A Study of Building Administrators' Knowledge and Attitude Regarding Placement of Students with Disabilities and Least Restrictive Environment

By

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Abstract

The purpose of the current investigation is to examine the attitudes and knowledge of principals toward least restrictive environment (LRE) as it relates to students with disabilities in four counties in Northeast Ohio. The research was conducted using a web-based modified survey that included questions from *The Principals' and Inclusion Survey* (2000), developed by Dr. Cindy L. Praisner, hypothetical scenarios survey developed by Donna M. Power (2007) and 3 opened questions developed by the researcher. The data were collected and analyzed to determine the current perceptions of principals related to their understanding, experience, and placement perceptions regarding students with disabilities and the continuum of services. The survey results indicated that the principals and assistant principals in the surveyed regions reported a positive attitude towards servicing students with disabilities in the general education classroom. There is also a positive correlation between the knowledge score and the years as building administrator and years of general education teaching experience.

Keywords: inclusion, least restrictive environment, continuum of services, special education, models of service.

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"Ask not that the journey be easy; ask instead that it be worth it." JFK

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Chapter 1

Historical Perspective

Successful schools do not exist without great leaders (National Association of Secondary School Principals and National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013). Principal leadership has long been seen as an integral component of the success that students experience, both academically and emotionally. The role of the principal has evolved over the years, with the extant research from the past decade supporting the importance of school leadership. "A particularly noteworthy finding is the empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement" (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 5).

The Wallace Foundation, since 2000, has supported research that explores the concept that school leadership is critical to student achievement. The importance of effective principals' impact on achievement for all students resonates throughout research and paints a vivid picture of the criticalness of school leadership. Because the role and responsibilities of principals have changed, and the impact that building leaders play in implementing programs is critical to the success of schools, it is imperative to understand how attitudes and perceptions impact the success of students with disabilities in the general education environment. In the past, principals were identified as managers; however, with the changes in legislation, principals operate as visionaries, educational leaders, disciplinarians, and public relations' directors. (Wallace Foundation, 2013). As summarized in the Wallace research since 2000, five suggested key responsibilities for building administrators are:

- "Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, on based on high standards;"
- "Creating a climate of hospitality to education in order that safety, cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;"
- "Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision;"
- "Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to their utmost; and"
- "Managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement" (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 4)

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) highlighted school leadership as central to student achievement for all students (United States Department of Education [ED], 2015). Educating all students, to their fullest potential, in the LRE, is critical to the success of every student. Therefore, integrating students with disabilities is not only a legal concern, but also an educational equity and quality concern, and educational leaders are a key component to its success. The principal is the individual who sets the vision for the school, including the vision of success for ALL (Smith, 2011). The principal insures that the placement of students is appropriate, and that the classroom teacher has the necessary supports (time, resources, and expertise) to educate all students. An IEP team must have an individual who acts in the capacity as the District Representative. In most districts, the principal has the responsibility as District Representative in the IEP process. Appropriate individuals from the district who may be considered district representatives at an IEP meeting include principal, assistant principal, or Special Education

administrator (McElhinny & Pellegrin, 2014). This responsibility requires that they must be equipped with knowledge of the law, must be qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially designed instruction, must possess knowledge about the general education curriculum, must be knowledgeable regarding resources that are available from the school/district, and must provide the support to commit to those resources (Ohio's Operating Standards for Students with Disabilites, 2014).

Research suggests that many principals do not possess a complete understanding of the laws and procedures to successfully provide an environment of success for all students nor are they prepared to provide effective special education leadership (Monteith, 2000; Walther-Thomas, DiPaola, & Butler, 2002; DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Smith 2011; Schulze, 2014). Principals' knowledge regarding the ever-evolving laws and procedures is based on their limited exposure to this information via certification programs, professional development, and the existing practices of the district.

Statement of the Problem

Educating students in the LRE is essential to the success of all students. The philosophy of inclusion means that students with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers to the fullest extent possible. Although educating students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers is a focus of Ohio, school leaders may not possess the necessary knowledge regarding the needs of the special education student, or strategies for successfully including students with disabilities within the general education classes. The current investigation proposes to examine the perception of principals in one region

in Northeast Ohio regarding creating and maintaining an inclusive environment for students with disabilities in the general education setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how the relationship between school leadership, attitudes, and knowledge of principals in Ohio schools affects the success of providing services to students with disabilities in their LRE. In addition, this study will determine if there are certain principal characteristics that moderate the provision of services that support the success of students with disabilities in their LRE.

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of school principals in Northeast Ohio toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms?
2. Do the following qualities affect principals' attitudes toward providing services to students with disabilities in their LRE:
    a. Age of principal
    b. Gender of principal
    c. Years of experience as a principal
    d. Size of school
    e. Type of school
        i. Elementary
        ii. Middle
        iii. High school
    f. Geographical Location
    i. Urban

ii. Suburban

iii. Rural

3. What is the relationship between principals' knowledge of special education law and the following characteristics: gender, age, years of experience as an administrator, the number of courses taken in special education and attitude towards providing services to students in their LRE?
4. Is there an interaction between the principals' attitude and knowledge based on provided responses? Are there any potential moderators involved in this relationship?

Research Design

This study employed a survey research design to investigate the attitudes and knowledge on special education and the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education environment. There are several advantages of survey research including the ability to reach several individuals with similar characteristics in a short amount of time. After consideration of advantages and disadvantages of several various data collection methods, the Internet survey format was chosen for the primary data collection. Follow-up telephone and email interviews and/or reminders were also used to increase data collection.

Significance of the Study

Much of the research that has been conducted about understanding the impact of school administrators' attitudes toward the inclusion of children with disabilities has focused on either elementary or secondary administrators. Unlike most of the previous investigations, this study investigated both elementary and secondary building level

administrators (assistant principals and head principals). In addition, the population included in the current investigation included large urban school districts, smaller rural districts, and suburban school districts. This study also investigated the placement of students with disabilities in their LRE, not inclusion. By understanding the impact of a school administrator's attitude towards the placement of children with disabilities in a general education setting, the results of this study could benefit universities, school districts, superintendents, special education administrators, principals, teachers, students, and community. The findings of this investigation could inform the local support teams that are responsible for designing professional development for building administrators on the existing gaps in building leadership knowledge and understanding that can drive the development of future professional development. Lastly, outcomes of the research could lead to the development of administrative coursework to prepare principals more appropriately to be school leaders of ALL students.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that the completion of the survey depended on the participants' fidelity. An additional limitation of this study could be that the participating school principals may have different policies and procedures within their districts that surround inclusive practices. The study was restricted to Northeast Ohio, and therefore, may not be representative of other regions in Ohio or districts outside of Ohio.

Definition of Terms

Child with a disability: Child with a disability means a child evaluated in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, Sec. Sec. 300.304 through 300.31, as having intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language

impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as emotional disturbance), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, and other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 [IDEA])

District representative: Is a person who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially-designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities, knows the general education curriculum, and knows about the availability of school district resources and has the authority to commit to those resources. (Ohio's Operating Standards for Students With Disabilites, 2014).

"Free appropriate public education (FAPE): means 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 Ohio department of education, including the requirements of this rule;

(c) Include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the state involved; and

(d) Are provided in conformity with an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) that meets the requirements of rule 3301-51-07 of the Administrative

Code for individualized education programs." (Ohio's Operating Standards for Students With Disabilites, 2014, p. 24)

"General education: means a learning environment that provides a community of students with the opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge necessary to meet state and local performance objectives" (Ohio's Operating Standards for Students With Disabilites, 2014, p. 24)

Inclusion: is the principle that supports the education of children with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers rather than separately (Webster, 2016)

Least restrictive environment (LRE): according to the final rules and regulations published in the Federal Register, stated children with disabilities are to be educated with non-disabled children to the maximum extent possible, and should only be removed from a normal environment when the extent and severity of their handicap precludes an appropriate education in the normal setting even with appropriate supplemental learning aids. A child may only be removed from the general educational setting if the nature or severity of the disability is such that the child cannot be educated in general classes, even with the use of supplementary aids and services (IDEA, 2004, Sec. 300.114).

