient students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs). The objective data has been delineated in standard type, while the researcher's subjective reflexive journaling has been indicated in italics and brackets. I begin with a discussion of the first school site: Pleasantville Elementary School.

### Pleasantville Elementary School

Located in an urban county in the Southwestern region of the U.S, Pleasantville Elementary School is a bright blue public school located beyond a dirt road and visible from a six-lane stretch of desert highway. This vibrantly colored school resembles an oasis in a neighborhood that consists of both abandoned single-story houses covered in peeling paint and occupied homes that don bars over broken windows. The yards are filled with broken-down sheds, mattresses, and hub-capped fences, while the front porches are decorated with Christmas lights, angels, sofas, warped awnings, and screen doors hanging off their frames. Campers and rusted work trucks line the streets; parked cars cover the front lawns. In lieu of landscaping, dead trees, overgrown grass, palm trees, and sidewalks filled with empty grocery carts litter this almost sixty year-old working-class community, which serves as home to Pleasantville Elementary School. Despite the neighborhood's obvious lack of financial resources and assets, the people exhibited friendliness--creating a small town feel and hinting that the community may be wealthy in ways money can't buy.

*[As I drove around this community, taking in the backdrop of this elementary school and jotting down notes while at stop signs, I was politely beckoned by on-coming traffic to proceed through the intersection first. This kind gesture happened at three different locations. My first impression of the community could have been summed up in one word, aloof. However, while the obvious oppressiveness of the community painted a bleak picture, the warm, Mayberry-like hometown feeling overshadowed my original opinion.]*

Pleasantville Elementary School lies within walking distance of a neighborhood family service center, county health district, Boys and Girls Club, and a Wal-mart. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the estimated population of this neighborhood is 64,000. The estimated median household income was barely over \$50,000, with only 66% in the labor force. The racial makeup of this neighborhood was 86.2% White, 12.4% Hispanic or Latino, 3.5% Black or African American, 1.8% Asian, 4.0% from other races, 1.0% American Indian and Alaska Native, and 0.4% Pacific Islander.

Inside Pleasantville Elementary School, the hallways are adorned with brightly painted sunflowers, shining stars, and murals of smiling faces, providing a welcoming atmosphere characteristic of an inviting school culture. From the billboards proclaiming “Pleasantville Elementary School” to the personalized school benches, students, staff, and visitors are surrounded by reflections and symbols of school pride. Pleasantville Elementary School, a partnership of educators, families, and community members, prepares each student for academic and personal success by providing a safe and challenging environment to ensure the students achieve their full potential as life-long

learners. As their mission statement affirms, they are committed to a culture of care and excellence for all students.

Each year, Pleasantville Elementary serves between 700-800 students, representing a diverse racial/ethnic student population with 51.6% White, 23.7% Hispanic, 12.6% Black/African American, 6.3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Students who qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch make up 56.4% of the school population, while Limited English Proficient students comprise 6.8%, and students with disabilities who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) total 12.4%. (SEE TABLE 1). Pleasantville's transiency rate of less than 35% represents the district's average in this very transient city. This public elementary school educates 93 students with disabilities, reaching almost every disability category. (SEE TABLE 2). Pleasantville maintained 100% parent/teacher conference participation for the past five years. During the past three years, the school had no incidents resulting in suspension/expulsion. Pleasantville matched or expended almost 10% more than the district in per-pupil expenditures to reach the school's mission of creating a culture of care and excellence for all students.

TABLE 1: Pleasantville Elementary Demographics and Student Information 2010-2011

	Enrollment #	Enrollment %
Total Students	747	100%
Male	392	52.5%
Female	355	47.5%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	10	1.3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	47	6.3%
Hispanic	177	23.7%
Black/African American	94	12.6%
White	419	56.1%
IEP	93	12.4%
LEP	51	6.8%
FRL	421	56.4%

Data are provided by the Department of Education using the state student information system. Demographic profiles are reported by gender, race/ethnicity, and special student populations as of count day.

IEP = Students with Disabilities

LEP = Students with Limited English Proficiency

FRL = Students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch

TABLE 2: Pleasantville Elementary-Students by Disability Subgroup 2010-2011

<b>Disability Subgroup</b>	<b>ECSE O-PK</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Grade</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Grade</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Grade</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>
Specific Learning Disabled	4	6	2	6	14	6
Speech Impaired	14	5	4	5	1	1
Mental Retardation				7		1
Deaf/Hard of Hearing						1
Visually Impaired				1		
Emotional Disturbance	1	1			2	
Orthopedic Impairment						
Autism	1	2	2		2	2
Traumatic Brain Injury						
Other Health Impairment		4	1	3	1	
Deaf-blindness						
Multiple Disabilities			1	2	1	1
Developmental Delayed	17		1			

An additional building, funded by the schools' partnerships, serves as the community Parenting Center. Families from the neighborhood freely access the center for various resources such as computer usage, immunizations, dental services, food backpack program, social services, and tax preparations, as evidenced during my visit. Besides the typical Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade level classrooms, additional classrooms are infused within the ten buildings including: special education resource classes, specialized program classes (i.e. mentally challenged specialized, early childhood special education, resource room, and gifted and talented education), a brain lab provides remote tutoring in cognitive skills, a computer lab, and an intervention room where students performing below grade level in a subject area receive additional small group instruction. In keeping with the school's Star theme, the hallways are named after constellations and other

celestial concepts, such as: Orion Beltway, Twilight Zone, even Sunshine Lane. While Pleasantville Elementary School is one of the oldest elementary schools in this urban district, spanning over five decades, the décor includes freshly-painted, welcoming, and warm murals (funded by local partnerships with businesses), picnic tables, and a school-initiated \$15,000 grant-funded natural habitat.

*[Stepping inside the confines of Pleasantville Elementary School was like entering a community within a community. It was very bright, happy, and screamed of pride. Students anxiously ran ahead of their parents to get to class. Staff members were adorned with smiles and laughter, while parents freely entered and exited what seemed like their second home.]*

Pleasantville Elementary School was recently recognized by the state's Partnership for Inclusive Education, at its annual Inspiration Awards, honoring schools that excel at meeting the needs of *all* students in public education. In fact, Pleasantville received the silver award two years in a row. Mr. Edward Seguin, the school's Special Education Instructional Facilitator, also received the Inclusion Teacher of the Year award from this large school district. Dr. Bancroft, Principal of Pleasantville Elementary School, believes "you don't see kids for a label...You see them as kids." and it is the school leader's responsibility to determine the needs of students and provide the resources they need to succeed. "I don't know how many times when the inclusion people came out for the inspiration awards and we took them into a classroom, they're like 'which ones are the inclusion kids?,' and we didn't even know."

*[Before entering Pleasantville, I predicted inclusion would be part of the norm at this site, based on the successive proficiency status the school has maintained. As a*

*researcher, I must confess that I am at a crossroads with wondering if winning an award due to including kids with disabilities in general education classrooms is prize-worthy and should be rewarded instead of expected. Individual student growth should be recognized, but should we continually single out a subgroup of a population to publically boast that we included them in what is deemed as the norm for the rest of the population? The reader must not misunderstand my excitement that schools are being recognized for doing what's right for kids, but do we monetarily reward schools for educating students that are Black/African American, Hispanic, or Asian alongside students that are White?]*

### Northside Elementary School

Northside Elementary School serves a blue-collar community within walking distance from several payday loan centers, check cashing facilities, a swap meet, numerous fast food chains, a community park, churches, a casino, a storage facility, a day care center, and a private golf course protected by an eight-foot high fence topped with barb-wire. Nearly every occupied residence has an older pick-up truck. Several front yards are littered with couches, overgrown weeds, grocery carts, cars propped up on bricks, and picnic tables and chairs. Neighborhood street signs and patrician walls are tagged with a mixture of fresh and old graffiti. Aesthetically, the front picture windows either have portable air condition units precariously hanging from them or are covered with plywood, sheets, or blankets. Walking past boarded up and abandoned houses on each block, I observed the neighborhood postal worker going door to door to delivering mail and dodging pit-bulls.

However when I returned on the weekends, I noted how this community accesses Northside Elementary School as the epicenter for support and camaraderie. The school's



parking lot spaces were filled with used personal possessions from community members. Families used the parameters of each parking spot to sell items to other neighbors and/or local garage-salers. Kids ran from parking space to parking space checking out the latest toys, clothes, or tamales for sale, while grandparents tended to their areas and cooking preparations. The neighborhood surrounding Northside Elementary School proved to be a very tight-knit community with families that not only supported each other, but viewed and utilized their elementary school as the hub for socialization and sustenance during times of financial difficulty and hardship.

*[Before even meeting the school's leader, his welcoming spirit shone through this community with the clear hospitality he offers to his families. Contrary to this proactive stance is the reactive position communicated by the golf course with its additional barb-wire attached to the already eight-foot high fence. Students walking home from school were seen stopping at the golf course, wrapping their petite fingers around the fence posts, and possibly dreaming of the day they might be able to walk on a green as expansive and plush as this to play.]*

Located in the desert southwest, the estimated population of this neighborhood is 67,000. The estimated median household income was barely over \$44,000, with only 68% in the labor force. The racial makeup of this neighborhood was 68.5% White, 21.9% Hispanic or Latino, 12.2% Black or African American, 3.9% Asian, 9.5% from other races, 0.9% American Indian and Alaska Native, and 0.6% Pacific Islander.

Northside Elementary School is housed in a brick building with a blue roof and blue and yellow accents that screamed Home of the Lions. The outdoor campus houses fifteen buildings, grouped as forty-four mixed grade level classroom pods and nine portables.

While Northside Elementary School opened in 1955, numerous renovations have occurred throughout the decades to ensure this area's namesake was preserved. According to local history, the school is located along one of the four springs that comprise Big Springs on the old trail to Los Angeles. Northside's mission is to provide an atmosphere that will promote student learning and academic achievement in a positive environment.

*[Northside Elementary was a clean and inviting school. The renovated front office, campus, and classrooms alike were unpretentious; clearly communicating the sole purpose is that of learning.]*

Demographically, Northside serves between 600-700 students each year, representing a diverse racial/ethnic population with 76.9% Hispanic, 13.3% Black/African American, 6.2% White, 0.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Students who qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch make up 85.8% of the school population, while Limited English Proficiency students comprise 63.5%, and students with disabilities who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) total 8.9%. (SEE TABLE 3). Northside's transiency rate of less than 35% represents the district's average in this very transient city. This elementary school educates over 50 students with disabilities, spanning six of the thirteen disability categories. (SEE TABLE 4). Northside Elementary School maintained over 90% parent/teacher conference participation the past five years. Over the past three years, they only had three incidents resulting in suspension/expulsion. Each year Northside expended almost 10% more than the district standard in per-pupil expenditures to reach the school's mission of being committed to a culture of learning and achievement for all students. As the mission statement of

Northside Elementary School proclaims, they are committed to a culture of learning and achievement for all students.

TABLE 3: Northside Elementary-Demographics and Student Information 2010-2011

	Enrollment #	Enrollment %
Total Students	663	100%
Male	333	50.2%
Female	330	49.8%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	0.2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	0.8%
Hispanic	510	76.9%
Black/African American	88	13.3%
White	41	6.2%
IEP	59	8.9%
LEP	421	63.5%
FRL	569	85.8%

Data are provided by the Department of Education using the state student information system. Demographic profiles are reported by gender, race/ethnicity, and special student populations as of count day.

IEP = Students with Disabilities

LEP = Students with Limited English Proficiency

FRL = Students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch

TABLE 4: Northside Elementary-Students by Disability Subgroup 2010-2011

Disability Subgroup	ECSE O-PK	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Specific Learning Disabled	0	0	2	0	2	3
Speech Impaired	42	10	6	6	2	3
Mental Retardation	6	0	0	0	0	0
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Visually Impaired	0	0	0	0	0	0
Emotional Disturbance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Orthopedic Impairment	0	0	0	0	0	0
Autism	0	0	1	0	1	0
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Health Impairment	0	1	0	1	0	0
Deaf-blindness	0	0	0	0	0	0
Multiple Disabilities	0	0	0	0	0	0
Developmental Delayed	36	0	0	0	0	0

Principal of Pleasantville Elementary School: Dr. Margaret Bancroft

Before proceeding with the audiotaped interview, Dr. Margaret Bancroft insisted that the Assistant Principal, Ms. Liz Farrell, participate in the interview since they work so closely together as an administrative team.

*[Since this was not part of the original plan I was a bit concerned as to how another school administrator would impact the findings. At first I was hesitant and conveyed to the principal that the purpose of the study is to determine how the school leader's preparation, experiences, and perceptions impact the learning experiences and outcomes of students with disabilities, but she was insistent that the administration at Pleasantville works as a team in every aspect of leadership. Upon further reflection, this spoke volumes about Dr. Bancroft's leadership style; a kind of a transformational leadership. A style whereby she engages others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation while trying to help them reach their full potential.]*

#### Margaret Bancroft's Background and Reflections on Disability

A farmer's daughter, Margaret Bancroft grew up in a little town of approximately 1000 people with two taverns, one stoplight, and one school that basically served 500 students in grades K-12. Margaret actively participated in everything from band and choir to cheerleading and basketball. She graduated with the same cluster of fifty (50) friends she began school with twelve years earlier. Margaret's dad farmed the land and worked in town as an accountant while her mom worked at the phone company before returning to school to become an elementary school teacher. Her mother finished her coursework at their state university then relocated to the same school district as Margaret to complete the student teaching requirement. Margaret commented on the unique

experience it was to teach her mom professional skills after growing up with mom teaching her life-skills. “It was kind of neat, an interesting role reversal because I was able to mentor her through lesson plans and all that stuff.”

Margaret could not recall her first encounter with an individual with a disability. “It’s so hard because I don’t really segregate to know, ‘Oh, this person has a disability or not.’” When a clarifying question was asked regarding her experience with learning alongside a child, a middle schooler, high schooler, or college student with a disability, she shared a personal struggle.

Now mind you, I went to Ms. Sullivan. I don’t think I had an IEP, but I had to go to Ms. Sullivan’s room because I had a hard time comprehending, still do. I still need to adapt with instructional strategies, but I don’t remember anybody in elementary, middle, or high school having learning problems or being able to pinpoint them. Gosh, in college, no.

When Margaret first started teaching she would notice some learning problems with kids but would just attempt to tackle each obstacle to ensure student success. As an administrator, Dr. Bancroft can make certain students do not fall through the cracks, as Frederick’s example illustrates.

I think Frederick while he wasn’t my first encounter, he’s one that stands out. I had a first grade student who I knew something was wrong. I mean, he didn’t know his colors in either language. It was alarming to me.

Dr. Bancroft sought out the school psychologist to assess Frederick since this six year old couldn’t write his name. However, the psychologist was not able to adequately assess the student because he was an English Language Learner (ELL). Dr. Bancroft passionately

explained how she had to involve the area special education director to observe the student before he fell through the cracks, “and sure enough he’s now in a specialized learning disabled room because he does have problems.” In this example, Dr. Bancroft saw herself as an advocate. Once Frederick had the necessary supports, he was “moved to an inclusion room where additional staff could provide him with extra help.” Dr. Bancroft claims that she doesn’t see differences “unless it’s a behavioral thing that would disrupt” or impede the learning of others. Dr. Bancroft further described the students in the Mentally Challenged Specialized (MCS) program housed on the campus of Pleasantville Elementary School.

If they can be functioning in the *general education* classroom...for example, we have one MCS student that goes to fifth grade with her peers and mind you she’s working on writing her name, but she sits there and writes her name and does her math, her level stuff, but she’s sitting among her peers so I wouldn’t be able to, I mean I know her, but I wouldn’t be able to pick her out.

*[Did Dr. Bancroft not notice individuals with disabilities because of her personal struggle with comprehension and her need to seek support outside the general education classroom? Was it her normal? As I reflect on my own childhood with a sister with a visual impairment, did I notice others with disabling conditions or would they all appear normal in my lens? Is Dr. Bancroft’s attitude about disability shaped by her own personal struggle? In the review of literature in Chapter 2, did the Kennedy’s view individuals as different in light of having a sister with intellectual disabilities, or are differences taught in the neighborhoods, schools, or through media?]*

Principal of Northside Elementary School: Dr. Samuel Howe

At Northside Elementary School I was greeted by the office staff, confirming my appointment with the principal, and sat among family members in a spacious office area. Within minutes, I was greeted by Dr. Samuel Howe, Principal of Northside Elementary School. Dr. Howe led me to his office to again question the purpose of the study and the interview because he could not recall what he “does differently for the special education population that isn’t done for every kid.”

#### Samuel Howe’s Background and Reflections on Disability

Samuel Howe was born and raised in a large urban city with a population almost reaching 500,000. The area is famous for its cross cultural and multilingual heritage. He was the son of a police officer, “so it was pretty strict as far as we didn’t mess up. We didn’t do anything wrong as dad was always there, even when we didn’t know he was there.” Sam described childhood in this rough, urban southeastern city where he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD),

The things I kind of went through as a kid I reflect back on kids now, especially with kids that don’t fit in all the way, kind of like my favorite kids, the ones I’m kind of drawn to.

Sam explained how people recognize his accomplishments with his doctorate credentials, but he tells them how he “literally finished high school with a 1.3 GPA.” He claims that he had no interest in school and “very few teachers I ran into were helpful, but there were teachers though that instead of regular curriculum, they would do different things.” Sam shares the story of how one English teacher viewed this sports enthusiast, not the least bit interested in diagramming sentences, and charged him with editing the sports section of

the school newspaper. “So, I was the sports editor for the school newspaper and thoroughly enjoyed that. I wrote and wrote, but I wouldn’t sit there and diagram sentences, I couldn’t.” Sam also explains how growing up with ADHD set his mind into thinking he was not going to go to college. “I worked on the docks for a while and realized that this is going to kill me early and I need to do something, so I decided I was going to try it,” college.

Sam recalls that his first encounter with an individual with a disability was “probably as a kid in school, we would have kids in a wheelchair, or kids with some type of disability.” He expressed that while he witnessed the jokes and inappropriate treatment, he “always tried to set the example of being respectful. I think that comes from home too, being respectful, not identifying or looking at the disability, just looking at the person.”

Sam shared two stories; one about his father-in-law’s handicap placard and the second was about the time he took his brother shopping, but the handicap spot was occupied. “I had to get a prescription filled for my father-in-law and my younger brother was riding with me in my father-in-law’s car. He pointed out the handicap placard and to a handicap spot.” Sam explained to his younger brother that it would not be right to use the handicap spot, “that spot is for somebody that’s going to need it.” The summer prior, Sam recalled being with his brother in his wheelchair-equipped van. “Some knuckleheaded person in the striped area pulled right in there and I don’t know maybe they were thinking that it wasn’t really a parking spot. I remember getting so upset. There was not enough room for the ramp to come down and my brother could not get out.”



*[Did Sam's own struggle with ADHD lay the foundation for a special connection and/or bias for students with special needs? As he pointed out, "they are his favorite kids". Do we all hold a partiality to students that are like us in some way? Does a school leader with a disability have a predisposition to students that are at-risk or do school leaders, ironically ensure extra supports are in place so failure is not an option? Is Sam's impartiality reflected in his leadership? Personally, as a state-certified interpreter for the deaf, am I partial to individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing? Of course! If I can ease in their communication struggles with the general public, I gladly offer. Is this reflected in my leadership? Most definitely, my staff seeks out my personal opinion as it relates to educating students who are deaf/hard of hearing or deaf-blind, over students with emotional challenges. Is that due in part to my disposition to this disability category, my education and experience, or both?]*

#### Dr. Bancroft Leadership Preparation and Experience

Margaret attended a university, out of her home state, for her undergraduate degree. "I knew a long time ago when I was little, that I wanted to be a teacher because I would play school with my sister. I'd come home and teach her everything I learned." Upon graduation from the land-grant state university, Margaret explained the supply outnumbered the demand for teachers in that college town so she was forced to look out of state for her first teaching position. Margaret located family in this rapidly growing southwestern state and attained a job in this large urban school district.

I moved down here and was just so excited to have my own classroom. At first I couldn't believe I'm getting paid for this because I did absolutely love it that first year. I don't know what I taught the kids, but I loved it! I learned so much from

those kids and just was so excited to be in the profession and then when you can't pay your bills, you are like, wait a minute here, what did I do?

Margaret's teaching experience encompassed a variety of elementary grades, serving students with diverse needs.

I had 36 ELL kids my first year and I spoke one or two words of Spanish. I think I actually had a D in Spanish in college and barely made it through a second time with a C-, so I'm not a big language person.

After a year at that school, Margaret moved across town to be closer to her family and taught 1<sup>st</sup> grade in the same school district.

I can remember going from where I had 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELL kids, some kids couldn't read and didn't know the language, to this first grade class where some of the kids were coming in reading because you didn't have all those other issues necessarily with language and all the language barriers. I can remember saying, 'Oh my gosh, these 1<sup>st</sup> graders are so smart.'

After another year, Margaret relocated to a different elementary school in the district to teach 1<sup>st</sup> grade for several more years. She then became an ELL Specialist and was reassigned to other sites before being appointed as an Assistant Principal, where she was split between two elementary schools. "Within three months, one principal went out on medical leave. So, part-time I was split and was running a building, brand new, didn't know what I was doing really." Four months later a principal was appointed. Margaret Bancroft shared story after story of hands-on leadership experiences that were provided to her by each principal mentor. For example, while teaching at one elementary school, the school principal modeled how to treat people and involve the community. The

school's principal was compared to Mother Teresa for having the gift of giving.

Margaret vividly recalled an interaction between the principal and the UPS driver.

The UPS driver came in and the principal introduced herself and greeted the driver. He responded, 'I've been delivering the UPS deliveries for four years and nobody has ever stopped and asked me how I was doing, so thank you.' All those experiences of how she treated people, stuck with me. People walk through our campus; we want to create this culture of care.

After several years in the classroom, Margaret pursued her master's degree with an on-site program offered from an out of state university concentrating on administration and supervision before being appointed a school administrator and furthering her education with a doctorate in Leadership. While Dr. Bancroft pursued and completed a bachelors, masters, and a doctorate degree in education, the coursework to prepare her in working with students with disabilities was scarce. Dr. Margaret Bancroft described one course, possibly called Diverse Needs, which she took in her undergraduate program. "I do not claim to be an expert in special education and I always play really stupid when it comes to special ed." When asked what courses would have helped prepare her for teaching in or leading a school with students with disabilities, she suspected more law courses, but qualified it with, "The thing is, in my mind, I don't really separate it. What's good for them is good for every kid." After entering the profession, she took Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) courses right away. "It teaches acceptance and trying to meet all their needs, trying to meet every child's needs or at least being aware of their needs and then trying to address them." Once Dr. Bancroft entered her administrative career, she completed a couple of Autism trainings as well as yearly policy

regulation updates provided by the district. While Dr. Bancroft feels it helps to have kids with disabilities on her campus, she shares the difficulty. “Sometimes it’s a challenge as we’ve had a couple that we’ve had to restrain constantly,” but while it’s a conundrum, she professes that inclusion does help the student body population as a whole. Dr. Bancroft provided an example of a time when she was in a 4<sup>th</sup> grade-level meeting and one of the teachers, a second year inclusion teacher, discussed the struggles of meeting the needs of students who function at a significantly lower academic level. The grade-level chair was able to pipe in and offer concrete advice. With that example, Dr. Bancroft believes university coursework that focuses on collaboration and differentiating instruction, with all students, would be greatly beneficial for educators and future school leaders.

During her assistant principalship, Dr. Bancroft gleaned valuable experiences from the assigned principals as well.

Each principal had his/her strength; one cared absolutely about kids first and foremost and taught me how to put kids first. I can remember one time we were doing lunch duty and he said to me ‘Margaret, did you realize there was a kid standing there trying to get your attention?’ Sometimes, ya know you get so busy and you miss the little, ya know it’s not little stuff, but you miss some of those opportunities.

Another principal ran the school comparable to a “well-oiled machine, it was so well put together, everyone knew their roles, everybody did it, there was not a frivolous side, and everything worked there.” The third school leader taught Dr. Bancroft how to be a cheerleader for all kids. After two years of being an assistant principal, Dr. Bancroft

embraced the challenge of the principalship position that greeted her at Pleasantville Elementary School, a school in need of massive rehab—both literally and figuratively. “When I pulled up, there was this big orange dumpster out front; they were in the middle of rehab. It was just, here you are, its demolition zone, and good luck teaching the kids.”

*[Preparing educational leaders for inclusive education is clearly limited as outlined in the study by Haller et al. (1994) and the voice of Dr. Bancroft. What proved to be fascinating was Dr. Bancroft’s desire to have more knowledge in the area of law, as reinforced by the literature, but explains her rationale in terms of instructional methodologies. If translated appropriately, when a student with a disability has effective instruction, then compliance with IEPs is a non-issue. However, when instruction is less than adequate, parents/guardians will invoke their due process rights leaving a site leader, not familiar with the laws, in a precarious position. A review of the coursework delineated for Dr. Bancroft’s degrees outlined one law course, which could have included a segment on special education, but not a single class on differentiating instruction, professional collaboration, or supervising/evaluating specialized programs.*

*As a school leader, my personal leadership preparation program focused on the leadership and managerial aspects of running a school building. Instructional leadership was fashioned in ways to supervise and evaluate the core subjects, not the functional skills classrooms or specialized programs. Upon completion of the Master’s program, this large district required a year-long Leadership Program before administrative appointment, in which special education provided a heavy compliance strand. As a school principal of a special school for students with significant disabilities, I view compliance secondary to instruction. After eleven years of site leadership and*

*zero due process cases, families proclaim that teachers that can task analyze the goals/benchmarks in an IEP so the student can achieve success drives their satisfaction.]*

#### Dr. Howe's Leadership Preparation and Experience

Sam expressed gratitude for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's), "I applied and was accepted. I probably wouldn't have gotten in anywhere else with my GPA." Sam obtained his undergraduate degree in elementary education with a minor in military history.

I had no idea what I wanted to go into. Honest, no idea what I wanted to go into and I saw that most of the girls were in Elementary Education. I know, it's terrible, but I loved it. I loved it! I loved working with the kids, I loved my classes, and it was all good.

He completed Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and then entered the U.S Air Force. "I think the military was really good for a lot of responsibility for a young person just coming out of college, as a military officer."

Sam originally wanted to be a pilot, but with the end of the Vietnam War he had to enter the Air Force in an area they had open. Sam spent a year teaching since the military's reduction-in-force, and then returned as an executive officer in a security squadron. Sam served for approximately eleven years where he gleaned "a lot of experiences; supervisory and leadership." His last duty assignment was as Executive Officer of the Red Flag Squadron.

While in the military, Sam Howe completed a Master's Degree at a state university. "I got my Master's in Criminal Justice, so I tell people that I was the original Kindergarten Cop." After serving in the U.S. Air Force, Sam moved to the southwestern

part of the U.S., opened a very successful security firm and was employed as an elementary school teacher in this large urban school district. With the construction boom in the city, Sam had to choose between the security firm and teaching, “I made a choice, I said you know what, I’m going to stay with education, that’s where my heart is and I haven’t been sorry that I did that.”

Sam’s first year of teaching between college and the military occurred in an inner-city middle school.

I had no idea really about being a teacher, people say you got the training, but I think unless you get into a school, see the other good teachers, and see what it looks like. I’m visual--I need to see what it looks like. I need to see that structure since I didn’t have that opportunity.

Sam described how the school didn’t have any textbooks and how the atmosphere was similar to a war zone. “Literally, the teacher next door to me was stabbed twice in one year...stabbed twice in one year.” With a caseload of students who could not read and no available books, Sam purchased a set of novels to “try to make a difference with these kids.”

It was a beautiful thing because by the end of that school year, the kids really, I mean I ended up having a real classroom where kids were actually enjoying reading and the class was recognized at an assembly for the growth they made. I remember that feeling of making a difference with those kids. I always would remember how rough it was to begin with.

Upon being offered employment in this southwestern urban school district, Sam informed the district recruiters his teaching wishes, “I want to teach at your roughest

school. I want your kids that need it the most! I ended up at an elementary school on the Westside, a 6<sup>th</sup> grade center.” Sam laughed at the thought of this 6<sup>th</sup> grade center being the roughest when compared to his experience at that inner city middle school, but emphasized that good teachers make a difference in these type of “out of control” schools and their good teaching is “worth a million bucks”. “There is no reason that teachers stay at schools like these unless they are just totally dedicated; that’s where their heart is.” Sam stayed at that school for six years teaching reading and becoming a widely-observed math instructor by other 6<sup>th</sup> grade center teachers. He claims it was the middle school experience and working with the kids at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade center that motivated him. “I guess I just kept on going from there. I was hooked.”

After teaching at a 6<sup>th</sup> grade center, Sam followed the principal to a teach primary grades in a prime six school, where he later became an assistant principal. Once Sam realized that education was going to be his life-long career, he returned to graduate school for an endorsement in administration. “Once I got into administration, I said you know what, I really want to learn as much as I can, so my doctorate is in educational leadership.” Dr. Howe completed his doctorate program through a popular online university.

As an Assistant Principal, Sam shared story after story of the principal mentors he had along the way. “I remember being the new AP monitor at the assembly. The kids started going bananas and I’m looking at the teachers like, ‘Come on, you got to get your kids’.” The principal called Sam into her office after the assembly to determine what happened. She took Sam into the next assembly and modeled presence. “She just walked up and down. I’m like, my God, so simple!” Dr. Howe instructs his assistant principal to watch



him, follow him, and allow him to mentor her in all the ways that not only makes your presence known, but conveys to the kids that they are being reinforced for doing the right things.

Dr. Howe could not recall a single class that helped to prepare him to teach or lead a school with students with disabilities. He believes future leaders should take classes on working with kids, understanding inclusion and how important it is for kids to do as much as possible in the regular education setting, as well as working with various cultures.

I know a lot of schools are doing it now, teaching sheltered instruction strategies, how to work with second language kids, cultural sensitivity, even kids coming out of a predominately black community, there's culture there that you have to work with and be able to blend culturally to work with your community.