Mainstreaming: the return of children with mild disabilities to a regular classroom for a portion of each school day (Rogers, n.d.).

School leader: means a principal, assistant principal, building administrator or other individual who is

(a) “an employee or officer of an elementary school or secondary school, local educational agency, or other entity operating an elementary school or secondary school; and”

(b) “responsible for the daily instructional leadership and managerial operation in the elementary school or secondary school building. “(ESSA, 2015, p. 297).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

One of the purposes of schools is to create a learning environment for all students to be successful. If this is, indeed, one of the goals of the educational system, then how has an achievement gap been created? Schools are charged with educating *all* students to allow them to fulfill their potential. The State of the World's Children 2013 reported that barriers for students with disabilities are both physical and social in nature. "Children with disabilities are one of the most marginalized and excluded groups of children, experiencing widespread violation of their rights" (UNICEF, 2013, p. 4). In addition, according to Plan International significant barriers still exist for many people with disabilities such as inaccessible school buildings and learning materials, discrimination preventing students with disabilities access to education that is on equal terms to others, as well as quality of education where children with disabilities have been included into non-inclusive settings (Plan International, 2013). Children and Young People with Disabilities FACT Sheet (2013) revealed "…the greatest barriers to inclusion of children with disabilities are stigma, prejudice, ignorance and lack of training and capacity building" (UNICEF, 2013, p. 6). Shifrer, Callahan, and Muller, (2013) discussed the marginalization within the courses that students with disabilities are enabled to take in high school. When we marginalize our students in school, it extends past school and affects their future, as indicated in the World Report on Disability (World Health Organization and The World Bank, (2011). People with disabilities experience lower rates of employment which directly correlates with their quality of life (World Health Organization and The World Bank, 2011). The value of school leadership cannot be

underestimated to mitigate barriers for students with disabilities. If students are to be successful in our schools, principals must rise to the challenge to ensure that school culture embraces high expectations for all students (DiPaola et al., 2004).

When looking at leadership, do schools merely focus on leadership styles, or actual leadership practices that will create an environment that will foster student growth for all students (Robinson, 2011)? Michael Fullen, in the foreword of *The Literacy Principal,* shared that leadership is the driving force behind change taking place in schools (Booth & Rowsell, 2002). This chapter presents findings in educational research that directly relate to the issue of the impact of leadership on inclusive environments.

Special Education

For decades, special education has been on the fringes of education, instead of the forefront, resulting in a parallel system of educational services in classrooms (Florian, 2014). Often thought of as an addition to the core education that needed to be applied in a separate location or environment, and by certain educators, special education was designed to provide additional accommodations, modifications, and services for students who were not successful in classrooms. Earlier classrooms created an environment that compartmentalized students into categories, which in turn created environments where not all students were successful. Society began to believe that special education meant separate education. According to Frattura and Capper (2007), "If we continue to function in the same manner as we have over the past five decades, we will continue to create schools composed of students who belong and those students who do not" (p. xxviii). This implies that the current classroom education is not appropriate for all students, therefore, widening the achievement gap between students who are typical and those who

are identified as students with disabilities. As previously mentioned, one of the barriers and negative impacts on student outcomes that are reported to affect students with disabilities is the lack of training and capacity-building for educators (Praisner 2003; Ramirez, 2003; Smith, 2011; UNICEF, 2013).

The history of special education is vast and laden with issues, controversies, and developments that have spanned the decades of the education system. School requirements have morphed over time due to legal and court decisions. The segregation of students with disabilities became the topic of many conversations within the walls of homes, schools, and courts. What was once considered the appropriate way to educate students with disabilities is now seen as discriminatory and unconstitutional; the goal now is to educate students with disabilities into the general education classrooms to the greatest extent appropriate.

Prior to the 1970s, children and adults with disabilities were either institutionalized, or remained protected in their individual homes with only one in five students with disabilities educated in public schools, laws that were in place often operated to exclude students with disabilities (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Florian, 2014). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of the early 1970s, now referred to as IDEA (2004), led to the disassembling of segregated facilities and classrooms mandating that all students with disabilities be provided with a "free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment" (Osgood, 2005, p. 105). EAHCA (1975) introduced the term of LRE, which reshaped the way schools were to service students who were identified as handicapped. Additionally, PL 94-142's emphasis was on those students who were mainstreamed into the general education setting in order

to provide them with the opportunity to receive an *appropriate* education, which was often time denied to them prior to PL 94-142 (Bateman & Cline, 2016). The law was passed to meet four goals:

- To ensure that special education services are available to children who need them;
- To guarantee that decisions about services to disabled students are fair and appropriate;
- To establish specific management and auditing requirements for special education; and
- To provide federal funds to help the states educate disabled students (EAHCA, 1975)

With the term of *appropriate* education, IDEA (2004) recognized that education of all students in a general education setting may not be appropriate for all students and that it also may be detrimental for some students with disabilities. Therefore, Congress developed a *continuum of alternative placements* to include part-time resource programs to residential treatment facilities to ensure that an appropriate education was provided (EAHCA, 1975). As such, LRE must satisfy two criteria: provide students with disabilities an education appropriate to their unique learning needs and do so in as close proximity as possible to normally developing, age-appropriate peers. LRE is, therefore, not a place, but rather a principle that guides the instructional experience for each student with disabilities. The LRE, which is represented first in a student's IEP, does assume the student will be serviced in the general education setting. To guide the Local Education

Agencies (LEA) of Ohio, each district is required to adopt written policies and procedures regarding the manner in which the district fulfills its obligation under IDEA (2004), and the Ohio Operating Standards for Ohio Educational Agencies Serving Children with Disabilities. In the Operating Standards, districts will find the language that is used for guidance for LRE. Ohio's language mirrors the federal guidelines by declaring districts must:

- "ensure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or nonpublic institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled;"
- "ensure that the placement of students with disabilities in special classes, separate schooling or other removal from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services, modifications and/or accommodations cannot be achieved satisfactorily;"
- "ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services in the LRE;"
- "educate the child in the school that the child would attend if nondisabled unless the IEP of the child requires other arrangements;"
- "in selecting the LRE for a child with a disability, the IEP team must consider any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of the services that the child needs; and"

- “not remove a child with a disability from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum.” (Ohio's Operating Standards for Students with Disabilites, 2014, p.160).

The term LRE was then reinterpreted in the Regular Education Initiative (REI, 1986), which focused on marrying general education and special education by recognizing that the education of students with disabilities is a shared responsibility allowing full access known as inclusive education. Inclusive education, rooted deeply in social justice, is not without obstacles. Many general education teachers resist serving students with disabilities in their classroom (Harkins, 2012). A timeline of the events which have shaped services for special education in the last 50 years is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

Timeline of Pinnacle Historical Events in Special Education

Timeline for Special Education		
Date	**Event**	**Description**
1954	*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, (1954)*	This decision was a turning point for segregation in schools. The Supreme Court decision desegregated schools and is used as precedence for equality for students with special needs.
1965	*Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.*	This basically emphasizes equal access to education with standards and accountability. The law also created federally funded programs that can be given out by the state.
1966	Congress adds Title VI to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* creating a Bureau of Education for the Handicapped	The original title has been changed to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) designed to protect children from as young as 3 to 21 years old.
1972	Two significant decisions: *PARC v*. Commonwealth of *Pennsylvania* (*1972*) and *Mills vs. Board of Education (*1972) apply the equal protection argument to students with disabilities.	This established the right for children with a mental disability to have a free education (like any other student in the state of Pennsylvania). The court case spiraled through to *Mills v. D.C. Board of Education (1972)* which applied this case to national scale that eventually turned in to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975).
1973	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is enacted	The Act ensures that students with severe disabilities have access to rehabilitation services and vocational training while in the public school system.
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.	Specifically address people with disabilities. Known as the "Bill of Rights" for students with disabilities, this act guaranteed "free appropriate public education", "due process", and "Individual education plans (IEP)" for all students with disabilities.
1982	*Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley* (1982)	It was sufficient that the instruction and services be such as "to permit the child to benefit educationally from that instruction." The ruling marked the first time that the court had interpreted any portion of the EHA.
1986	P.L. 94-142 (1986, 2010)	Extended the special education related services to age two.

1987	The Regular Education Initiative (REI, 1987, 1990)	Called for general educators to become more responsible for the education of students with disabilities. Questioned the legitimacy of special education as a system of education separate from general education.
1990	P.L. 94-142 is renamed to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1975-1990)	Continues the demands of P.L. 142 (it is just renamed) and reinforces that the IEP must include a statement of transition services.
1990	Americans with Disabilities (ADA, 1990) is created	This Act protects people with disabilities in America from discriminating based on their disabilities in areas including employment, public services, transportation, public accommodations and telecommunications.
1990	Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technology Education Act (1990)	Students with disabilities (SWD) are provided with resources for improving educational skills needed in a technologically advanced society, guaranteeing full vocational educational opportunities
1997	IDEA is amended	Changes include SWD participation in state and district wide assessment programs; evaluation; parent participation eligibility and placement decisions; emphasis on participation in the general education classroom and curriculum, transition planning, discipline of children with disabilities
2001	No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) is enacted	Intended to help initiate better performance for all students with a major expansion of the federal government's role in education. Their role is no longer simply providing money to the ESEA intends, but mandates standards and sanctions for school who "fail" set criteria.
2015	Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)	Replaces NCLB. Many of the same components of NCLB focusing on Accountability plans, accountability goals for all students.
2017	*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1* (2017)	In order to provide children with disabilities, free appropriate public education that is guaranteed under IDEA, school districts must offer children and IEP that is reasonably composed to enable each child to make progress appropriate for that child's circumstances.

The table provides a brief description as well as outcome to the event. The journey of the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings has been a journey of many turns and it continues to develop today.

Least Restrictive Environment

The emphasis on LRE has not produced the intended outcomes. Many children continue to be discriminated against and marginalized as evident in the aforementioned literature review. In January 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law and held school districts accountable to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged students. One facet of NCLB (2001) was Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is a measure of year-to-year student achievement on statewide assessments. NCLB (2001) required all states to establish state assessment systems and academic standards that met the federal guidelines. AYP held each LEA accountable for the academic success of all students, with a focus on holding all students to high standards to prepare them for careers and college. This greater accountability system further preserved the need for more inclusive settings for students with disabilities. If students with disabilities were to perform, and be successful on the high stakes tests, they needed to have access to the core standards. As recently as December 2015, ESSA reauthorization reinforced existing accountability systems to ensure that school districts were held accountable for all students' performances, with a focus on low-performing schools, and schools with achievement gaps (United States Congress, 2015).

National Trends

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, as of 2013-2014, 95% of six- to twenty-one-year-old students with disabilities were served in regular schools, with the percentage of students served in a general education classroom at 62%: a 29% increase since 1990-1991. Though the number of 62% seemed hopeful, with a closer look at the data, students who were served with speech or language impairments made up the highest percent, with two-thirds of students with specific learning disabilities and developmental delays. Only 16% of students with intellectual disabilities spend most of the school day (80% or more) inside general education classes (ED, 2014). In Ohio, the 2014-2015 school year data reflected, similarly, that Ohio had 254,187 children identified as children with a disability, and 61.35% of all students, ages 6-21, were served inside a general education setting for 80% or more of the time (ED, 2014).

Based on the Ohio Department of Education Special Education Profile for 2014-2015, the target set for the LEA to educate students with disabilities within the general education classroom was 63%. To further investigate where students with disabilities are educated, the following information was retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW) "IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection," 2014-15. It indicates that children who are identified in the following disability categories are educated inside the general education classroom for 80% or more of the day:

- Multiple Disabilities, 17.34%;
- Autism, 42.87%;
- Intellectual disabilities, 21.27%;
- Emotional disturbance, 51.38%;

- Specific Learning Disabilities, 71.37%; and
- Speech Language Impairment, 87.95%.

An analysis of that information suggests that the highest percentage of students who benefit from being educated in a general education setting are those students identified with Speech Language Impairment, which continues to support the 2014 data. The review of the data reveals that it is not clear that placement decisions (LRE) are considered solely on disability identification.

Inclusive Education

Though special education services have improved over the years, and students with disabilities may have a higher rate of being educated in the general education environment, there is still disparity in schools. The need to develop educational outcomes for students with disabilities is greater than ever with a great emphasis on where students are educated. The terms LRE, inclusion, and mainstreaming are often used interchangeably, however, they are not terms that are synonyms, but terms that have clear distinctions on how students with disabilities are educated. Though the term inclusion is not mentioned in EAHCA (1975) or IDEA (2004), nor is it used in case law, inclusion is a word that is often used to define a place where a student with a disability is educated, or a service, in the way a student is educated. The sheer fact that the inclusion definition has multiple and competing interpretations may be the catalyst of why it is a challenge to school districts (Smith, 2011; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013). Courts provided clarity of the regulations that surround inclusion by clearly stating that schools have the right to individually determine the degree of placement in the general education setting for students as it is prescribed by their needs (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013).

Inclusion is more than a series of practices or procedures; it is a civil right and promotes equity. What inclusion or inclusive education refers to is that all students, with or without disabilities, are invited, valued, and deserving of the same educational opportunities and experiences in age-appropriate, general education classes with the supports to be successful. Paula Kluth, in her website article, *Is Your School Inclusive?* shared, "Inclusive schooling is an educational movement that stresses interdependence and independence, views all students as capable, and values a sense of community. Further, it supports civil rights and equity in the classroom" (Kluth, 2017, p. 1). It is a philosophy that goes beyond just being included to being integrated; it is where students learn and with whom students learn. The National Center of Inclusive Education (2011) defined it as "characterized by presumed competence, authentic membership, full participation, reciprocal social relationships, and learning to high standards by all students with disabilities in age-appropriate general education classrooms with supports provided to students and teachers to enable them to be successful" (p. 1).

Inclusive education, though, for the purpose of this paper, refers to students with disabilities.

Murawski and Dieker (2013), in the book *Leading the Co-teaching Dance: Leadership Strategies to Enhance Team Outcomes,* defined inclusion as a term that is more of a philosophy, with the focal points being the necessary supports and assistance, as defined by the IEP, that any student needs to be successful in the general education setting, are provided (p. 2-3). The definitions of the word inclusion are plentiful as well as illusive. Individuals need to embrace the fact that inclusion is not a place, but,

"Inclusion is not something you do but something you believe" (Murawski & Dieker, 2013, p. 2).

Legal Influence

There are many court cases that have influenced and shaped the educational landscape and provided guidance in the area of special education. This is a review of eight influential cases since 1982.

1982: In *Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley*, the court determined not to require that the special instruction and supportive services provided under the law by state governments to disabled students be designed to help them achieve their full potential as learners. Instead, it was sufficient that the instruction and services be such as "to permit the child to benefit educationally from that instruction". The ruling marked the first time that the court had interpreted any portion of the EHA (*Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 1982)*

1983: First court case on inclusive learning: In *Roncker v. Walter,* the court determined that special education services could be provided, feasibly, in a non-segregated school setting, then providing the same services in a segregated setting would be inappropriate *(Roncker v. Walter, 1983).*

1989: *Danny R. v. State Board of Education* determined that LRE and FAPE meant students had a right to inclusion to the maximum extent possible (*Daniel R.R. v. State Bd. of Educ., 1989)*.