When Dr. Howe was asked about the college courses that helped to prepare him for the middle school students or students with diverse needs, he humbly shared his undergraduate experience.

You must understand, in college I got out with a 2.5, so I was basically B's, but mostly C's, trying to get me through. I think the thing that prepared me the most was certain teachers that I ran into. It wasn't the coursework; it was the positive people that I felt wanted to take the time to help me, individually.

Dr. Howe shared a profound story of one of his professors that still stirs fire in his voice. "She told us that on her application to this HBCU she indicated in the race section, 'If it makes any difference, then I don't want to be affiliated!'" Dr. Howe described the blonde haired, blue eyed instructor that was "just one of the most, ONE of THE most

wonderful people that I've ever run into and she really helped influence me." He emphasized that it was these types of teachers that took a personal interest in helping as the most influential kinds of teachers.

I was drawn to her right then and there when she said, 'if it makes a difference, I don't want to be affiliated!' I said, 'You Go Girl!' That was the perfect answer to that; it's not about that...it's about connecting with students that makes all the difference in the world.

When Sam taught reading to the students at that inner-city middle school, it "wasn't all about just teaching reading, it was about connecting with kids, even older kids." Dr. Howe has infused that mantra in his own teaching and his leadership: it's not just about teaching, but about connecting with kids, all kids!

*[Is there a relationship between Sam's personal struggle with ADHD, his success in teaching the at-risk students at the inner city middle school, and his need to make a difference with "those kids"? Exactly who are those kids? Are they your weak, tired, heavy-laden, second language learners, poor, disabled, or any student that he sees as a challenge?*

*A review of collegiate classes in educational leadership does not list courses on connecting with all kids. Can the love for the profession be taught? Can a university leadership preparation program teach prospective school leaders how to love all students, regardless of race, creed, socio-economic status, or disability? Are separate classes on special education then needed, or can preparation programs infuse special education best practices into the current curriculum? For example, courses on*

*Supervision and Evaluation can include specialized programs in addition to the core content classes.]*

**Response to Research Question #1: In what way does a school leader's leadership preparation program impact the education of students with disabilities?**

Respondents were asked about their college leadership preparation programs as well as administrative professional development offered by the school district. Both school principals were K-8 elementary principals certified in elementary education and educational leadership. While one school leader recalled a class possibly entitled Diverse Learners, both expressed the need for additional college coursework that focused on differentiating instruction and working with various students, not just students with disabilities. While additional training in special education law was brought up in one interview, instructional methodologies for students with various learning styles dominated both interviews. Upon being appointed as an administrator, both school leaders completed an intensive leadership development training required by the district, but there was no mention of any special education sessions during that year-long training. Since being appointed principal, both attended district trainings that included sessions on Autism, Inclusive Practices, and law updates. Interestingly enough, both school leaders possessed doctorate degrees, encompassing over 8 years of education but only one university course related to special education.

According to the vast amount of literature on preparing educational leaders for inclusive education, training on special education issues in administrative preparation programs is minimal and administrators are not adequately prepared to meet the demands of managing special education programs. Principals across the country are required to

assume increasingly greater responsibilities relative to the education of students with disabilities despite minimal training and preparation. Failure to ensure that school leaders are able to identify best practices ensures that the quality of instruction for every child is left to chance, which again is contrary to the due diligence evidenced by these two schools.

**Research Question #2: In what way does a school leader's leadership experience impact the education of students with disabilities?**

Respondents were asked about their teaching experience as well as their administrative experience. Both principals taught primarily in elementary schools and their first assignments were with at-risk students. Upon being appointed as assistant principals, Dr.'s Bancroft and Howe mutually credited their professional growth to administrative mentors.

According to the extensive literature on the expanding role of the principalship, our school leaders are ill-prepared to successfully provide quality instruction and management to special education programs. The focus on procedural compliance often overshadowed efforts to provide quality instruction, which is contrary to the data evidenced by these two schools, but could be evident in the other 211 schools that did not meet the criteria to participate in the study.

**Dr. Bancroft's Leadership Philosophy and Strategies for Students with Disabilities**

Upon her arrival, Dr. Bancroft described the culture when she arrived at Pleasantville as "unique", particularly the special education population.

Not that I came and saved the world or anything, but when I first came here all the kids, if they had an IEP, would get service in the back annex. Ironically, all of

our halls have names and the hall back there is the Twilight Zone. It is way back there.

The assistant principal, Ms. Farrell added “no one goes back there and whenever somebody’s back there, nobody can find them. There are no classes, there was nothing out there, just unaccounted for kids.” The back annex came into being years prior to the current administration. Ms. Farrell described how the general education teachers did not want to relocate classrooms due to their closeness with colleagues and the opportunities the current classroom placements allowed for student socialization. “However, the special education teachers jumped at the opportunity to have the back classrooms to have the ability to distance themselves.” This resulted in less accountability for those teachers.

The reality was that students in those segregated special education classes fell further and further behind. The teachers utilized their own non-grade level curriculum, self-created non-instructionally based projects, and students often missed core instruction in the general education setting due to poor scheduling of pull-out time.

When the new administration began in 2006, they discovered “more students were seen roaming the hallways on campus on their way to the Twilight Zone” and when the site leaders attempted to converse with these particular students, they had little response and appeared confused. According to Ms. Farrell, “It became apparent that these students were outsiders in their own school. Sadly, a stigma was created.” When these students were not succeeding a special education label was slapped on them and they were sent to the Twilight Zone to receive their education. The school leaders clearly determined that the stigma needed to be changed to ensure student success, hence the start of inclusion.

Ms. Farrell reported that once all the teachers accepted the importance of the specialized services provided through special education and learned “to value the differences, differentiate instruction, and embrace these students” students immediately started showing growth at a quicker pace. Dissolving the back annex rooms and making it the specialists’ rooms “enabled the students with disabilities to become a part of the school community, build friendships, and for teachers to build accountability for the success of ALL students.”

*[Is it ironic that instruction for special education occurred down the hallway entitled the Twilight Zone? The Twilight Zone is an American television anthology series that hosts a mixture of drama, psychological thriller, fantasy, science fiction, suspense, or horror, often concluding with an unexpected twist. As the review of the literature in Chapter 2 outlined, perspectives and contexts of disability could be compared to these same categories, especially horror. It has been four decades since the inception of equality in education for individuals with disabilities. I was saddened to learn that kids were forced to learn in the Twilight Zone, but pleased to hear how they were transported to the same celestial halls as the other Pleasantville students. To date, when I visit schools across the country, I still witness classrooms for students with disabilities being housed in school basements, chiller rooms, closets, and small offices. Even when I’ve worked with architects building new schools, there is a sense that these programs should be housed in the back of the school building or even portables; which is as archaic as separate water fountains, but sadly still happening.]*

Dr. Bancroft started at Pleasantville mid-year. Due to the timing of her appointment, she was able to conduct a school-wide needs assessment to determine what resources the

teachers needed in their classrooms. “Right away *Dr. Bancroft* went to work with the region in getting stuff, like computers.” According to the assistant principal, Dr. Bancroft’s arrival was marked by a change in expectations.

There was a priority shift from paper-like items from teachers working with pleasing administrative responsibilities to what’s best for kids and changing from what the paper product looks like to see what the interaction with the kids look like.

Dr. Bancroft affirmed that a while a good plan is definitely important, collaborating on how to really deliver it is the key to instruction.

So, by the next year, I stated communicating that we were moving more towards inclusion. The kids needed to be exposed to grade-level concepts if they were going to have to take this criterion-referenced test. They might as well be exposed to it so at least they’ve seen it and they can make the best guess.

While none of Dr. Bancroft’s previous school experiences included inclusion, she asserted that “it just really made sense that if they’re going to be expected to pass this test, they better be exposed to the material.” While it was a difficult task to make the cultural shift from my kids to our kids, the teachers were taking notice of the changes happening at the school including new computers, the elimination of paper ration, and the physical sense of belonging as evidenced by the facility changes.

I just want everyone to feel like they like to be here; it’s a place that gives them a sense of belonging and a sense of ‘I make a difference here.’ I love this place, even though it’s a 52 year old building, I love it! Of course, it’s about the kids, but also our students don’t necessarily have a great house to go home to, so their

school is something they value, take pride in, our tortoise habitat, and our murals, as I walk by, I know I smile.

The assistant principal testified that Dr. Bancroft came in and “was just trying to build climate, trying to build trust.” However, when the test results surfaced from the first interim assessments, Dr. Bancroft danced on the table at a staff meeting because the students demonstrated tremendous growth in student achievement. “I don’t think we conceptualized how much because then when we got our criterion-referenced test data the following year and were deemed high achieving, we didn’t realize what that meant and we were excited.” With the high expectations communicated and realized, Pleasantville Elementary School administration started to track every student.

We don’t look and see if they have an IEP because really I could care, I just want to know if they are red or green. So, it’s every kid, it doesn’t matter if they have an IEP, their disability, we don’t even care about subgroups. I guess I shouldn’t say that, but it’s like we don’t care that they’re black, white, etc. All I care about is red and green. Are you red, yellow, or green? I want everybody green.

Dr. Bancroft explains how they extrapolate the data and it shows that there are kids “right now that are non-IEP kids that have higher needs than our IEP students.” Identifying a student by the color green, yellow, or red, is a “combination of our assessments and entrance exam.” The administrative team found that so many of the students were entering school two to three grade levels below standards, so the school’s literacy specialist assesses each student to give an accurate portrait of that student’s abilities to the teacher, without interrupting instructional time. For students who are in need, those “who are yellow or red, they don’t go to specials, they go to our Tier 2, Brain Lab.”



*[What color am I? Sounds like the old school method of creating ability reading groups of redbirds, bluebirds, and robins, whereas the robins were the lowest and the groups never changed. Once you were categorized in that group that is where you stayed the whole year, no matter what progress was made. How exciting to teach advocacy skills in the elementary grades. Knowing your level, not based on a subjective grade, but by true growth, instills ownership in learning, for all the stakeholders.]*

The Pleasantville Elementary School administration monitors the progress of every student and puts into place the necessary supports for success. They wrote grants to infuse positive behavioral supports, as well as before and after school tutoring. At the management level, the administrative team resourcefully used grant money for these budgeted allocations, such as after-school tutoring, allowing them additional instructional funds for other resources for the students. Dr. Bancroft attributes the luxury of site-based management to the concept of the empowerment. It “was crucial for us to be able to take that budget number and allocate it how we want because it’s the people that make a difference, not the stuff.”

*[“It’s the people that make the difference, not the stuff.” How many times in education is money thrown at schools to purchase stuff, when we need people; human hands that know how to reach into a mind or touch a heart? An adult that can sit alongside a child and listen to them read, solve a math problem, or construct a novel. If the research is accurate that the number one indicator of student success is dependent on the teacher, we need to ensure schools are equipped with people, not just stuff.]*

Once Pleasantville staff embraced the empowerment model, grade levels took charge.

It's sort of like having different franchises. I am the district head of McDonald's and then this one is 3<sup>rd</sup> grade McDonald's, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade McDonald's, and so on. It's run like a business and they take ownership in it from assisting with hiring, to making sure effective practices are happening, and sharing strategies across grade levels to vertical articulation.

Dr. Bancroft conveyed how the grade levels are involved in interviewing prospective team members as well as visiting other schools that are making gains in math, reading, and/or writing. Grade levels also review the data sheets to discuss grading. If "all your grades in your classroom are A's and B's, yet half of your class is in the red, what is the problem?" Pleasantville administration also explained staff is not only empowered at the curriculum level. Ms. Farrell describes how general education teachers are involving themselves more in their students' IEPs. "For the first time grade-level teachers are really getting involved in the IEP, vocalizing 'I don't feel that so-and-so should be pulled out for this, he is succeeding with me in the classroom.' That is significant change!" Dr. Bancroft professes that the general education teachers are taking on an ownership in their kids that are on their rosters. The special education staff may come in and help, or "work in the classroom with some non-special ed kids, and they may co-teach a lesson." Historically, inclusion classes were sentenced to the worse teachers. "Now, I tell the grade-level chairs that the best teachers need to be teaching our inclusion classrooms and they actually fight over it, wanting to be the inclusion teacher."

The administration at Pleasantville Elementary School strongly believes that every child needs to be in the general education setting as much as possible; however, the

current policies and systems in place for students with behavioral concerns needs refining.

While I don't want to put them out, if they do this, then they get this consequence like everyone else. If we're all for equality, which I am, then they should have the same consequence or be held to the same consequence as the other students, otherwise they're never taught that consequence. How are they going to be successful in middle school and on up in life if they've never had those consequences?

When asked what systems the administration put in place to assist the IEP AYP population maintain proficiency status for consecutive years, the response was a resounding,

we treat them like every other kid! They don't know they have an IEP; the stereotype has been eliminated. Everyone is responsible for doing 100%; everyone's responsible to get to green. If you have an IEP and you're yellow, then you just have to work harder, but I would say that to any kid. We don't treat them different.

The caveat to that would be "when you're teaching life skills; how to use the restroom, how to eat, and do those basic skills, then you can't have them inclusive all day because they wouldn't be getting those life skills."

*[The research cited in Chapter 2 regarding the principal's attitude on inclusion can vary based on the disability category, which was a resounding factor in this interview. Students with disabilities can be successfully included in the general education classroom, as long as they have the intellectual abilities. If a student has an intellectual*

*delay and needs more of a functional curriculum, s/he would not receive that daily living skills instruction as part of the grade-level content, therefore should be educated in a specialized program, outside the general education classroom.*

*Contrary to the documented trend noted in Chapter 2's literature review, the school leaders' perception of students' limitations rather than student possibilities was not evident at this school. Pleasantville clearly focuses on students' possibilities, not deficits.]*

Finally, the administrative team affirmed that

it's not about the IEP; it's about the child and what the child needs. I think just looking at every child, trying to get them to their goals, and having them to be able to verbalize it too. It's part of the staff expectations when you're hired here. Part of the culture of care and meeting the needs of every child in your classroom whomever comes to the door because the parents send the best kids they have and we're going to try to meet the needs of those kids.

Dr. Bancroft ended the interview with a story about Kelly, a young girl who lacked self-confidence, demonstrated no self-esteem, and was below grade level last year. This year she "stands up in front of a group and does this whole spiel about her book report and I'm thinking is this the same child?" Dr. Bancroft credits the student's success to the climate in the classroom, where both the general education and special education teacher work collaboratively to not only improve academics, but build confidence. "Kelly is at grade level now, going to pass the CRT's with an IEP," and received the Inspiration Award at the state-level. What did the Pleasantville Elementary Staff do to contribute to this young

lady's success? They did not see the disability. They removed the label, started with where she was, and determined the steps that were necessary to help her progress.