1992: *Greer v. Rome City School District* (11th Circuit Court, 1992) determined that before a school district may decide that a student with a disability should be educated outside of the general education classroom, it must consider whether supplemental aids

and supports would allow for satisfactory education in the general education classroom. The major message was that all options must be considered before removing a child from the general education classroom *(Greer v. Rome City School District, 1992).*

1992: Students sued their school board because students with disabilities were not being taught in the LRE. A class action lawsuit, *Corey v. Chicago Public School Authority 1992*, in federal court, on behalf of all students with disabilities against the Chicago Public School Authority, alleged that students were not taught in the LRE. In 1997, the Chicago school reform board of trustees agreed to settle out of court and to establish policies, services, and staff development to end segregation of SWD *(Corey v. Chicago Public School Authority, 1992).*

1993: *Oberti v. Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon School District* (3rd Circuit Court). The court ruled in favor of a placement that was more inclusive than that provided by a self-contained placement. The court ruled that three factors must be considered:

- Did the district make reasonable efforts to accommodate the student in general education?
- Did the court compare the educational benefits the child would receive in the general education classroom with supplemental services contrasted with the benefits in a special education classroom?
- Did the court consider the effect the inclusion of the child with disabilities might have on the education of other children in the general education classroom? *(Oberti v. Clementon, 1993).*

1994: *Board of Education in Sacramento, CA v. Holland* determined LRE address four factors, including the needs of all children in the school that must be considered for FAPE. The four factors were as follows:

- The educational benefits of placing the child in a full-time regular education program;
- The non-academic benefits of such a placement;
- The effect the child would have on the teacher and other students in the regular classroom; and
- The costs associated with this placement *(Board of Education of Sacramento, CA v. Holland, 1994)*

2017: *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1* determined to meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances. In clarifying the standard, the Court rejected the "merely more than de minimis" (i.e., more than trivial) standard applied by the Tenth Circuit. In determining the scope of FAPE, the Court reinforced the requirement that "every child should have the chance to meet challenging objective" *(Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District Re-1, 2017).*

Though courts are consistently providing meaning and understanding to LRE, the concept is still illusive and open to interpretation. Given the evolving legal landscape is there no doubt why educational leaderships' understanding of special education law is critical in the servicing of students with disabilities?

Benefits of Inclusive Education for All Students

The journey to becoming an inclusive school is one that is both long and challenging. However, the benefits of creating an inclusive environment are advantageous to all students. Inclusion is not just merely placing students with disabilities in a general education classroom but is more of a way a school provides the support and services for students with disabilities. The National Center on Inclusive Education at the Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire, provided an overview of the research on inclusive education that shares the benefits of being educated in an inclusive setting. A monograph of over 450 references that included a synthesis of the literature and relevant court decisions conducted by McGregor and Voglesberg (1998) stated the following benefits from students educated in general education classrooms: the IEPs of students supported in a general education classroom are of higher quality representing alignment with general education outcomes than those educated in segregated classrooms, inclusion does not compromise general education students' outcomes, the presence of SWD leads to new learning opportunities for general education students, and there is a small-to-moderate beneficial effect on the educational and functional outcomes of SWD. Their research also indicated that students with disabilities demonstrated gains in the areas of engagement, involvement of integrated activities, social interaction along with social competency and communication skills. Students with disabilities were more likely to be recognized as being a part of the school community by peers without disabilities (McGregor & Voglesberg,1998).

One of the largest longitudinal studies that focused on the benefits of inclusive education, The National Longitudinal Transition Study, which included nationally recognized sample of more than 11,000 students who were ages 13 through 16 and

receiving special education services in seventh grade or above in the 2000-2001 school year indicated higher scores on standardized tests of reading and math, fewer absences from school, fewer referrals for disruptive behavior, and better post-graduation outcomes in employment and independent living (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2005). The data were collected over a nine-year period which included information for not only the schools but also the students and parents as well (Wagner et al.). Falvey (2004) stated that there have not been any studies conducted since the latter part of the 1970s that have indicated any academic outcomes for students serviced in a separate setting. Falvey (2004) and Cole, Waldron, and Majad (2004) agreed with the research of Wagner et al. (2005) that students with disabilities, who are educated in the general education setting, demonstrate better performance in reading and math curriculum than those students educated in separate facilities. Despite the transforming outcomes, issues regarding inclusive education are still prevalent.

Educational Leadership

According to Arne Duncan, U.S. Education Secretary during the Obama administration, there can be no high-performing schools without great principals (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). In today's educational state, building-level administrators are charged with ways to improve student outcomes; this is not a new concept, but one that is constantly explored to determine the impact of effective leadership. Along with monitoring student academic outcomes, principals are faced with becoming managers of facilities, public relations' experts, budget analysts, and the social-emotional leaders of a building. The job description of a building administrator is extensive and evolving. Robinson (2011) stated that the expectations for school leaders

have never been higher and that this comes at a time where school enrollment is more diverse than historically. Given the changes in the student diversity in schools, it is even more critical to ensure that principals possess the necessary skills and characteristics to influence outcomes for students. One such guidance document that is required in Ohio is the Ohio's Principal Evaluation System ([OPES], 2015), that provides Ohio's principals with guidance and the definition of the characteristic needed to be an effective principal:

- "Help create a shared vision and clear goals for their schools and ensure continuous progress toward achieving the goals;"
- "Support the implementation of high-quality standards-based instruction that results in high levels of achievement for all students;"
- "Allocate resources and manage school operations in order to ensure a safe and productive learning environment;"
- "Establish and sustain collaborative learning and shared leadership to promote learning and achievement of all students; and"
- "Engage parents and community members in the educational process and create an environment where community resources support student learning, achievement and well-being" (OPES, 2015, p.3).

In OPES, principals can be rated ineffective, developing, skilled, or accomplished when evaluated. This tool also provides principals characteristics to consider to self-reflect on their processes and skills. Standard 2 focuses clearly on instruction, advocating for high levels of learning for all students. To be accomplished in this area, principals must demonstrate systemic discussions regarding instructional needs of all students. The table below, from OPES, clearly delineates the characteristic differences between the four

ratings under Standard 2: Instruction: Principals support the implementation of high-quality standards-based instruction that results in higher levels of achievement for all students. Standard 2 is subdivided into six elements (Table 2).

Table 2.

Six Elements of Standard 2

2.2 Principals ensure instructional practices are effective and meet the needs of all students.	
Ineffective	Principal does not attempt to diagnose and or misdiagnose the state of instructional practices in the school and is unable to articulate clear strategies to improve interventions.
Developing	Principal makes regular classroom visits and provides basic feedback on classroom instruction.
Skilled	Principal makes systemic and frequent classroom visits and provides feedback on classroom instruction and assessment while monitoring the use of varied instructional methods and formats to make learning experiences relevant and responsive to the needs of students with different abilities and from diverse backgrounds. Principal connects teachers to other faculty for aid in the development of their instructional methods.
Accomplished	Principal guides staff in the implementation of research based instructional practices and sets aside time for attention to crucial instructional issues during the school day. Principal empowers and facilitates teachers in designing curriculum and addressing instructional and assessment issues.

The overall rating of a principal is based on the four standards: *Ineffective, Developing, Skilled, and Accomplished.* Each standard increases the demands on a principal to ensure that the learning experiences for all students are relevant and responsive, and, therefore, further substantiates the importance of building leaderships' understanding of the continuum of services and their being an active participant in those decisions.

For decades, researchers have touted the effect of strong educational leaders' impacts on school culture, climate, and student achievement. Leadership is a function with as many definitions as people trying to define it (Stogdill, 1974) but not all leadership practices produce positive outcomes (OLAC, 2015). Hallinger and Heck (1998) conducted a review of over 40 empirical studies between 1980-95 that addressed the contribution that principals have on school effectiveness. The results of this review supported the belief that principals indirectly effect school effectiveness and student achievement. Hallinger and Heck (1998) also shared that the research during those 15 years became more complex and refined, extending inquiry from simply "Do principals make a difference?" to not only if principals have an effect, but how do they have an effect? (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). It was not until recently that education was not sure of what leadership practices had the greatest impact on teaching and learning (Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Not only does school leadership make a difference, it is second only to teaching as it relates to student outcomes (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Educational leaders serve as guides, catalysts, and facilitators of change; without an effective leader, an inclusive environment will not be successful. There is a correlation between district leadership and student achievement as well as school leadership and student achievement (Wilson, 2013; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). In two separate meta-analyses, the underlying relationships were discussed. In the chapter, *Does District Leadership Matter?* by Marzano and Waters (2009), they presented the finding that district leadership has a measurable effect on student achievement. They suggested that there are five district-level responsibilities to ensure that district leadership positively affects student achievement. They presented that

district leaders need to ensure collaborative goal setting, establish and monitor non-negotiables that surround instruction as well achievement, create an alignment of board policies and support to those goals, and finally, allocate the resources to support achievement and instruction (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

In a similar study that emphasized school leadership focusing on 21 responsibilities of the school leader, research supported that school leaders play a critical role in promoting and sustaining change (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The 21 responsibilities were: affirmation, change agent, contingent rewards, communication, culture, discipline, flexibility, focus, ideals/beliefs, input, intellectual stimulation, involvement and knowledge of curriculum/instruction, and assessment, monitoring/evaluating, optimizer, order, outreach, relationships, resources, situational awareness, and visibility. These responsibilities align with the achievement of all students and are timely and instrumental to the success or failure of inclusive education.

The connection between the two studies is once the district leaders (building leaders, teacher leaders, central office administrators, and board members) establish the nonnegotiable goals for the district; all stakeholders agree to support the attainment of those goals. This is communicated throughout the district to each building and all staff members.

The term educational leader refers to leaders in the classroom, leaders of the building, and leaders of a district. It is reported that consistent, well-informed support from the principals, and when principals serve as effective leaders, it makes a difference in student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). It further reveals that high-quality educational leaders achieve impact by setting directions and high expectations by

supporting teachers and key players with training and professional development, and by removing barriers that may inhibit the non-negotiables set forth as it surrounds teaching and learning. "The chance of any reform improving student learning is remote unless district and school leaders agree with its purposes and appreciate what is required to make it work" (Leithwood et al., p. 2). Carson (2011) documented that "every school has a unique cultural climate that is shaped by administrative decision making and other actions" (p. 32).

Due to the critical role building administrators play in implementing inclusive education programs, it is important to study how principals' perceptions towards including students with disabilities, in the general education settings, guide their decisions in placement decisions of LRE. Robinson (2011) further supported that the quality of a principal's leadership not only makes a difference to the achievement of students which is directly correlated to the location of their services. Ohio's Operating Standards for the Education of Students with Disabilities (2014) delineated that an IEP team must include a representative of the school district who:

- "Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities;"
- "Is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and"
- "Is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the school district" (p. 121)

The principal's role is essential to success as schools continue to meet the challenge of implementing IDEA (2004). The attitude and support of principals can ensure that the climate, instruction, curriculum, and assessment are conducive to the

success of all students, with a focus on students with disabilities (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001).

Research supports that the quality and attitudes of leadership matter in the outcome of students and staff, as well as the importance of improving leadership as a critical ingredient to allow school reform to be successful. Along with the investment in developing the instructional leaders of the building, is the professional development for both teachers and building leaders that is aligned with district goals, and expectations with a connection to the monitoring of the implemented professional development to ensure outcomes for all students. Likewise, Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) maintained that principal leadership is a key mechanism for improving schools. They focused the attention of their research on the direct and indirect pathways that connect school leadership to student learning. Principal leadership is associated with student learning through the school climate. Evidence supports that in schools where teachers rate their principals highly; it is more likely that there is a strong learning climate. Climates are more apt to be safe and orderly, and to have clear, post-secondary emphasis. Therefore, strong principal leadership that has the expectation of a school climate that is safe and orderly equates to high achievement of students.

Leadership for Students with Disabilities

There have been several studies conducted to measure the attitudes of principals toward educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Ball & Green, 2014; Brown, 2007; Chandler, 2015; Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Galano, 2012; Idol, 2006; Praisner, 2000; Praisner, 2003; Ramirez, 2006; Smith, 2011; Vazquez, 2010). Based on the extant research, variables that can affect a principal's attitude include grade

level of school, experience in the field of special education, number of students who are identified in the school, and types of disabilities, and training that the administrator has had either in pre-service or administrative coursework (Mulholland, 2011). Unlike the current investigation, most of the studies reviewed focused on a particular area or grade level, such as elementary schools or secondary schools.

In 2006, Ramirez investigated elementary principals and their attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. The results of Ramirez's (2006) survey of 110 elementary principals (32% of the sample size) from the Texas Education Agency indicated that the special education teaching experiences that principals had significantly affected their attitudes towards inclusion. Ramirez (2006) stated that there were significant findings for five of the six independent variables: special education teaching experience, elementary principal experience, in-service training hours on inclusion, time period of special education training, and law knowledge. In addition, the study also indicated that there is a need to develop strong administrative leadership programs grounded in more positive attitudes toward inclusion. Overall, principals reported a more positive than negative attitude toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. The results of the study clearly "demonstrated that principals' attitudes and perceptions can affect the successful implementation of inclusion programs and play and important part in their success" (p. 89).

Similarly, Praisner (2000) assessed the attitudes of 408 elementary principals from the Common Wealth of Pennsylvania toward the inclusion of student with disabilities; she found that one in five principals' attitudes towards inclusion were positive. The introduction to special education concepts through

training and positive experiences were found to contribute to positive principals' attitude towards the integration of students with disabilities. "Three areas related to attitudes toward inclusion lend to additional research: (a) factors related to placement perceptions, (b) role of experience with students with disabilities, and (c) type of training for inclusive practices" (Praisner, 2003, p. 141). Subsequently, Praisner's (2000) study that consisted of surveying 408 elementary principals indicated that those principals with positive attitudes were more likely to ensure that students were serviced in a less restrictive environment.

To further substantiate the premise that school leadership plays a direct role in the success of inclusion, Galano (2012) surveyed elementary school principals in New Jersey. He specifically surveyed principals regarding their attitudes towards inclusion. The results of this investigation revealed that 96% of the urban principals reported positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. This research also indicated that the more training and understanding a principal has in the area of behavior management and crisis intervention, the more positive the principals' attitudes were when ensuring that students with a disability were serviced in a general education setting. Galano's (2012) research supported Praisner's (2000) findings, regarding the value of integrating special education topics into administrative leadership training programs, and that principals require more development of what was needed for dealing with crises, and a stronger understanding of different characteristics of disabilities.

Likewise, Smith (2011) surveyed 405 high school principals from the state of Georgia and 66.3% of Georgia secondary principals who completed the survey (Principals and Inclusion Survey [PIS], 2000) possessed a positive attitude towards

including students with or without disabilities. He further concluded that students with disabilities can benefit from integration in a general education classroom with 69.8% of the principals who completed the survey indicated that students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities, while 96% of the principals disagreed that students with disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the activities of a regular school. This study supports the premise that attitudes of principals, correlated to the training and experience that they have had with students with disabilities, and the need for administrative preparatory programs to be more inclusive of current trends, themes, and findings of students with disabilities. Smith (2011) extended the concept of preparatory programs to include teachers and counselors to include more exposure and understanding of the inclusion of students with disabilities along with the understanding of disabilities.

Murray's (2012) dissertation used the PIS developed by Praisner (2000). Murray (2012) surveyed 606 elementary principals in Pennsylvania, focusing on the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding inclusion as well as co-teaching and differentiated instruction. The overall findings of the study indicated that the principals reported to have high regards for inclusion and reported a high usage of the instructional strategies of co-teaching and differentiated instruction. Murray (2012) reported that 134 principals responded out of a total of 460 possible participants: a 29% response rate, which also may suggest that the principals who responded were proponents of inclusion and, therefore, responded favorably, whereas principals who may have concerns regarding the philosophy of inclusion may have not responded (Murray, 2012).