*[Which of Dr. Bancroft's vast experiences prepared her for running an award-winning inclusive school? Was it her personal struggle in school, her educational coursework, or the hands-on experiences with second language students that tugged at her heart to learn? Did the administrative mentors play a role or was it the scare tactic that the Twilight Zone contributed to her student's low self-esteem trigger the full inclusive philosophy? I believe it is a combination of all the above factors. As a school principal, my own personal experiences with individuals with disabilities, my educational journey, and the years I personally co-taught in an inclusive setting helped formulate my personal philosophy of educating students with significant disabilities. While I currently serve as a special school principal, I believe that all students should start in the general education setting unless they are more than two grade-levels behind and/or pose a safety risk to themselves and/or others. With that, there is a need for separate programs and separate schools for the betterment of education for everyone involved.]*

#### Dr. Howe's Leadership Philosophy and Strategies for Students with Disabilities

I think my role with kids with disabilities is the same as the role with any kid, I need to be the model. As an educational leader you set the tone, you've got to set the tone. These are my bestest kids! In fact, I make it a point to go out of my way to make sure they get a smile or they get attention, a hug, or whatever the case may be.

Dr. Howe emphasized the need for the educational leader to set the example on the treatment of students as well as the culture and atmosphere of the school. "I won't accept

anything else for our school. I tell people we're kinder, gentler school and you will be kind and gentle to my children or you will find somewhere else to be."

Upon Dr. Howe's arrival to Northside, he described how the students with limited English proficiency were segregated and were told they couldn't speak in their native language while at school. Dr. Howe slowly "weeded out those kinds of people that just didn't meet my philosophy or weren't right for kids, and technically when those kids come in with that second language, that's a disability also.

Dr. Howe tearfully told story after story on how the community responds to the needs of the school.

They want to do anything they can to raise money to help their kids; they want their kids to be successful! They are so proud of their school and when they hear they are one of the few schools with a lot of second language learning kids and our community doing as well as the kids are doing, they are so proud. They are so proud!

Dr. Howe describes how the community approached him with a fundraising idea that entails renting out the spots in the parking lot.

For \$10.00 a spot, my whole parking lot is like a flea market and everyone has the opportunity to shop from each other. They bring stuff out of their garages; they bring their hibachis and sell tacos, tamales, clothing, and knick knacks.

More importantly, Dr. Howe emphasized that these weekend opportunities gives the community cause to come together. "They see their neighbors, they meet each other, they're socializing, their kids are out there, the dads, moms, grandmothers, they're all out there and, culturally, I think for a community that is really important."

*[Which of Dr. Howe's experiences prepared him for running a kinder, gentler school? Was it his personal struggle with ADHD, his tumultuous educational journey, or the challenge those middle school students posed as they tugged on his heart to assist them in succeeding? Did the administrative mentors play a role or was it the influence of his brother, father-in-law, or the bold teacher at the HBCU that contributed to his I-want-your-kids-that-need-it-the-most philosophy? Again, I believe it is a combination of all these factors.]*

Educationally, Dr. Howe attributes special education laws as a result of “people not doing the right thing.” Many times he sees the laws as “bizarre as to why would legislatures have to tell anyone that rule, as it’s obvious.” One example he shared involved Response to Instruction (RTI). Dr. Howe explained how, upon arrival to Northside, a lot of second language and minority kids were being pushed into special education. While Dr. Howe prided the staff on “trying the interventions to ensure that a child is not being placed into special education inappropriately, but there comes a time when you realize the child may need to be tested” and current policies and regulations lengthen the duration of these interventions, thereby delaying possible supports another program could offer.

According to Dr. Howe, RTI is just one way to evaluate learning, “you have to assess and progress monitor at every school, which is why it is one of our five basics.” Dr. Howe outlined the five basics at Northside Elementary School, which include: Culture of professional educators, expectations and accountability, assessment and progress monitoring, focus assistance, and effective use of resources. Those five basics were

visible on the white board in the principal's conference room and printed in a school pamphlet as the school's prescription for success.

This not only affects special education kids, but it affects all kids! Be it a second language learning kid that needs additional focus assistance, a special education kid with a handicapping condition, a kid with a mom and dad being divorced and wondering where their next meal is coming from, or a dad being sent back to Mexico. All of those kids need focused assistance in some way. It's a big umbrella we have for kids, for all kids.

When asked about the achievement gap between kids with disabilities and kids without, Dr. Howe adamantly attributed it to not only ability but instruction.

I think that there may be a difference in a sense of ability. If a kid has a learning disability, it doesn't mean that they can't learn, it means that we need to find another way to TEACH that child to be able to learn and give that child as much as possible.

Dr. Howe compares it to his personal learning experiences.

ADHD is a learning disability, if I had given up or people gave up on me as a kid, how do you become a doctor with a damn 1.3 GPA coming out of high school? It took motivation, of course, but it also took those special people that would say, 'if it makes any difference that I don't want to be affiliated.' It takes those kinds of people that are going to work with you and move you forward, so the bottom line is that there may be an achievement gap, but they haven't run into that right person that's going to be there to work with them with their disability, in spite of their disability.



The school principal at Northside Elementary School believes that educational placement is a decision that needs to be made on an individual basis for each student; site leaders must trust the teachers and staff as professionals to help make those determinations.

What we ask all teachers to do is to say if Johnny or Joe is not getting what we're giving to the whole population, you have a way to breakdown the information to address Johnny and Joe. The same thing for that kid that comes into the classroom for inclusion, s/he may not be exactly where they're supposed to be, but then show me a classroom where all the kids are exactly where they're supposed to be.

*[Contrary to the documented trend noted in Chapter 2's literature review, the school leaders' perception of students' limitations rather than student possibilities was not evident at this school. Northside also clearly focuses on students' possibilities, not deficits.]*

Dr. Howe painted the perfect inclusive setting that starts with great teachers that are well trained on inclusion. Training would encompass "how to differentiate instruction, a good monitoring system where we can make sure we see the growth of that child, as well as time for the teachers to collaborate with that special education professional." The best teachers for students with disabilities are "not my best overall teachers, but to me they're my best because they can do more. They're definitely good classroom instructors, but what I find is that they're also good people; they have a heart and want to help. It's a special person. Staff that are sensitive to the needs of all kids, I think that covers the special education kids too."

When asked about the sustainable strategies he has put into place at Northside Elementary School to assist the IEP AYP population maintain proficiency status for years, the response was nonchalant

Strategies, I would say the same ones for all kids: 1) giving them all the attention, the best teachers I can possibly give them, 2) monitoring those teachers to make sure they're doing a good job, 3) making sure those kids are feeling safe and comfortable in their environment, and 4) giving them that attention, making personal contact with them. I couldn't think of anything different, I wonder if I should.

Dr. Howe ended the interview sharing numerous success stories.

I was telling you about the one student that stayed underneath the table, the baby is just doing wonderfully now. I think of another child with autism that was really acting out. He ended up in a classroom with one of my favorite teachers that looks forward to working with kids with disabilities in the general education classroom, she's just a heart! His behavior was off the wall and she just kept working with him.

Dr. Howe explained how the student moved out of zone and while he was visiting that school, he met the student's new teacher and she claimed she "didn't even realize he was autistic." Dr. Howe shared "the really good stories" at Northside Elementary that makes an educator really appreciate their impact on kids, all kids.

### **Response to Research Question #3: In what ways do a school leader's attitudes and perceptions impact the education of students with disabilities?**

Respondents were asked numerous questions to gauge their attitude and perceptions regarding individuals with disabilities. Both school principals conveyed personal struggles with their own learning at an early age and claimed they “do not segregate” or see the disability, they just “see the person”.

According to the literature on principal attitudes on inclusion, our school leaders' perceptions are based on students' limitations rather than possibilities. This deficit model was not evident at either school or in the narratives of either principal. On the contrary, both school's staff clearly articulated that their school is a “no excuse” school and they “expect 100% from everyone”. This quite possibly could be the biggest factor separating these two schools from the others in this district..

#### **Pleasantville's Staff Perspectives on the Dr. Bancroft's Knowledge and Perceptions of Students with Disabilities**

During my time at Pleasantville Elementary School, I had the opportunity to interview the Special Education Instructional Facilitator (SEIF). The role of the SEIF is to be 1) an educational leader and advocate for students with disabilities within the school setting, 2) communicate and collaborate with the district-level special education department to maintain up-to-date information, 3) access assistance, as necessary, to assure that appropriate services to students with disabilities are appropriately addressed in compliance with District/Division procedures and applicable Federal and State Laws, and 4) serve as a resource to the school administration and staff regarding quality instruction, best practices, IEP development, and compliance issues. Mr. Edward Seguin serves as

the SEIF at Pleasantville Elementary School. As a third year transplant teacher from the east coast, Mr. Seguin feels Dr. Bancroft is knowledgeable in special education.

She's been stressing the inclusion model as beneficial for the school and with my experience before coming here, being more of a self-contained type classroom, I was a little skeptical at first because I really didn't know if that is, in fact, the best way to teach special education students, but it seems to really work. I couldn't have asked for a better administrator to be on my side and so supportive toward everything that we're doing here.

He further commented that Dr. Bancroft allows the special education team to work as the professional team they were designed to be, but avails herself whenever a need arises.

"She's always there for whatever we need...she's always there to help." When describing his principal's perceptions of students with disabilities, Mr. Seguin quickly asserted, "I believe her perceptions are the same as any other student she has at this school. She doesn't treat them any differently. She still expects 100% from all of her students, no matter who they are." When asked about the systems administration has put into place to assist the IEP AYP population maintain proficiency status, he listed the amount of programs and supports that are in place for the students, all students. Dr. Bancroft not only "stresses inclusion" but "has brought in a ton of programs, which are geared toward diverse learners. There are a lot of computer-based programs that are very visual for students to learn math and prep them for the criterion reference tests." Mr. Seguin described accommodations embedded in the software that will read to the students that have difficulty reading, which helps both the general education kids as well as the special education kids.

There are so many programs, including Saturday morning tutoring to help with our students, we have a lot of interventionists here that work with both non-IEP and IEP students so the amount of programs and support that is given to not just the special education staff, but the whole staff, I think it helps create the success that we see.

Mr. Seguin also attributed success to the team teaching model. “I see a lot more success than just having students go to a Resource Room, where they’re not given the grade-level curriculum. We’re trying to get every student to achieve with grade-level curriculum.”

Mr. Seguin described strategies such as modifying the instruction as well as working in heterogeneous small groups, but quickly qualified that it depends on the individual needs of each student.

There is definitely a need for a Resource Room and a specialized classroom, but I think that’s the biggest benefit of all, is just having the kids in the general education classroom for as long as possible to make sure they are successful in the grade-level material. You want to keep them in inclusion as much as possible, I think it’s the biggest benefit to keep them in with the general ed class as much as possible and challenge them. When it becomes too much of a challenge and there’s such a significant achievement gap where they’re really not getting it in that placement, that’s when you have to look at other possibilities.

When Mr. Seguin was asked what the ideal inclusive school would look like, he quickly stated Pleasantville Elementary School.

What’s done well is the collaboration between the teachers: special education and general education teachers. You see the success of the students no matter the

placement that they're in; they're doing something right. I see at this school that even if you have an IEP, the kids can't tell the difference between an IEP student and a non-IEP student. If I'm calling back students or another teacher is calling back students to work in a small group, it's not just going to be the IEP kids; it's going to be kids!

Mr. Seguin ended the interview with the same success story as Dr. Bancroft, emphasizing how the 5<sup>th</sup> grader started the year.

She was reading at 14 words a minute, now she's at 77 words per minute. She wasn't able to do sentences, now she's able to actually do a four paragraph essay. I don't just judge it based on academics, I also see that student at the beginning of the year, who wasn't really smiling, didn't really fit in with the other students and now I see a confident young girl that has a smile on her face so I think that's a huge success right there, not just academic, but her believing in herself.

*[The entire experience at Pleasantville Elementary School can be summed up best by Elizabeth Farrell, Founder of the Council for Exceptional Children and pioneer for special education reform, who asserted that schools had a responsibility to assist children in reaching their potential, saying:*

*The function of the school is to provide an environment in which the abilities and capacities of each individual may unfold and develop in a manner that will secure his maximum social efficiency. To secure this right environment, we must know the strength and weakness of the individual's native endowment and we must know its modifications due to his experience. With these facts determined, the school life of the child will be tempered. The environment which society created*

*for the education of the young will be so organized as to prevent the vast majority of cases the development of the problems of retardation, truancy, and conduct disorders, and will insure to all the children the opportunity to succeed, to control, and to accomplish (Kode, 2002).]*

#### Northside's Staff's Perspectives on Dr. Howe's Knowledge and Perceptions of Students with Disabilities

Before proceeding with his own interview, Dr. Samuel Howe requested I start with his special education team: School Psychologist, Special Education Teacher, and the Special Education Instructional Facilitator (SEIF), since they work closely to plan and advocate for students with disabilities.

*[Since interviewing a group of staff members was again not part of the original plan I was a bit concerned as to how two additional perceptions would impact the findings. Again, upon further reflection, this spoke volumes about Dr. Howe's leadership style; a kind of a transformational leadership. A leadership style whereby he engages others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation while trying to help them reach their full potential.]*

Ms. Kirk serves as the School Psychologist at Northside Elementary School. She has worked at the school for many years with Dr. Howe as well as the principal prior to him. Ms. Bender is in her third year at Northside as a Special Education Teacher, but brings eight years of specialized program experience with her. Mr. Pratt has been in the district for 19 years, 14 of them working in a specialized program for students with emotional disturbances, and five as a SEIF, two of the five being at Northside. All three of the educators received their educational degrees from other states and relocated to this

southwestern state for teaching positions. When asked about Dr. Howe's knowledge as it relates to students with disabilities, all three professionals concurred that he is knowledgeable and strives to stay informed.

I think he's knowledgeable, I mean he advocates for children and so I don't think he looks at it differently. He does whatever it takes for a child to be successful on this campus, regardless of an IEP or not. I think he looks for his key people to do their job well and keep him informed, but whenever we meet him, he's here for anything; discussion, just to sit and talk, in fact it's always about communication. We have at least monthly meetings with him to talk about our cases, how things have procedurally changed, and he just wants to be constantly informed about anything that goes on. He's not a principal that hides in his room, closes his door, and doesn't want to hear. He treats every child fairly, he makes sure of it! We have a mentally challenged specialized (MCS) program that he ensures are also included in all specials and lunch. Some principals I have worked with have not agreed with that, not under Dr. Howe, he has made sure to support our teachers about that of inclusion.

An example of being of assistance was shared in another story about the MCS program that had a long-term substitute teacher. "It was important that we all supported the students, we all worked hard in there, and so did he! We all were in there and he was not afraid to roll up his sleeves." The psychologist also explained how Dr. Howe searches for resources to aid struggling classroom teachers with classroom management, instead of criticizing them. When describing their principal's perceptions of students with disabilities, all three quickly asserted that Dr. Howe "doesn't treat them any differently"



and “whatever is expected from his general education teachers, he expects from me.” It is also understood that “every child will learn on our campus, everyone!” More profoundly, Dr. Howe’s school mantra was conveyed as a “no excuse school.” As this educator itinerantly helps other schools, Dr. Howe clearly leads this no excuse school!

It doesn’t matter. You can make 100 reasons why this child is not reading or why they’re not where they’re suppose to be, but it’s a no excuse school. Besides, how are we going to get them food, clothes, shelter, and those things? What are we doing to support this child to be successful in his/her classroom, regardless of disability or not?