Ball and Green (2014) further explored the attitudes and perceptions of the inclusion of students with disabilities by surveying 170 elementary, secondary principals, and assistant principals in a Southeastern United States public school district using the PIS. A total of 138 school leaders completed and returned the survey for a return rate of 81%. The results of this study revealed that there is a relationship between the training and experience of school leaders relative to special education and inclusive practices. Attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities were negative, with a mean total 2.46 out of 5.0, which mirrors Praisner's results though the principals and assistant principals in the study supported inclusive practices, their attitudes varied depending on the disability category and characteristics of the students. Additional findings that were revealed: finding school leaders lack training and experience in special education concepts, school leaders support inclusive placements for students with disabilities, however, disability category is weighted. The research also suggested that though attitude is critical for inclusive practices, these researchers concluded that the training and the experience the school administrators possessed is more critical to inclusive practices (Ball & Green, 2014).

In related research, Chandler (2015) surveyed 73 principals and assistant principals in both elementary and secondary schools in one district in the Southeast region of the United States on their attitudes towards inclusion using The Principals' Attitude Toward Inclusive Education (PATIE) developed by Bailey. Seventy out of the 73 participants completed 100% of the survey for a response rate of 95.9%. Chandler (2015) investigated special education teaching experience, personal relationship with students with disabilities, and school enrollment of which all showed to be significantly

associated with attitudes toward inclusion. Consistent with previous studies, there was a strong predictor of attitude towards inclusion and the number of years of special education teaching experience. Chandler (2015) also found having a personal connection with individuals with disabilities is related to more favorable attitudes towards inclusion, which mirror Praisner's (2000) research.

Continuum of Services

The attitude of the administrative leader of the building is a critical component of the climate of the building. Murawski and Dieker (2013) shared that it is critical that educational leaders understand the options for servicing students' needs in an inclusive setting in order to ensure that the needs of students are met appropriately in this integrated environment. EAHCA (1975) and IDEA (2004) provided us guidance that a school needs to provide a continuum of placement options. The continuum of placement options identifies different service delivery models to provide specially designed instruction to a student with a disability (State of New York Department of Education, 2013). There are many examples of continuum of service in the literature. Murawski and Dieker (2013) provided one example of service options that range from the least restrictive to the most supportive as represented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Service Options

Level of Support	Description
No support	Students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom without any direct support from an intervention specialist. Students are still monitored and may receive indirect support through consultative services to their general education teacher.
In-class support (direct or indirect)	Intervention specialist or related service provider give support directly to the student in the general education classroom.
Facilitate Support	Intervention specialist or related service provider give support directly to the general education teacher through co-planning, co-serving, or co-assessing.
Co-teaching	Services and support are given to students with disabilities in the general education setting through intervention specialist (related service provider) with the general education teacher co-planning, co-serving, and co-assessing.
Self-contained	Services and support are provided by and intervention specialists in a separate classroom for students with disabilities.

In addition to having the continuum of services - which is assuming that districts are providing the continuum - school leaders need to not only understand the nuances of the continuum, but also understand what supports the leader needs to put in place to provide for staff, students, and community to allow success. Ball and Green (2014) and Smith (2011) stated that school leaders may not have the necessary understanding and knowledge of the continuum of services to properly place students. Taking a closer look at the menu of service options, options can include no support, in-class support, facilitated support, co-teaching, and self-contained classroom support.

The option of no support, where students with disabilities are educated in the general education setting without direct services, may still be monitored and/or be provided support in the indirect method through monitoring and consultative services by a special education service provider. In-class support, typically, is where a special education teacher is in the general education setting providing direct services, is reactive in nature, and void of co-planning. When the aperture is broadened, the team will realize that support may come for other special education service providers such as paraprofessionals, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and behavior therapists. Facilitated support is where a special education provider co-plans, co-serves, or co-assesses with the general education teacher. The *or* is the difference. The educational professionals are not involved with all three aspects due to possible scheduling conflicts, time constraints, and needs of the students. In this menu option, the special education service provider is not in the general education setting at all times. Co-teaching can best be described as general education teacher and special education service provider working symbiotically to co-plan, co-serve, and co-assess. The last menu selection that is available in a public-school building is that of a self-contained classroom, best described as a setting within a general education building where services are primarily provided by a special education service provider, in a separate classroom reserved for students with disabilities. Additional service options are available for students with a disability such as separate facility, hospital setting, homebound, and residential setting (Murawski & Dieker, 2013).

The continuum of service is where and how specially designed services are provided to students who are identified as students with a disability. Districts must

provide a full continuum of alternative placements to ensure that students receive services in the LRE. The traditional order that should be considered when placing or when providing services is "(1) regular class placement, (2) regular class with resource or itinerant instructional services, (3) regular class with special education related services, (4) special classes or special schools (either of which often also involve the provision of related services), (5) nonpublic schools, (6) state schools for students with "low incidence" disabilities, and (7) instruction in settings other than classrooms (such as in homes or hospitals)" (Legal Information Institute, n.d., p.7-20).

The graphic from Cengage Learning 2017 is a visual representation of the continuum of services that all districts need to provide for students with disabilities (Hardman, Egan, & Drew, 2017). This is illustrated in Figure 1.

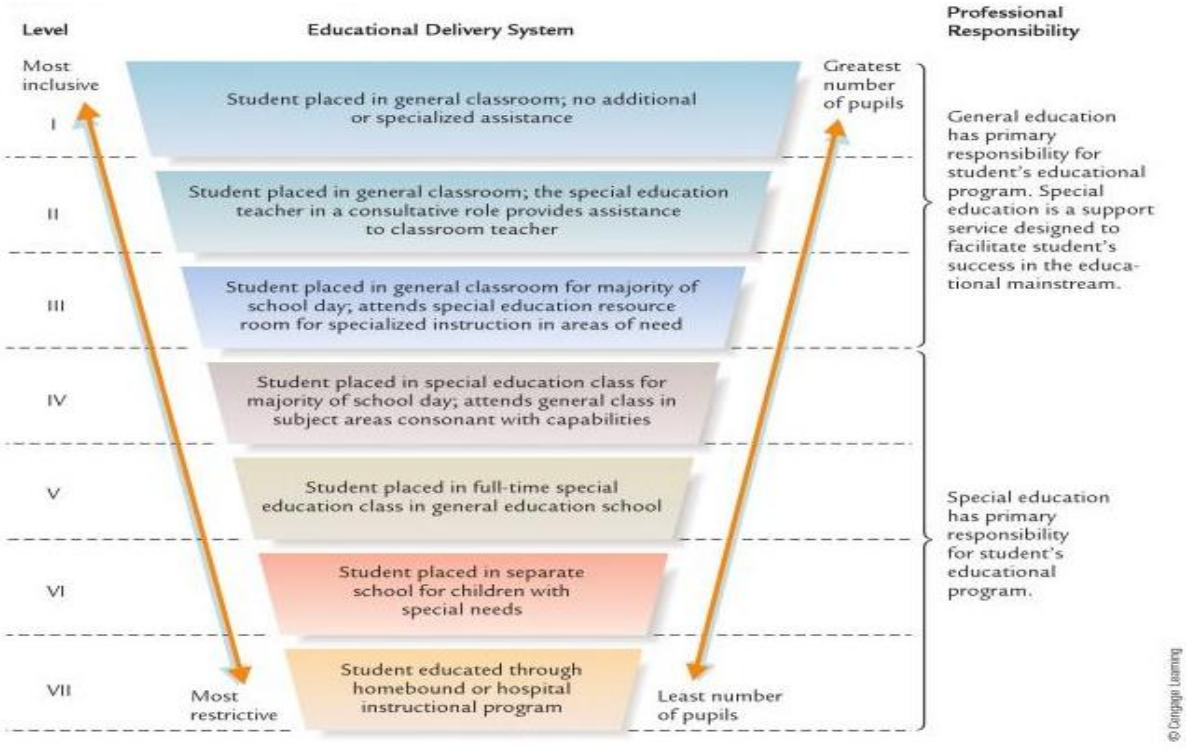

Figure 1. Educational Delivery System

As mentioned in Figure 1, the term inclusion is not stated in federal guidelines, but instead, the term LRE is used (Ohio's Operating Standards for Students With Disabilites, 2014; Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2016; ED, 2017). Likewise, the term integration is not a term that is used in the explanation of LRE. The word integration is often used synonymously for inclusion; however, inclusion does not mean that students are integrated. The current educational system is fractured into programs within the building, however, integration talks about not only including students with disabilities, but also, integrating students while recognizing their differences and the different teaching strategies utilized (Billimoria, 2013). Frattura and Capper (2007) also noted that, historically, the educational system created programs for students that were not successful in the traditional classroom. In doing so, the environment that was created lacks continuity, and the students who needed the most continuity were experiencing the most interrupted.