When asked about the systems administration has put into place to assist the IEP AYP population maintain proficiency status all these years, a list of programs and interventions were shared that are tailored to the child’s needs. “We offer a lot of things at this campus that I think a lot of schools don’t always have. We also have before and after school tutoring and summer academies.” Formative assessments were also highlighted as a key to the schools success. “They are constantly taking a temperature gauge into the standards. You have kids that are making it, those that are not, and how we need to change instruction because of it.” The school psychologist also affirmed that Dr. Howe emphasizes differentiated instruction.

He goes into the classroom and that’s what he looks for; to make sure that the teachers are accommodating all the students based on their learning styles and their learning levels. He does not want to go into a classroom and see that student doing anything other than what the other students are doing and he has made that known since day one. Dr. Howe tells the staff that it’s just good teaching!

The SEIF attributed the community partnership as a key strategy to the school's success. Dr. Howe "pushes for the community support. They have parenting classes, after school English classes, and they involve the parents a lot in the school." Professional collaboration and teaming was also professed as a successful strategy. The general education teachers "send me their lesson plans so I can make necessary modifications, while still following the IEP goals." The educators strongly believed that a full continuum is necessary to ensure the individual needs of the students are being met.

I think inclusion is a good place for students that may be a year or two behind academically, but when you are so far behind, it leads to other things such as loss of interest in school, behavioral and self-esteem issues.

The special education teacher further emphasized her enjoyment of team teaching in the general education classroom.

I like it because we're helping the students. I can give her ideas and suggestions as to how she may want to attack a problem that a student might be having, if they're not getting that concept. To me the kids see that teachers are working together and that kind of motivates them to be able to collaborate with their peers as well. At first I didn't think I would like it because I like to be the queen; I'm used to being the center of everything. I also didn't know how I could feel going into someone else's classroom, but it's a really good thing. I don't just work with students with IEPs, I work with all the students and you're always going to have students that are going to struggle. I think that extra person in the classroom doesn't just benefit kids with IEP's, but it benefits all students!

The interview concluded with several student success stories. One story focused on a student that was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade last year who could not read at all. “I wanted to cry, oh my God, he couldn’t read. He just couldn’t read. A year later he’s now reading on a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level. I tell everybody that I see fire in him, he wants to learn.” Mr. R. choked up while telling a story about a little boy in the MCS classroom that has not made any progress in years, but within the first half of this year, with a new special education teacher that teaches a picture exchange communication system, he not only has made huge improvements but his behaviors have significantly de-escalated. “He’s making sounds and trying to form words. This teacher loves kids, loves to teach, and is making a huge difference.”

*[In the early 1900s Superintendent William Maxwell from the New York City Schools proclaimed that one of the prime checks of public education is to develop each child, fit or unfit, to his highest capacity, as far as conditions will permit, for the work and enjoyment of life (Kode, 2002).]*

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4, which were based on the lived experiences and perceptions of public elementary school leaders who have demonstrated significant improvement in the academic achievement of their special education student populations. Using narrative inquiry and rich descriptions, I presented key findings within the context of the school communities where the principals work, their words and reflections (along with the perceptions of those who work with them and for them), and as a direct responses to the three research questions that guided this study. In sum, findings revealed that each of the participants were committed to inclusive leadership practices, a focus on student achievement over student ability, and their own key prescription for serving as effective educational leaders for students with disabilities.

In the sections that follow, I discuss these findings using research-constructed themes within the context of related literature on the perspectives and contexts of disability (Barnes, 1997; Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997; Evans, 2004; Baker, Mixner & Harris, 2007), education policy related to the education of students with special needs (ESEA, 1965; EAHCA, 1983; IDEA, 1990; NCLB, 2001; Osgood, 2005; Peterson, 2007; Alexander & Alexander, 2009; S 2781, 2010) and the shift toward inclusion in educational leadership (Reynolds, 1962; Dunn, 1968; EAHCA, 1975; Will, 1986; Sawyer et al., 1994; Alexander & Alexander, 2009). Using direct quotations and concepts from the participant interviews, these themes are: (1) Inclusion Leadership Practices: “Which Ones are the Inclusion Kids?” (2) Achievement over Ability: “We Don’t Care if They are Black or White...Just Red or Green” and (3) Instructional Leadership: The

“Prescription for Success”. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for educational leadership preparation, policy, and practice, and recommendations for future research.

Theme 1—Inclusive Leadership Practices: “Which Ones are the Inclusion Kids?”

When Dr. Bancroft at Pleasantville Elementary was asked what the ideal inclusive school would look like, she passionately painted the portrait of a warm, caring, welcoming environment. “Where everybody just loves to be here and wants to do what’s best for kids. The kids love coming, they feel safe...secure...and valued. It doesn’t matter if they have an IEP or not.” When prodded, she qualified her response with a story about their experience with the inclusive practice committee. “I don’t know how many times when the inclusion people came out for our inclusion grant and inspiration awards, every time we took them into a classroom, they kept asking, ‘Which ones are the inclusion kids?’ We had to ask the special education teacher because we don’t know.” I am sure this spoke volumes to those committee members and, unknowing to them, realized the goal of Rosa’s Law.

President Barack Obama signed Rosa’s Law (S. 2781), replacing the term ‘mental retardation’ in Federal law with ‘intellectual disability’. Rosa’s law is hopefully larger than just changing the lexicon. Rosa’s Law was signed twenty years after, IDEA (1990) established the language of “people first”. As new attitudes toward people with disabilities evolve and cultivate, a healthier atmosphere for learning occurs in our nation’s schools. Both study schools modeled this healthy atmosphere. This was evident in the initial telephone conversation with Dr. Howe at Northside claiming he doesn’t do anything differently for students with disabilities “that isn’t done for every kid” at his

school. The award-winning Inclusive Practices School, Pleasantville, principal proclaimed that students with disabilities are “treated like every other kid” proving that attitudes toward this previously oppressed population has made dramatic strides. This is a stark contrast to the educational practices forty years ago, when students with handicapping conditions did not have the right to the same education as their non-disabled peers.

Both elementary schools principals demonstrated their belief of impartiality as evidenced in the locations of the special education classrooms on each campus. Pleasantville’s principal relocated the students from the Twilight Zone to hallways like Sunshine Lane, while the special education programs at Northside were infused among the grade levels. Individuals with disabilities were historically portrayed using negative images causing a normalized discrimination and disregard for this community. They were confined to attics, basements, or institutions and considered pitiful people; unable to contribute to society. Both school leaders concern for equality and educational opportunity resonated as expected by the precedent setting case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the later mandated Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142).

Neither one of these elementary school principals referenced policy re-evaluation or federal mandates as the basis for including students with disabilities into the mainstream of the entire student body population. However, they both mirrored the philosophy of Maynard Reynold’s (1962) framework in that students could be served in the regular education classroom, especially if provided with supplementary services. Both Dr. Bancroft and Dr. Howe echoed the sentiments of Madeleine Will’s Regular Education

Initiative, in that children with mild to moderate learning and behavior problems would be best served in general education classrooms, as long as specialized support systems were in place. Not professing to know Reynold's or Will's call, both school sites modeled the envisioned "shared responsibility" between general and special education teachers in educating students with disabilities.

The literature on principal's attitudes on inclusion focuses, most notably, on students' limitations rather than possibilities. Whether or not both site leaders examined the ways in which their belief structures, personal struggles, or teaching experiences with at-risk youth influenced their success with students with disabilities, their narratives decreed the inherent ability that all students can learn. According to Goor et al. (1997), for principals to be effective instructional leaders for students with disabilities, they must examine their belief structures to determine the viability of adopting more accepting and inclusive paradigms. Praisner (2003) also emphasizes that principals who had previous successful interactions with children with disabilities were more likely to support inclusive practices and to achieve programmatic success. Both Dr. Bancroft and Dr. Howe clearly focus on the child, not the disability, as evidenced by staff interviews and state achievement levels. Within four short decades, educating students with disabilities metamorphosed from institutionalization to placement in their local schools alongside their non-disabled peers, thereby now requiring all students to perform according to the same standards.

Both school leaders also valued the principal gurus they met along their administrative journeys. The narrative accounts in this study were noticeably similar. Dr. Bancroft told story after story of administrative mentors who modeled a kids-first philosophy and respectful treatment of others. Dr. Howe credited his mentor for personally teaching him

important life lessons on connecting with kids. It was this invaluable concept that made the difference in student success, as evidenced in his personal life.

While both school leaders explicitly modeled a positive attitude toward students with disabilities, created a healthy school atmosphere that did not segregate students by ability or disability, and proudly professed their vision that all students can learn as supported by the inclusion literature, were there implicit values that contributed to their disability blinders? Whether fully integrating the diagnosis of a disability into the context of his story or glossing over the suggestion of her struggle with comprehension, both school leaders conveyed their own personal tussle with learning while growing up. Specifically, Dr. Howe articulated how the ADHD diagnosis negatively impacted his motivation throughout his schooling, but positively influenced his perceptions and experiences while teaching at-risk youth, ultimately addicting him to the profession of education as his life-long career. More subtly, Dr. Bancroft shared her struggle with comprehension when she could not pin-point her first experience with an individual with a disability. Despite their own battles with learning, these two school principals' experiences molded their personal views of individuals with differences, essentially blinding them to the differences and allowing them to see the individuals.

Through their narratives, reliance on an adult for extra instructional assistance became clear. Was this ingrained strategy for learning part of their normalization, which, in turn, became a foundational belief that shaped their attitude and perceptions of individuals with disabilities? Do Dr.'s Bancroft and Howe only see a child because it is what they hoped others would see when they were looked at while growing up? Or was it the contrary, were they singled out because of having to go to another classroom to learn,



thereby creating a strong passion that no other child under their tutelage will be made to feel different?

Besides experiencing first-hand a personal struggle in learning, both school leaders started their professional teaching experiences with at-risk students. Dr. Bancroft strived to reach ELL students even though she could not speak the same language, while Dr. Howe pulled out all the stops to connect with inner-city middle school students who couldn't read. Both educators tasted success while educating these populations. Did that success add to their positive disposition toward at-risk students?

Finally, both school leaders referenced courses that hinted of some de-sensitization topics. Dr. Bancroft mentioned a Diverse Needs course in her educational background, while Dr. Howe referred to cultural sensitivity. Did, in fact, both leaders have varying degrees of attitude, experience, and leadership preparation that culminated into their overall success as a school principal for students with disabilities? If a personal struggle set the stage for their attitude, positive experiences with at-risk students added to it, and a professional development course, that had facets of de-sensitization, enhanced their knowledge, then in some way all three dispositions played a role in the making these leaders. It is believed that if a principal's attitude reflects the core beliefs of a diverse society, more opportunities will be realized for all children, even those with the most challenging needs (Goor et al., 1997).

#### Theme 2—Achievement over Ability: “We Don’t Care if They are Black or White...

##### Just Red or Green.”

Pleasantville's practice of using data to place every student in the color groups of green, yellow, or red categories identifies individual student strength and need. Dr.

Bancroft explains how they extrapolate the data from the culmination of various assessments to categorize every single student at Pleasantville according to his or her academic achievement. When the administrative team started to track each student, they didn't analyze demographics such as racial classification or IEP status.

We don't look and see if they have an IEP, because I really don't care. So, it's every kid, it doesn't matter...it's like we don't care that they're Black, White, etc...all I care about is red and green. I want everybody green.

The administrative team found that so many of the students were entering school two to three grade levels below standards and they needed to identify the level of each student and intervene. For students who are in need, those that are yellow or red, they attend the school's brain lab in lieu of specials.

What color am I? This instructional strategy reminds me of how we created ability reading groups of redbirds, bluebirds, and robins, where the robins were the lowest level readers. Once a student was deemed a robin, did we as educators attach a label and unintentionally clip their wings? This could be viewed as quite a controversial tracking system. While on one hand it is exciting to instill those advocacy skills and ownership in learning, are we exchanging one label for another that could potential stigmatize children?

Northside's prescription for success, which includes regular progress monitoring, ensures each educator is gauging the learning of every student. While the first federal mention of students with disabilities being held at the same standard, or proficiency measure, as their non-disabled peers was the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001,

the school leaders stressed this high academic expectation for all students like it was part of the fabric of the school, not a legal requirement in its infant stage.

Each participant commented on the range of intervention programs offered to students that might need that extra push to get from red to yellow or yellow to green. Staff members applauded the site leaders for creatively identifying ways to fund the numerous programs to ensure there were “no excuses” for failure. The school’s faculty resonated the mantra “whatever it takes to be successful—IEP or not.” Site leaders claimed the data currently revealed “the non-IEP kids have higher needs” than the students with the IEPs. The study findings not only reflect an insistence on high academic standards and excellence, accountability for results at all levels, but include empowering parents, and supporting and enhancing teacher quality; phrases also located in the 2002 President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education Report. Ironically, the biggest challenge found in the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) is the call for more data on student outcomes, something both schools proudly do for all their students, not just for students with disabilities.

Both sites created a culture of care for not only the students but the families. Community involvement was physically evident at both school sites before being confirmed through the interviews. Pleasantville’s free-standing parent education center and Northside’s weekend parking lot festivals were just a few examples of the school leader and faculty creating a culture of care. A culture that conveyed these brick and mortar buildings belonged to everyone in the neighborhood. This interdependent community concept was a resounding factor with every single participant. Dr. Bancroft described the inception of the parent education center, while Mr. Sequin, her SEIF, listed

the numerous intervention programs available to students during the week, as well as those that take place over the weekends. Dr. Howe tearfully described the families' passion for ensuring that the school has everything to meet the individual needs of their children, while his faculty rattled off several services offered to the community members to assist them with developing English and parenting skills.

Both site leaders did not have low expectations for students based on their disability. As such, it is no surprise that they maintain high expectations for all the students on their campuses. I sometimes wonder what school vision and mission statements decreed decades ago. Did they profess all students will achieve or did they qualify it by saying some students or most students, but not the special education students? Clearly both the actions of Pleasantville and Northside mirror each school's respected vision to ensure all their students reach their fullest potential. Dr. Bancroft modeled her high expectations when she relocated the special education students from the Twilight Zone to a hallway closer to Sunshine Lane. Is it ironic that instruction for students with disabilities occurred down a hallway commonly associated with a horror series? What saddens me more in the narratives is when the special education teachers wanted to remove themselves from the masses and as a result student performance plummeted.

### Theme 3 –Instructional Leadership: The “Prescription for Success”

When Dr. Howe at Northside Elementary was asked about the sustainable strategies he put in place to assist the IEP AYP population maintain proficiency status for years, he handed me a pamphlet, opening it up to the center, which was entitled “Prescription for Success” while nonchalantly responding, “Strategies, I would say the same ones for all kids.” This prescription for success included: 1) culture of professional educators 2)

expectations and accountability 3) assessment and progress monitoring 4) focused student and teacher assistance and 5) effective use of resources. Dr. Howe acknowledged that these five basics not only pertain to students with disabilities, but all kids. This includes “a second language kid..., a special education kid..., a kid with a mom and dad being divorced and wondering where their next meal is coming from... It’s a big umbrella we have for kids, for all kids.” This prescription was not found in a textbook or college course.