Bawardi-Shomar's (2012) research concluded that principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities correlate with principals' knowledge, personal experience, and professional experience with students with disabilities. He further maintained the need at the district level suggesting that one of the hiring criteria be principals' experience and understanding of students with disabilities.

Summary of the Current Investigation

Much research, to date, has investigated and focused on the attitudes that principals display towards inclusion of students with disabilities, rather than the understanding and the application of LRE, when making placement decisions. Though attitude is important, the attitude of principals is greatly shaped by their understanding of

the law, their educational and personal experiences, as well as the demographic of the district.

Findings from review of the literature suggest that there are inconsistent results from studies that were conducted to measure the principals' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. Whether the attitudes are pro-inclusion, against inclusion, or neutral, it is critical to identify the impact that leadership attitudes have on the achievement of students with disabilities.

The purpose of the current investigation is to examine how the attitudes of principals can either negatively or positively influence the success of the integration of students with disabilities along with their progress. The findings of the proposed investigation will allow proactive components to be established and implemented into place in the four-county- area school districts. Specifically, the results will provide the evidence that can inform the direction of professional development for district leaderships in order to allow for an increase of positive outcomes for students, school staff, and parents, paving a road for a successful LRE placements, not merely the inclusion of all students with disabilities. This study will broaden the lens to include both elementary and secondary principals where other studies focused on either elementary or secondary.

Leadership is critical because, "School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 5). Educational leadership has demonstrated that the caliber of skills that the principal possesses can directly influence the achievement of students, and the value of exploring and investing leadership qualities

of school administrators will only result in more successful administrative programs and success for all students (Robinson, 2011). “While other factors within the school also contribute to such turnarounds, leadership is the catalyst” (Leithwood et al., p. 17). Therefore, it is critical that principals demonstrate the behaviors that advance the acceptance, the integration, and progress of students with disabilities in general education classes (Praisner, 2003). The current investigation can clarify what knowledge principals possess in the area of servicing special education students and LRE, and whether that knowledge is at the caliber that is needed to place/service children with disabilities appropriately.

Chapter 3

Methods

Research Design

This study used a survey research design which intended to identify the variables involved in determining whether the attitudes of principals have a direct correlation to the success of including students with disabilities into general education settings. There are benefits of utilizing the survey research method as documented in *Survey Research: Handbook of Research Methods in Social and Personality Psychology.* Survey research involves the process of collecting data from a specific sampling with well-defined criteria through the use of a questionnaire (Visser, Krosnick, & Layrakas, 2000). A cross-sectional survey was utilized for this study, which is the design that is frequently used to document particular characteristics in a population. This type of survey provides the researcher with the opportunity to evaluate relationships between variables while investigating the impact that a principal's attitude has on the integrating students with disabilities in the general education setting and the continuum of services.

In order to address all stated research questions in this analysis both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics included distribution frequencies of response feedback, as well as aggregation of participants' self-reported demographic information. Analysis was conducted in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) following the gold-standard guidelines of Tabachnick and Fidell (2009). First, reliability estimates were calculated where appropriate. Secondly, data was evaluated with a variety of tests of statistical assumptions tests in order to ensure that the data was

tenable for the respective analyses. Regression and correlational analyses were used to evaluate existing relationships.

Responses from open-ended questions were reviewed for emerging and common themes. Themes were classified where appropriate and coded for synthesis with the quantitative data. General linear model analysis will be used to test for interactions and potential moderators. If a significant interaction effect existed, main-effects analyses were not incorporated. Qualitative and quantitative responses were synthesized in an effort to discover any relationships that present. Qualitative quotes were extracted for reporting if deemed appropriate.

Specifically, the current investigation will seek to address the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of school principals in Northeast Ohio toward the placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms?
2. Do the following qualities affect principals' attitudes toward placement of students with disabilities:
    a. Age of principal
    b. Gender of principal
    c. Years of experience as a principal
    d. Size of school
    e. Type of school
        i. Elementary
        ii. Middle
        iii. High school

f. Geographical Location

i. Urban

ii. Suburban

iii. Rural

3. What is the relationship between principals' knowledge of special education l aw and the following characteristics: gender, age, years of experience as an administrator and the number of courses taken in special education?
4. Is there an interaction between the principals' attitude and knowledge based on provided feedback? Are there any potential moderators involved in this relationship?

Participants

The participants in this study are both elementary and secondary principals selected from the name and email addresses of every public, vocational, and community school located in Mahoning, Trumbull, Columbiana, and Ashtabula Counties of Northeast Ohio. The researcher located the names and email addresses by contacting the State Support Team Region 5 and the Educational Service Centers located in each of the counties and cross-referencing them with the OEDS Public Extraction Data. A total of 200 public school principals and assistant principals were identified for inclusion in the survey. All participants remained anonymous to the researcher, unless the participant volunteered his/her name for a follow-up interview.

Instrumentation

An electronic, cross-sectional survey was adapted by the researcher from the PIS survey developed by Praisner (2000), and Power (2007) to gather data related to the

attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of principals on placing students with disabilities in a general education setting. Original analysis of the reliability of the PIS was conducted by computing a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient with a split half correction factor, and was reported as 0.899 (Praisner, 2000).

The survey consisted of four sections: demographic information, training and experience, special education hypothetical questions, and attitudes towards inclusion. The researcher shared the adapted survey with 10 school administrative professionals from the field of special education and educational administration. The panel reviewed the survey for validity as it related to the area of research, as well as the amount of time that it took to complete the survey. Feedback was received and revisions on the survey were made based on the results of the review. Feedback that was received centered on the change of terms to better suit the region/area and current language, as well as defining terms within the questions to improve clarity. Changes based on feedback were as follows:

Question 4: change *number* to percentage

Question 9: number of special education classes in formal training; suggestion to define *formal training*.

Question 13: preface question with directions; change *deal with* to teach

Questions 16: change *regular educator* to general education teacher

Questions 19: change *general education activities* to general education curriculum

Questions 23: add *meet the school's graduation (credit) requirement*

Questions 25: change *school division* to school

The average time spent on the survey was 10 minutes.

Sections one and two included questions that the researcher used to gather demographic information on the sample population. The questions were developed to ascertain basic information such as, gender, years of experience, grade levels of building, current enrollment, current percentage of students who are identified as a student with a disability, and percentage of students with disabilities who are integrated in the general education setting less than 21% of the day. This percentage is one of the indicators on which the school districts collect data for the Special Education Profile.

Section three included questions focusing on principals' training, knowledge, and experiences in education and was based on a Likert scale with 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Not Sure, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree. This section also included two open-ended questions focusing on the role of a building administrator on least restrictive decision and the definition of LRE.

Section 4 included hypothetical scenarios adapted from Power's (2007) research questions, and one open-ended question that allowed the participants to describe the current processes that are used for placement in their school/district.

Research Procedures

The researcher contacted the Director of the State Support Team Region 5 and the Educational Service Centers that support the four counties for the names and addresses of all of the principals: elementary, intermediate, and secondary, located in Ashtabula, Columbiana, Mahoning, and Trumbull Counties. The introductory letter, along with the survey, was created and submitted to the Youngstown State University (YSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB), along with the required protocol based on YSU

guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research. Following the approval of the study, the survey was disseminated to the administrators throughout the four-county demographic region for their completion, via their school email address, using SurveyMonkey.