While both school administrators had great difficulty trying to recall a single university course pertaining to effective instructional practices for students with disabilities, a session on special education law was casually mentioned. Leadership preparation programs have historically only provided school leaders with a dose of special education law. Higher education institutions are not adequately preparing administrators to meet the demand of managing special education programs (Hirth and Valesky, 1990). Yet, with minimal, if any, training, school leaders are forced to improve student achievement. As a result of this compliance approach, school leaders are not equipped with the instruction strategies necessary to ensure that students with disabilities are deemed proficient according to federally mandated high-stakes testing. However, compliance is a moot point in light of successful instructional practices as mutually evident at Pleasantville and Northside. Individual student success is the driving force in both schools. Dr.’s Bancroft and Howe are instructional leaders, not compliance monitors. Goor, et al (1997) highlights the need for principals to be seen as the instructional leader for all programs in the school, including special education services. Lowe & Brigham (2000) asserted that the principal’s attitude toward special educations

students, as well as his or her ability or inability to supervise their instruction, will ultimately determine the efficacy of the school's special education services.

Both study schools had formulas for student success. They did not see the label or the disability, but the individual child. The environment was not segregated, but accessible, and staff is comprised of professional educators who demonstrate high expectations for all students. Instructional practices follow a regimented routine where each child is assessed to determine baseline ability, every student is exposed to the general education curriculum, and interventions are provided accordingly, all the while monitoring the individual's progress to ensure the desired outcome—student success. This recipe was not found in a special education law session, but grounded in instructional best practices.

Each staff respondent spoke at length about his/her school leader's knowledge and perceptions, as well as its impact on the education with students with disabilities at their site. Threaded throughout the narratives were three overlapping trends: personal skepticism, supportiveness from the site leader, and the abundance of opportunities provided for professional collaboration to achieve the mission of student success.

Faculty respondents reported that they were skeptical, at first, regarding the school leaders' practices of including students with disabilities into the general education classrooms. In Mr. Sequin's case, skepticism was a result of his self-contained experience before Pleasantville and his uncertainty that inclusion was the most effective method to reach this population. However, after reaping the fruits of the labor, he professes that inclusion exposes the students to the curriculum that is tested, resulting in academic achievement. The special education teacher at Northside shared her cynicism

in relation to professionally collaborating with a general education teacher, but concluded “inclusion works”.

The faculty at both elementary sites also overwhelmingly attributed the success of students with disabilities to the supportiveness of the school principal. Examples of the leader’s supportiveness included: backing the staff, forwarding district information as it pertains to special education, staying current with cases, attending meetings, providing resources, hiring the most qualified teachers, scheduling professional development, ensuring time is allocated for professional collaboration, working alongside teachers in the trenches, maintaining the same high expectations for both the general and special education teachers, and always being available.

The final parallel among the faculty was the time site leaders offered the educators to professionally collaborate. Blocks of time are carved out at both facilities for general and special educators to join forces for the betterment of educational services for not only students with disabilities, but all students. This partnership ensures that lesson planning, instructional practices, and vertical alignment is realized for all the students. The priority shift from working in isolation to acting as a team redistributes the ownership of the students from their students to our students.

#### Limitations of the Study

Due to time constraints posed by the elimination of the degree program, I was limited to two school sites, totaling seven participants for this study. With that, there is no assumption that the data collected in this study can be generalized or expected to reflect the experiences of all principals of schools that serve students with disabilities. Further, my role as a principal of a special school that only serves students with significant

disabilities presents the potentiality of bias, which is openly acknowledged in narrative inquiry since the role of the researcher includes telling stories of the research relationship to capture the whole story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). If I had the opportunity to replicate this study, it would include more school sites and much more time in the field conducting observations and interviews. Having the luxury to interview and collect data from a larger sample of schools would afford me the opportunity to search for and better describe and identify the ways in which the leadership preparation, experiences, and attitudes of school leaders impact the education of their students with disabilities.

### Implications for the Field

The key findings of this study, which emphasized the participants' leadership philosophies and approaches grounded in inclusive leadership practices, achievement over ability, and strong instructional leadership have important implications for educational leadership preparation, policy, and practice. Due to the substantial growth in the number of U.S. children who qualify for special education services, improvements must be made in leadership preparation programs to better equip future school leaders to support the learning and achievement of students with disabilities through equitable and in many cases, inclusive practices. In addition, the increasing federal role in education, to include special education policy, will continue to impact how school principals lead, most notably by necessitating greater knowledge, understanding, and compliance with regard to federal, state, and district laws. This, in turn, will continue to influence the leadership practices of school leaders, especially with the increasing focus on inclusive and equitable leadership and leadership for social justice.



## Implications for Leadership Preparation

The results of this study confirm that aspects of the leadership preparation program play an important role in impacting the education of students with disabilities. There are some subtle lessons to learn from these two school principals. While the literature reflects that special education law helps prepare school leaders and improves their overall attitude toward this population, quite the contrary was evidenced here. While Dr.'s Bancroft and Howe could not recall a course that prepared them, their attitude was already very embracing. They did not see the disability or segregate classrooms. With that, do we need an isolated special education curriculum at the leadership preparation level or can leadership preparation programs infuse strands in each course? We already see this modeled in Law classes as special education is already afforded a session in the required law course. Other special education strand possibilities could include the integration of: Finance—managing and instructionally spending federal monies for specialized programs; Supervision and Evaluation—instructional best practices for the low incidence specialized programs; Curriculum and Instruction—how to differentiate instruction for all learners as well as how to accommodate and modify.

Another common theme that resonated with both study school principals was the impact administrative mentors had on their practices. Pairing perspective school leaders with effective, veteran principals not only provides the hands-on experiences that cannot be conceptualized from a textbook, but the internal shaping of beliefs may take place during these mentorship opportunities. Educational leadership preparation programs need to:

1. Create positive learning experiences on key topics to ensure principals can develop positive beliefs and attitudes toward special education, if they are not already in place;
2. Choose participants who have a strong evidence of success with diverse students;
3. Address specific knowledge and skills related to instructional best practices including: differentiating instruction, building collaborative teams, supervising and evaluating specialized programs; managing federal funds at the school level; Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and key special education topics so that all children can benefit and be successful in school; and
4. Facilitate meaningful field-based experiences in collaboration with the best school leaders and strong preparation program faculty.

#### Implications for Education Policy

In 2002, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education shared findings and proposed major recommendations to revitalize special education for children and their families. Three of the nine findings focused on compliance issues:

1. Process and compliance are often placed above results.
2. A culture of compliance has diverted too much attention from the first mission of schools: educating every child.
3. Compliance and bureaucratic imperatives supersede academic achievement and social outcomes, which fails too many children in school and beyond.

If a third of the findings put instructional practices on the back burner to compliance, we need to reevaluate the focus of public education in the United States with an eye toward student achievement. Policy makers need to celebrate the successes of demonstrated

equality for students with disabilities and shift the focus to ensuring every student has access to the instructional best practices that will prepare them for the standardized test, and ultimately the high school proficiency exams. At the same time, policy-makers should:

1. Certify only principal preparation programs that demonstrate that their programs follow the best-practice research and include criteria that specifically addresses the need to build the special education knowledge of pre-service administrators so that all children can achieve success in school;
2. Implement a state credentialing requirement for successful completion of not only Special Education Law, but a general special education strands that focus on the field and instructional best practices specific to special needs learners; and
3. Shift the focus in special education from compliance to instruction.

#### Implications for Leadership Practice

According to the literature and results of this study, “administrative support and collaboration were powerful predictors of positive attitudes toward full inclusion” (Villa et al, 1996). The results of this study confirm that principals’ attitudes play an important role in impacting the educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Principals set the tone for the success or failure of not only inclusion programs, but all programs on their campuses. Ensuring the philosophical tone is set at the site level that success is for all students, including students with disabilities, promotes the accessible education. Principals must take that equality to the next level—a quality education. The findings from this study brought about some important points of interest concerning how school

principals play a critical role in the academic achievement of their students with disabilities. As such, school leaders should:

1. Analyze the achievement level of every student at the school site;
2. Provide interventions using scientifically based instruction and teaching methods;
3. Supply resources so the general education and special education educators work together to provide effective teaching
4. Ensure that those students with additional needs, IEP or not, benefit from strong teaching, instructional methods, and curriculum offered through the general education.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Including the voices of students to this study could provide a missing perspective from the body of research. Another area for future research includes comparing leaders of schools with high-performing students with disabilities with those leaders of schools with low-performing students with special needs.

Since this state combines students with very mild disabilities and students with profound disabilities in the AYP IEP cell, this study could be replicated in a state that does not mix the severity of disabilities in their achievement data.

Future studies could be conducted to examine if there are any differences that exist within special education placements and handicapping conditions, and if they have an effect on principals' attitudes toward inclusion.

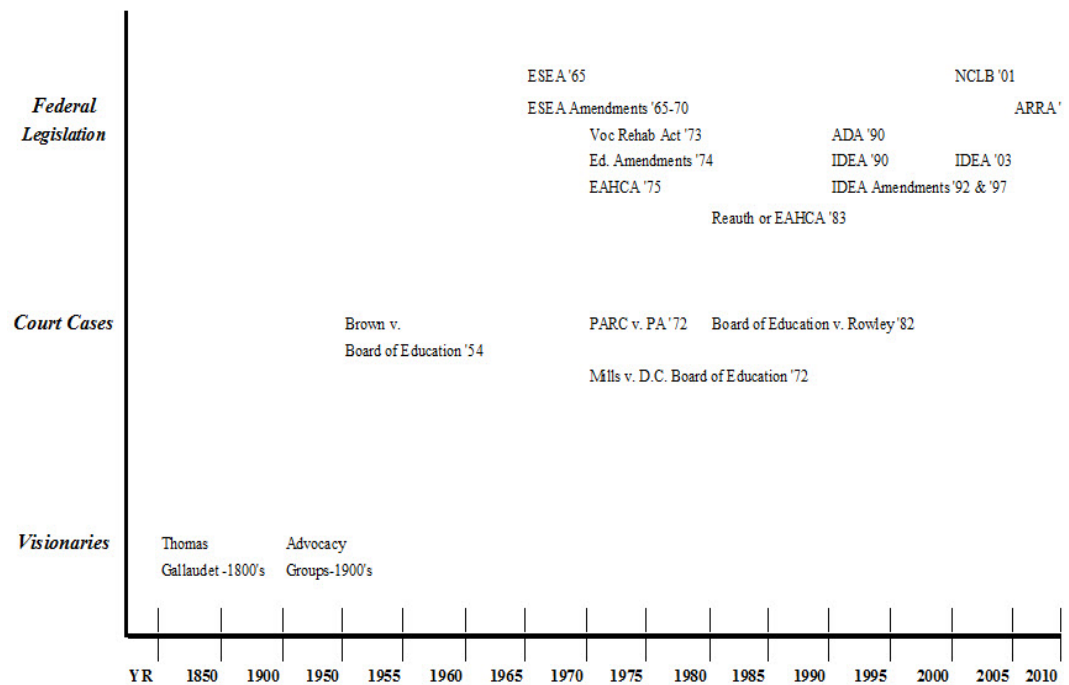
An investigation of a similar nature with middle school or high school administrators might provide an interesting comparison to the results of this study.

## Conclusion

Since beginning this dissertation journey, whenever my administrative colleagues learned that I was studying the leadership preparation, experiences, and perceptions of effective school leaders of students with disabilities, they were intrigued. The topic piqued their interest as though this study would reveal the magic wand, secret potion, or silver bullet that would serve as the prescription or solution to working successfully with this population. Throughout this process, particularly during my reflexive journaling, it became evident that I was researching much more than a topic centered on leadership strategies or approaches to working with children with special needs. Rather, I was exploring how the leadership philosophies and beliefs of school leaders, in this case school principals, influence how they foster, shape, and sustain a school culture that supports and expects great things from all students, regardless of ability or disability (Payne & Murray, 1974; Davis, 1980; Cline, 1981; Center, Ward, Parmenter & Nash, 1985; Villa et al., 1996; Goor et al., 1997; Burrello, Schrup & Barnett, 1992; Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Praisner, 2003; Cook, Semmel & Gerber, 1999; Lowe & Brigham, 2000) .

Overcome with the great responsibility to accurately and ethically report my findings, with as little bias as possible, I became extra sensitive to and protective of the study participants, their schools, and school communities. I originally began this research for my own personal and professional growth as a school principal in a district that offers a full continuum of services for students with disabilities. Upon completion of this study, I understand there is a heavier weight: ramifications for the people who read it—the professionals I interviewed, the schools portrayed here, and those who will use it for

professional edification. The intent of the research, however, remained unchanged. I was curious about the methods used by school leaders to ensure their students with disabilities were achieving success. What was so special for the special education students at the elementary schools that were deemed proficient in the IEP AYP cell? According to the responses to the research questions, school principal's leadership preparation programs did not impact their ability to improve student outcomes for students with disabilities. However, whether it was solely their personal learning struggles, teaching experiences with marginalized students, strong administrator mentors, solid instructional leadership practices, equity-minded attitude, or a combination of the aforementioned factors, these school leaders reflected the significance of leadership and the role of a school leader in successfully impacting the education and lives of students with disabilities.

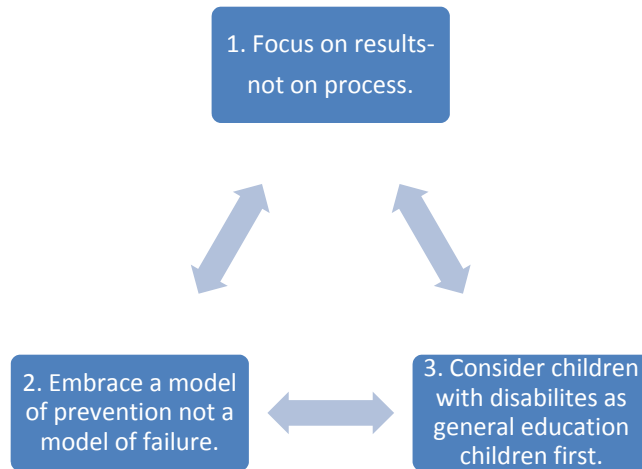


**Figure 1.1 Chronology of Legislative History Impacting Individuals with Disabilities**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>HISTORICAL EVENT</b>	<b>IMPACT</b>
1964	Creation of Community Mental Health Centers Act	Governmental funded aid to assist individuals in de-institutionalization
1965	Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA)	Creation of Bureau of Education of the Handicapped
1965-70	ESEA Amendments	Federal grants established at local school level Expansion of special education services
1972	PARC v. PA (1972) Mills v. D.C. Board of Education	The courts take the position that children with disabilities have an equal right to accessing education as their non-disabled peers.
1973	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act	Free Appropriate Public Education
1974	Educational Amendments	Education of the Handicapped Act-first to mention an appropriate education for all children with disabilities and FERPA was introduced
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. FAPE</li> <li>2. IEP</li> <li>3. Special Education Services</li> <li>4. Related Services</li> <li>5. Due Process Procedures</li> <li>6. LRE</li> </ol>
1982	Board of Education v. Rowley	Defined FAPE
1983	Reauthorization of EAHCA	Parent training, early childhood, early intervention, attorney's fees
1990	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	Access, protection against discrimination
1990	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Language change to reflect people first, transition services, rehabilitation counseling, and social work services added as a related service. Autism and traumatic brain injury added.
1992-1997	IDEA Amendments	Infants and toddler program Strengthened role of parents Access to general curriculum Ensuring schools are safe Increased attention to racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity Included in state and district-wide assessments Regular ed. teacher required member at IEP
2001	No Child Left Behind (NCLB)	Proficiency in reading, language arts, and math
2004	IDEA Reauthorization	Progress monitoring Interventions to keep students out of special education
2009	American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA)	Federal allocation of funding for IDEA
2010	Rosa's Law	Federal law replacing the wording "mental retardation" with "individual with intellectual disability"

**Figure 1.2 Chronology of Special Education Law**

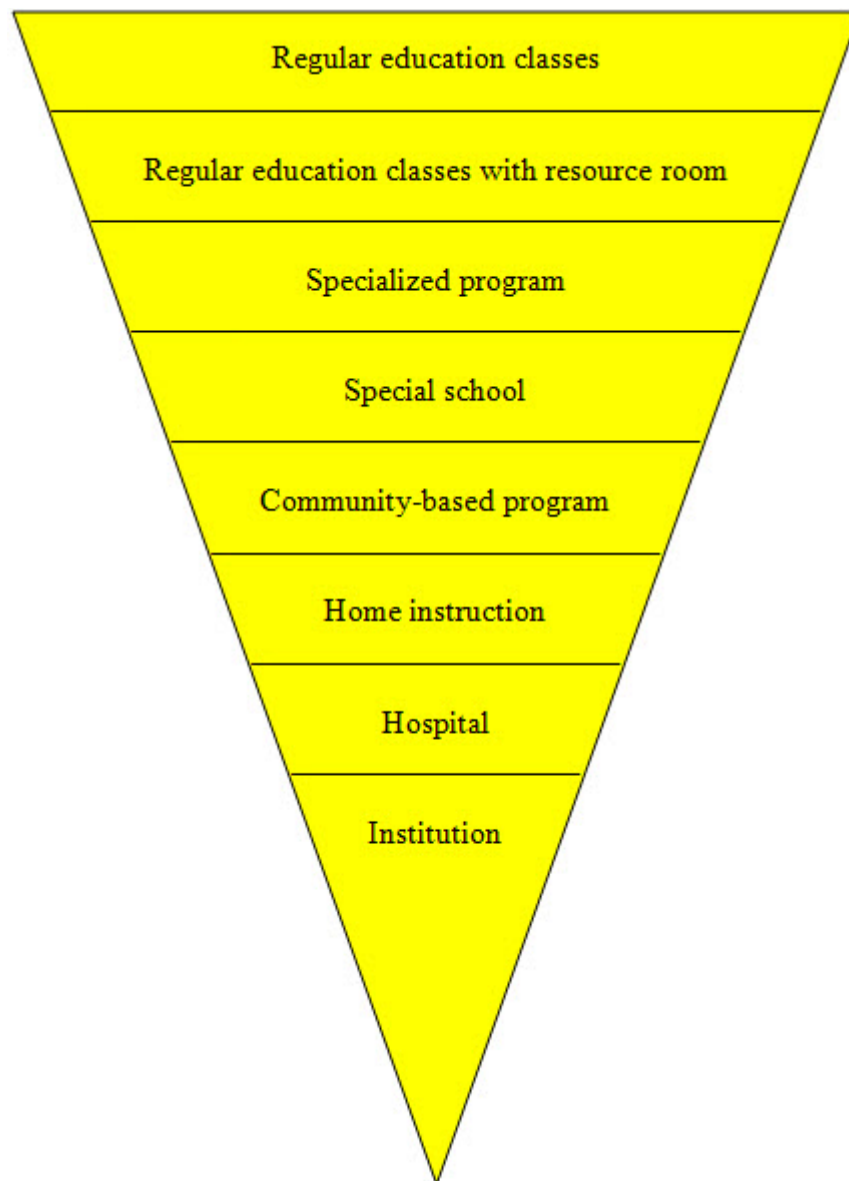




**Figure 1.3 The President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education**

**Summary of Major Recommendations**

1. The system must be judged by the opportunities it provides and the outcomes achieved by each child.
2. Reforms must move the system toward early identification and swift intervention, using scientifically based instruction and teaching methods.
3. The systems must work together to provide effective teaching and ensure that those with additional needs benefit from strong teaching and instructional methods should be offered to a child through general education.



**FIGURE 1.4 Continuum of Alternative Placements**



## **INFORMED CONSENT**

Department of Educational Leadership

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**TITLE OF STUDY: An Examination of the Preparation, Experiences, and Attitudes of Effective School Leaders of Students with Disabilities: Voices from the Field**

**INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Sonya Douglass Horsford, Faculty Advisor**

**CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: 895-0092**

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### **Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to document and examine the preparation, experiences, and attitudes of effective school leaders of students with disabilities.

### **Participants**

You are being asked to participate in the study because your Individual Education Program (IEP) Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) population has demonstrated four consecutive years of proficiency, under the same school principal, with the highest reduction in non-proficient students with IEPs.

### **Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions presented in an in-depth one-on-one interview with me, the researcher. The interview will be audio taped and should only take 2 to 3 hours to complete. You may also be asked to participate in a 15 to 30 minute follow-up conversation with me to clarify any information you provided in the first interview.

### **Benefits of Participation**

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn more about the preparation, experiences, and attitudes of effective school leaders of students with disabilities.

### **Risks of Participation**

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. It is possible you may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions asked. If so, you are encouraged to discuss this with me, the researcher, who will explain the questions to you in more detail. Please note that all information gathered in this study will be strictly confidential and your identity will be kept private.

### **Cost /Compensation**

There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately two to three hours of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact me, Patricia Schultz at 239-3895. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794 or toll free at 877-895-2794 or via email at [IRB@unlv.edu](mailto:IRB@unlv.edu).**

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with the university. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

### **Confidentiality**

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

### **Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name (Please Print)

### **Consent to Record**

I agree to be audio taped for the purpose of this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name (Please Print)

***Participant Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or is expired.***

## LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT FACILITY

Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects  
University of Nevada Las Vegas  
4505 Maryland Parkway Box 451047  
Las Vegas, NV 89154-1047

Subject: Letter of Authorization to Conduct Research at <School Name>.

Dear Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects:

This letter will serve as authorization for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (“UNLV”) researcher/research team, Patricia Schultz and Dr. Sonya Douglass Horsford to conduct the research project entitled “An Examination of the Preparation, Experiences, and Attitudes of Effective School Leaders of Students with Disabilities: Voices from the Field at [facility name and location] (the “Facility”).

The Facility acknowledges that it has reviewed the protocol presented by the researcher, as well as the associated risks to the Facility. The Facility accepts the protocol and the associated risks to the Facility, and authorizes the research project to proceed. The research project may be implemented at the Facility upon approval from the UNLV Institutional Review Board.

If we have any concerns or require additional information, we will contact the researcher and/or the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects.

Sincerely,

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Facility’s Authorized Signatory

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Date

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Printed Name and Title of Authorized Signatory

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol  
School Principal  
Interviewer: Patricia Schultz

Personal and Professional Background

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Where are you from originally?
3. Where did you attend primary/secondary school?
4. When did you know you were going to be an educator? Why this field?
5. Tell me about your professional experience as an educator.

Post-Secondary Education & Leadership Preparation and Professional Development

1. Where did you attend college?
2. What was your major?
3. How long was your program?
4. How many and what kind of college courses specifically focused on special education?
5. In what ways did college prepare you to lead a school integrating students with disabilities? In what ways did it lack?
6. In looking back, did these courses sufficiently prepare you for working with students with disabilities in the classroom? As a school leader?
7. Now as a school leader, what do you wish you would have learned about special education?
8. Since becoming a school leader, what kinds of professional development have you taken? How have those courses helped or hindered your leadership?
9. What kind of professional development is currently available to you to assist you in serving students with disabilities? Is it adequate?

Experiences with Individuals and Students with Disabilities

1. Tell me about your first encounter with an individual with a disability?
2. Did you have a family member and/or friend with a disability?
3. How was that individual with a disability treated?
4. What were your first perceptions?
5. Have your perceptions changed over time? How so?
6. Have your perceptions changed since becoming an educator? A school leader?
7. What do you perceive as your role in educating students with disabilities?

Compliance v. Inclusion

1. Tell me about your memory of the integration of students with disabilities into your grade school/jr. high school/high school.
2. How old were you and where were you attending school? Describe the climate of the school you were attending.
3. Tell me about your memory of integrating students with disabilities into your classroom as a teacher.

4. How does the current state of education for students with disabilities decades after P.L. 94-142 influence your thoughts on inclusion?
5. How has your role as an administrator changed as a result of these laws?
6. What is the role of the Special Education Instructional Facilitator?
7. Describe your RTI/eligibility process. What is your role?
8. Describe your IEP process. Define your role in this process.

#### Testing Students with Disabilities

1. How do you explain the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers?
2. What systems have you put in place to assist your IEP AYP population maintain proficiency status for four consecutive years?
3. Some blame the specialized programs and suggest that full inclusion is needed to provide students with disabilities with greater opportunities. What do you say to this?
4. Others argue that inclusion does not provide the specialized/individualized instruction needed for this population. What do you say to this?
5. What role does the history of institutionalization, play in the education of students with disabilities today? Is it even relevant?
6. If you had to craft an inclusive school, what would it look like?

#### The Future of Public Education for Students with Disabilities

1. In light of AYP and high-stakes testing, where do you see the public school system headed in the next 5 years? 10 years?
2. In what ways will students with disabilities be influenced by this system?
3. What sustainable strategies have you put in place to ensure students with disabilities will continue to receive students receive a quality instructional program?
4. In what ways do you prepare your instructional staff for meeting the needs of students with disabilities?
5. What advice would you give principals who are committed to improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol  
Special Education Instructional Facilitator (SEIF)  
Interviewer: Patricia Schultz

Personal and Professional Background

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Where are you from originally?
3. When did you know you were going to be an educator? Why special education?
4. Tell me about your professional experience as an educator.

Post-Secondary Education & Leadership Preparation and Professional Development

1. Where did you attend college?
2. How many and what kind of college courses specifically focused on special education?
3. In what ways did college prepare you to teach a school integrating students with disabilities? In what ways did it lack?
4. In looking back, did these courses sufficiently prepare you for working with students with disabilities in the classroom? As a school facilitator?
5. Now as SEIF, what do you wish you would have learned about special education?
6. Since becoming a SEIF, what kinds of professional development have you taken? How have those courses helped or hindered?
7. What kind of professional development is currently available to you to assist you in serving students with disabilities? Is it adequate?
8. How would you describe your principal's knowledge as it relates to special education?

Experiences with Individuals and Students with Disabilities

1. Tell me about your first encounter with an individual with a disability?
2. Did you have a family member and/or friend with a disability?
3. How was that individual with a disability treated?
4. What were your first perceptions?
5. Have your perceptions changed over time? How so?
6. Have your perceptions changed since becoming an educator? A SEIF?
7. What do you perceive as your role in educating students with disabilities?
8. How would you describe your principal's perception of students with disabilities?

Compliance v. Inclusion

1. Tell me about your memory of the integration of students with disabilities into your grade school/jr. high school/high school.
2. How old were you and where were you attending school? Describe the climate of the school you were attending.
3. Tell me about your memory of integrating students with disabilities into your classroom as a teacher.



4. How does the current state of education for students with disabilities decades after P.L. 94-142 influence your thoughts on inclusion?
5. How has your role as a special education teacher change as a result of these laws?
6. Describe your RTI/eligibility process. What is your role?
7. Describe your IEP process. Define your role in this process.
8. Describe your principal's role in the RTI process.
9. What is the principal's role in the IEP process?

#### Testing Students with Disabilities

1. How do you explain the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers?
2. What systems has your current principal put in place to assist your IEP AYP population maintain proficiency status for four consecutive years?
3. Some blame the specialized programs and suggest that full inclusion is needed to provide students with disabilities with greater opportunities. What do you say to this?
4. Others argue that inclusion does not provide the specialized/individualized instruction needed for this population. What do you say to this?
5. What role does the history of institutionalization, play in the education of students with disabilities today? Is it even relevant?
6. If you had to craft an inclusive school, what would it look like? How would it differ from its current state?

#### The Future of Public Education for Students with Disabilities

1. In light of AYP and high-stakes testing, where do you see the public school system headed in the next 5 years? 10 years?
2. In what ways will students with disabilities be influenced by this system?
3. What sustainable strategies your principal put in place to ensure students with disabilities will continue to receive students receive a quality instructional program?
4. In what ways does your principal prepare the instructional staff for meeting the needs of students with disabilities?
5. What advice would you give principals who are committed to improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities?

### Interview Data-Taxonomy

Question	P-P	P-AP	P-SEIF	N-PSY	N-SET	N-SEIF	N-P
<b>Bkground</b>	Midwest		East coast	East coast	East coast	South western state	South
<b>Where did you attend primary/secondary school?</b>	K-12 same class of 500 students one school (story)		East coast				LA
<b>When did you know you were going to be an educator?</b>	Knew when I was little (story)		Senior year in high school (story)	Difficult reading- had teachers that believed in me (story) Never wanted another person to feel like that			College
<b>Why this field?</b>	Played school with sister		Easier to get a job  Good personal fit		Mother told me she saw some-thing in me	Experience during practicum (story)	Most of the girls went into elementary ed. & Air Force route
<b>Prof. experience</b>	ES Teacher, AP (mentoring stories) Prin-Jan '06 (culture school story)		MCS Teacher in a private school  Elementary teacher		East coast 8 yrs Alt School-ED hs students	19 yrs- 14 yrs in SEC 5 yrs SEIF	MS-inner city (South) 6 <sup>th</sup> grade Center AP (2-3 yrs), Principal (story-mentors)
<b>College</b>	Midwest		East coast	South-western		South western	South
<b>Major?</b>	BA-Elementary Ed		Early Childhood		Business, Sociology Ele Ed	Industrial Arts	Ele Education
<b>Master's</b>	Admin & Sup.		Special Education		Special Ed		Criminal Justice & Admin
<b>Doctorate</b>	Leadership						Ed Leadership
<b>Sp Ed. Courses?</b>	Probably Diverse Needs-I don't know. I do not		Basic special ed course, diversify	Psy classes (story) Assessments	None undergrad MA in special ed One	I took a bunch of courses and not one course	It wasn't the course, it was the positive people that

	claim to be an expert in special ed and I always play stupid with it comes to special ed.		ing teaching, IEP's, courses on specific disabilities, sped stats, teaching methods, law	Learn more in field, but courses give an intro Counsel classes and multi-cultural class, which is really important in our type of school	course that sticks out the most-deaf professor who taught sign language	helped me for anything that I've even done in special education	I felt wanted to take the time to help me
<b>In what ways did these courses prepare you for working with students with disabilities in the classroom?</b>	...I don't remember and I don't want to make one up		Lots of reading—lacked enough time in the classroom to put practices learned on paper into practice	MA paper on inclusion	If I tried to pull out the stuff I learned, I wouldn't have lasted 8 yrs at the alt school  Now, in a course about transition	Nothing—you have to have real life exp—you have to get in the classroom  No courses on inclusion, other than the exp. in classroom doing my own inclusion	None that I can remember
<b>Now as a leader, what do you wish you would have learned about special education?</b>	I suppose more about law or what is expected. The thing is in my mind I don't separate it. It's like what's good for them is good for every kid. Maybe more strategies for how to look at things differently. (Story)	How to differentiate instruct	How much is involved in it—there is so much legally involved	Consult and learning how to work with someone because in every one of our jobs you can be the best teacher, the best psy, the best nurse, but if you can't translate that and work	Taking Core Reading right now (Sp Ed) classes were not geared toward reading strategies, there was nothing toward that.	It changes every year. The students, the cultures, the parenting changes every year and every generation so it doesn't matter what we had in the past, it will change next year	Definitely working with kids understanding inclusion (stories)

				w/anther colleague it doesn't help kids			
<b>Prof Dev.</b>	AP-Autism trainings & policy regulation updates		Autism trainings , Electroni c IEP, CPI and other courses beyond sped- writing academy				
<b>How have those courses helped or hindered?</b>	Yes, some- times it's a challenge but yes it helps(restra ining)						
<b>PD Adequate?</b>			I actually think it's pretty good-1 <sup>st</sup> year training	RTI training & Core			
(How would you describe your principal's knowledge as it relates to special education?)			Pretty knowled ge-able stresses inclusion model  Supporti ve	Advocate for all children, he doesn't look at it different- ly. What- ever it takes for a child to be success- ful on campus regard- less of IEP or not MCS story	I do get a lot of support from him if anything I need I go right to him, if he can help me, it's a done deal	Communi- cation and supportiven ess-he gets the basic facts and then he wants to be supportive for what the facts are	
<b>First encounter with an individual with a disability.</b>	It's so hard because I don't really segregate (Story of 1 <sup>st</sup> grader)		3 <sup>rd</sup> grade MR	Group home & friend that was blind at camp			Probably as a kid in school we would have kids in a wheelchair or kids with some type

							of disability
<b>Family member and/or friend with a disability?</b>	Never saw differences unless it's evident.			Mother ran group homes (story)	Nephew with Autism Cousin		Self-ADHD & brother now disabled (story)
<b>How was this individual treated?</b>	(not witnessed unless It's a behavioral thing where you have to remove the entire class)		Good and bad—some students calling him names and others treated him with the utmost respect list he was just another student—which he was				It's always a joke and not treated right, but I always tried to set the example of being respectful
<b>First perceptions?</b>	A kid with significant needs visibly (Student at current school)		I didn't think he was capable of doing as much as I guess he could (story)	I think normal except the more severe homes were scary (Willow-brook time-frame)	We would go to our room and hide because we were so afraid of him	Selfish and self-centered. They were always in the closet We were rude to them.	Always respectful
<b>Have your perceptions changed over time? How?</b>		Impede the learning of others	Everyone has strengths and weaknesses and just want to focus on the positives —Some have difficulty in math and/or reading-- -I have difficulty			As soon as the first year I taught special ed.	Oh no, that's my bestest kids. In fact I make it a point to go out of my way to make sure they get a smile or they get attention, I get a hug or whatever the case may be.

			learning science				
<b>Have then changed since becoming an educator? Leader?</b>	I always tell teachers that unless it's a behavior thing that would disrupt-I really don't see it. (strong opinion-story)	Impede the learning of others	Not so much you just have to basically look at each child the same way they're all trying to learn, they're all here for a reason, you just want to do the best you can for each child regardless of disability				
<b>What do you perceive as your role in educating students with disabilities?</b>			Ensuring all teachers have basically the right amount of knowledge and tools to educate the students				I think my role with kids with disabilities is the same as the role with any kid. I need to be the model, the example; I think that as the educational leader you set the tone I think my teachers see me not just with kids, with ALL kids, making sure. (examples, stories)
How would			I believe	I feel his	No, he	I wouldn't	

you describe your principal's perception of students with disabilities?			her perceptions are the same as any other student she has, she doesn't treat them any differently. She still expects 100% for all her students no matter who they are.	phil. is that we are a no excuse school  Every child will learn on our campus... everyone	expects me to do whatever he expects from his general ed teachers	think he treats them any differently	
<b>Tell me about your memory of the integration of students with disabilities into your grade school/jr hs/hs.</b>	Principal- I don't even remember anyone having disabilities Mind you I went to Ms. S, I don't think I had an IEP, but I had to go to her room because I had a hard time comprehending. I don't remember anybody in ele, ms, hs or coll.		3 <sup>rd</sup> grade (story)	Personal in the RIF program (Reading is Fundamental) I member going into that little class so to get support	A lot of LD went unnoticed I remember being in school with kids that were really low  The real first exp. would be college because for me growing up they either it just went unnoticed or kept basement, by the boiler rm	I'm so old, they didn't have spec ed back then	I remember two different things: I remember a special class, a Resource which had a really negative connotation, but I also do remember kids in wheelchair being in class with me too, so I think I've seen both.
<b>How old were you? Describe the climate of that school.</b>			Progressive-I can't remember any other				People thought it was different, it was something

			student in the classroom now with gen ed students				unusual, but I don't remember anything negative about it either, there're always knuckle-heads.
<b>How does the current state of education for students with disabilities decades after PL94-142 influence your thoughts on inclusion?</b>	No, not really. I believe that as much as possible they need to be in a general education setting. I do believe it's for the best, unless their behavior problem. As far as the laws, maybe the discipline thing (story)		At first I saw some of the negative ...I saw students making fun of him – teacher took students aside and straightened it out (story)	NCLB is a positive thing that has come out of it, that we do not forget about our kids who are in special education because they are subgroup  To hear people really care about the kids, I've seen a big difference to make sure they're learning	Compared to previous exp, out here there is actual teaching going on	I feel special education have too many rights. I feel they are protected too much, especially when it comes to the behaviors. I advocate for sp ed but for learning I want gen ed kids to have all the rights that sp ed does and if the special ed kid is disrupting the rm, then I don't feel they should be in that rm	I really don't think they did. I think the things that have come out, a lot of the laws, that I've seen come out is because people weren't doing the right thing.
<b>How has your role as an admin changed as a result of these laws?</b>	Laws regarding manifestation determinations (stories)		The laws haven't really changed so much				I would say no, right now we're looking at...RTI (story)
<b>What is the role of the SEIF?</b>	Work with staff and ed esp new staff, mentor,	Professional resource	Creating IEPs, LEAing (story)				



	schedule, bet there to support IEPs, parent concerns Trained in Encore, able to provide prof dev						
<b>Describe your RTI. What is your role?</b>	Taking every single student in reading, writing, and math who is struggling and trying to get them proficient and the ones that have significant delays, they get brain lab, Fast Forward, tutoring, Tier 3, retention, ROLE: Attend mtgs. (story)		Can you refresh my memory again on RTI- what's that stand for	Ms. RTI! I do every-thing-training for Aims Web, setting up schedules, progress monitoring, developing interventions, writing plans	When I do attend, I sit with the teacher or group of teachers and discuss various strategies to try to help the student	I have no role in RTI	As in everything else, I am the cheer-leader and supporter. I firmly believe you get a good group of teacher, you kind of give them direction you want to go into and you get the hell out of their way (example and expectations)
<b>Describe your IEP. What is your role?</b>	Mainly I get involved with more of the high needs ones otherwise our team really does handle it (High needs defined and stories provided)		IEP, LEA, getting new teachers up to speed (story)	Initials, Re-evals, Present levels of functioning-it's all about collaboration, help my teachers write behavior plans	I do everything from parent notices to present levels, goals, everything. I'm respons. for that IEP from start to finish	I monitor the IEP, sit in on meetings and help the teachers that have questions, requests, help; I look at the IEPs to make sure they're compliant, if they need help writing anything. goals, present levels	I am basically am there if I am needed, we have very, very effective, I support my SEIF assist the teachers, I try to make sure they understand that the SEIF's is there to assist us and we don't get a

							lot of time with him (example)
<b>Principal's Role</b>			LEA's now and then...allows us in special ed to work on our own but she's always there for whatever we need (examples)	RTI-Like I said, we're a no excuse school, so it starts from him-he's there every wk to our mtgs (ex) IEP-will LEA when we need him For initials, he wants to review all the data, logs, interventions that were done-make sure we did everything we could at our campus	If I needed someone to sit in he would typically make sure the one think I will say he does he likes for us to work together as a team	IEP-Supportive if I request support  If there are questions concern I go to him and he addressed it ASAP	
<b>How do you explain the achievement gap?</b>	In order to even qualify there has to be a significant gap initially or a learning problem	Outside factors: attendance, home life	Reading and writing, it's hard, a lot of variables		I don't think it's a gap, I think it a lot of it has to do with the supported home because I have some kids who are in resource oh good amazing support from home.	I believe they just do not connect. The disabilities do not connect a gen ed kid, I walk into a gen ed classrm, the teacher teachers and I will be shocked because those gen ed kids are just picking it up, whereas LD	I think that there may be a difference there in a sense of ability, if the kid has a learning disability, it doesn't mean that they can't learn, it means that we need to find another way to TEACH that child to be able to

						kid doesn't get it-learns on a slower and lower level and it's shocking to see what a typical kid can do.	learn and to give that child as much as possible that that child can take and learn and to be better with (example)
<b>What systems do you have in place to assist your IEP AYP pop?</b>	We treat them like every other kid! They don't know they have an IEP- Everyone is responsible for doing 100%.		Amount of programs in place for the students (examples)	We offer a lot of things at this campus (ex) Before after school tutoring, additional time, Lexia, SuccessMaker, Study Island, formative assess They are constantly taking temp gauge into the standards and you have lists of kids who are making it and are not making it and what they're doing and they're changing instruction because of it.	In service trainings, sharing lesson plans between gen ed and spec ed, AM & PM tutoring, summer academy	There's a lot of community support here. Parenting classes after school teaching English This is a community based school. They're not so much transient at the school, they don't leave, and they want to be here. They want the kids at the school.	(Five Basics for Effective Schools) That is the system that focused assistance which is part of that is it goes under that big umbrella, it not only affects special ed kids, but it affects all kids!
<b>Some blame</b>	My		I		I don't	I think	I say

<b>spec programs and suggest full inclusion to provide this pop with greater opp. What do you say to this?</b>	paradigm's shifting on this. If I could go back a year or two, I would (story of keeping a student in an inclusive environment)		disagree (story)		agree. (story of 4 <sup>th</sup> grade student at the beginner 1 <sup>st</sup> grade level)  It doesn't work for everyone, I think if a student is maybe a yr or two yrs behind academically, then sure, I think inclusion is a good place, but you get in to 4 <sup>th</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup> gr and it becomes embarrassing for them to leave the room  When you're so far behind that leads to other things-loss of interest in school, behavior issues, self image	inclusion is ok for some of the students, but there needs to be a full continuum for students that are lagging behind and need that extra small group out.	sometimes the resources aren't there to do it and sometimes that's going to be the very best thing for that child and sometimes you know what, that child that's not the best thing for the child, that child needs individualization, that smaller setting, and that's what we have to trust our teachers and our staff as professionals to help make those determinations.
<b>Others argue that inclusion does not provide the sp/indiv instruction needed for this pop. What do you say to</b>	I think it does (Disability related) It has to be based on the child	If it's within the scope of regular standards and core curriculum	I disagree too (story)		Once again it depends on the student  That extra person in the classroom doesn't	I feel inclusion just needs to be addressed with SET and gen ed teacher, has to be some consultation on	I say that it may not in all classes give the opportunity for the teacher to individualize with that particular

<b>this?</b>		um, then yes			just benefit kids with IEPs, but it benefits all students	those kids and not just put them in there and let them float without supports	kid in the sense of, of I'm going to leave all the kids over here and I'm going to work with just this child, but what we ask all teachers to do (examples, stories)
<b>What role does the history of institutionali- zation play?</b>	I don't even remember		A little before my time, horrible		I don't think it's relevant	They don't have them now	I am really not sure
<b>If you had to craft an inclusive school, what would it look like?</b>	Where everybody just LOVES to be here and wants to do what's best for kids; kids love coming, they feel safe, they feel secure, they feel like their valued-it doesn't matter if they have an IEP or not.		It would kind of look like this school collabora- tion is done well... (ex)		I don't think I am totally sold 100% on inclusion, there are some kids that are just not going to benefit from that (4 <sup>th</sup> grade kid that can barely write story)	We'd have a lot more supportive teachers to go in and help with inclusion  More support FOR the general education teachers	First of all, start with great teachers, you have to have great teachers that's going to want to work with kids, secondly they would have to be well-trained on inclusion; how to differentiate instruction (examples)
<b>Where do you see the public school system headed in the next 5- 10 yrs?</b>	We need to up the standards in instruct. time.		Too many variables as it relate to standard. testing.				Working together with teacher unions, districts, and schools (Teacher Re- mediation Academy- collabor- ating closer

							on ensuring that we only keep the most effective teachers, and there's a fair and equitable way of being able to ask other teachers to find another career if necessary
<b>In what ways will students with disabilities be influenced?</b>	I think that it's great that kids with disabilities are trying to reach their highest potential in that staff is trying to get them to their goals.		They are a subgroup of what we look at for our CRT scores, so they're just as involved as any other student.				I don't see any difference. I don't see them being influenced any differently. The bottom line is ALL kids will have better teachers. I think it would be a good influence not just for kids with disabilities, but ALL kids.
<b>What sustainable strategies to ensure students with disabilities will continue to receive quality instruction?</b>	We have our grade levels in place and they chose who's best to meet the needs of our IEP population  every child we're accountable for and the grade level is accountable		Principal has brought in a ton of other program which a lot of them are geared more toward diverse learners (ex)				I would say the same one for all kids. Just giving them all the attention, giving them all the best teachers I can possibly monitoring those teachers making sure they're doing a

	for every single kid.						good job, making sure those kids are feeling safe and comfortable in their environ, giving them that attention, making that personal contact with them
<b>In what ways to you prepare your instructional staff?</b>	A lot of profess develop. is very data driven (story)		Hire the teachers that are qualified for the job, always there to make sure we get as much time for profess development courses, always there for whatever we need		Differentiated instruction	I'm not sure I can't tell you, but from your data I'm hearing we must be doing something right.	Once again, it goes across the board. We've done some things with inclusion.
<b>What advice would you give principals who are committed to improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities?</b>	Building confidence-being like this big cheerleader and just believing and giving people hope and then not seeing the disability.		Make sure you know enough about sp ed to be able to support us if anything we need and and strive for inclusion		Communication and support  Not being afraid to just roll up your sleeves and get in there and doing what needs to be done and he does a lot of questioning too	I think they need to take a lot more training in special education IEP process to look at the goals and benchmarks and accommodations. They don't have a clue	Make sure if they're going to do that, that they train the teachers working with inclusion, the benefits of addressing all kids, and to always just make sure that they are sensitive to the needs of

							all kids I think that covers the special kids too.
<b>Success story:</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> grade student		5 <sup>th</sup> grade student		3 <sup>rd</sup> grade student who couldn't read-now 4 <sup>th</sup> grade, reading on a 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade level	MCS student	Student with autism



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