Proposed Data Analysis

In order to address all stated research questions in this analysis both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Reliability estimates were calculated where appropriate. Regression analysis was used to evaluate existing relationships. Responses from open-ended questions were reviewed for emerging and common themes. General linear model analysis will be used to test for interactions and potential moderators. Qualitative and quantitative responses were synthesized in an effort to discover any relationships that present.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine how the relationship between school leadership, attitudes, and knowledge of principals in Ohio schools affects the success of providing services to students with disabilities in their LRE. In addition, this study will determine if there are certain principal characteristics that moderate the provision of services which support the success of students with disabilities in their LRE.

A modified version of the PIS developed by Praisner (2000) with four knowledge questions adapted from Powers (2007) and three open-ended response questions created by the researcher was electronically distributed November 2017, via email, to 200 principals and assistant principals in Northeast Ohio. Email addresses were collected via the Educational Service centers in Columbiana, Mahoning, Trumbull and Ashtabula counties. *Survey Monkey* was the platform used to create and collect the survey results. Overall survey completion rate of $n = 75$ completed survey, 37.5% of the proposed $n = 200$ sampling frame.

Respondent Demographics

The respondents were asked to address 14 questions regarding to demographics training and experience. Participants were asked to provide the following personal information:

- gender
- age
- years of full-time general education teaching experiences
- years of full-time special education teaching experience

- years as a building level administrator
- whether they serve as the district representative in their building
- type of teaching license that they hold
- approximate number of number of courses in special education
- approximate number of in-service hours in inclusive practices
- participation in formal training
- certification in special education

Participants were asked to indicate their gender. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 4.

Table 4.

Percent Gender of Respondent

Principal Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	36	48
Female	39	52

As indicated in the Table 4 $n = 36$ (48%) male administrators and $n = 39$ (52%) female administrators participated in the survey. The distribution of administrator gender for Ashtabula, Columbiana, Mahoning, and Trumbull counties is an average of male administrators at 60% and the average female administrators at 40% (ODE, 2018). These numbers are not reflective of state gender distribution where 66.6% of the building level administrators were male and 33.4% of the building level administrators were female. (NCES, 2003). Next, participants were asked to indicate their age. The reported age distribution of participants was examined and is presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

Distribution of Responses to Age of Respondent

Principal Age	Frequency	Percent
31-40	27	36
41-50	29	38.7
51-60	19	25.3

Table 5 indicates the age of the participants includes ages 31-40, n = 27 (36%), ages 41-50, n = 29 (38.7%), and ages 51-60, n = 19 (25.3%). Following this question, participants were asked to indicate their years of full-time general education teaching experience. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 6.

Table 6.

Distribution of Responses to Years of Full-Time General Education Teaching Experience

General education teaching	Frequency	Percent
0	2	2.7
1-6 years	11	14.7
7-12 years	19	25.3
13-18 years	18	24
19 or more years	25	33.3

The experience-related items asked principals about the number of years of experience they had teaching full-time in general education, number of years teaching full-time in special education, and their number of years as a secondary school principal. The results indicate that the principals were relatively diverse in their general education teaching experience. The most common response was to have 19 or more

years (33.3%) with n = 25 principals selecting that response option. The second most common response was to have between 7-12 years teaching general education $n = 19$ (25.3%). Additionally, participants were asked to indicate their years of full-time special education teaching experience. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 7.

Table 7.

Distribution of Responses to Years of Full-Time Special Education Teaching Experience

Special education teaching experience	Frequency	Percent
No experience	50	66.7
1-6 years	10	13.3
7-12 years	9	12
13-18 years	3	4
19 or more years	3	4

The results indicate that n = 50 building administrators (66.7%) reported having no fulltime teaching experience in special education. In addition, only n = 3 building administrators (4%) had 19 or more years of experience, and n = 3 (4%) had between 13-18 years of experience of fulltime teaching experiences in special education.

Participants were asked to indicate their years as a building administrator. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 8.

Table 8.

Distribution of Responses to Years as a Building Administrator

Years as a building administrator	Frequency	Percent
0-5 years	31	41.3
6-10 years	24	32
11-15 years	7	9.3
16-21 years	9	12
22 or more years	1	1.3

The results indicate there is a similar rate of building administrators with 0-5 years' experience n = 31 (41.3%) and 6-10 years' experience n = 24 (32%) for a total of n = 55 (73.3%) who had 10 years or less of experience as a building administrator. Next, participants were asked to indicate if they serve as the district representative on IEP teams in their building. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 9.

Table 9.

Distribution of Responses to Service as the District Representative on IEP Teams in Buildings

District representative	Frequency	Percent
Yes	43	57.3
No	10	13.3
As Needed	19	25.3

The number of building administrators who serve as the district representative on IEP teams is n = 43 (57.3%) and n = 19 (25.3%) report that they are district representatives on IEP teams on an as-needed basis. Collectively that is n = 62 (82.6%) building administrators who serve as district representatives, with only n = 10 (13.3%) indicating that they do not serve as the district representative on IEP teams. Table 10 reports and examines participants' teaching licenses.

Table 10.

Distribution of Responses to Type of Teaching License

Type of teaching license	Frequency	Percent
General Education License	55	73.33
Special Education License	5	6..66
General Education and Special Education License	6	8
Other	9	12

The results indicate that $n = 55$ (73.33%) of the participants hold a General Education License, where $n = 5$ (6.66%) hold a Special Education License. Only $n = 6$ (8%) hold General Education License and Special Education License.

Participants were asked to indicate the approximate number of special education courses in their undergraduate program. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 11.

Table 11.

Distribution of Responses to Approximate Number of Special Education Courses in Undergraduate Programs

Special education courses: undergraduate	Frequency	Percent
0 courses	8	10.3
1-3 courses	52	66.7
4-9 courses	7	9.0
10 or more courses	7	9.0
22 or more courses	1	1.3

The review of the data indicates that $n = 60$ (80.0%) of the respondents had 3 or fewer special education courses while earning under graduate degrees.

Likewise, participants were asked to indicate the approximate number of special education courses in their graduate program. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 12.

Table 12.

Distribution of Responses to Approximate Number of Special Education Courses in Graduate Programs

Special education courses: graduate	Frequency	Percent
0 courses	11	14.1
1-3 courses	53	67.9
4-9 courses	4	5.1
10 or more courses	3	3.8
22 or more courses	1	1.3

Results of the data collection indicate that $n = 64$ (81.0%) respondents had 3 or fewer special education courses in their graduate program.

Participants were asked to indicate the approximate number of in-service training hours in inclusive practice. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 13.

Table 13.

Distribution of Responses to Approximate Number of In-Service Training Hours in Inclusive Practice

Hours of training: inclusive practice	Frequency	Percent
0 training hours	2	2.7
1-8 training hours	24	32
9-16 training hours	20	26.7
17-24 training hours	3	4
25 or more training hours	26	34.7

The approximate number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices results indicate that $n = 24$ (32%) of the respondents reported having between one and eight hours of in-service training and an additional $n = 20$ (26.7%) had between 9 and 16 hours of in-service training. In addition, $n = 29$ (38.7%) had more than 16 training hours in

inclusive practices. Consequently, $n = 2$ (2.7%) of the respondents reported having no formal training.

Participants were asked to indicate the number of formal areas of training such as courses, workshops, and/or significant portions of courses. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 14.

Table 14.

Distribution of Responses of Formal Areas of Training

Content area	Frequency	Percent
Special education law	71	94.7
Characteristics of student with disabilities	58	77.3
Behavior management classes; students with disabilities	45	60
Crisis intervention	44	58.7
Fostering teachers collaboration	39	52
Academic programming for student with disabilities	37	49.3
Change process	35	46.7
Supporting and training teachers to handle inclusion	31	41.3
Teambuilding	27	36
Field based experiences with actual inclusion activities	22	29.3
Life skills training for students with disabilities	18	24
Eliciting parent and community support for inclusion	16	21.3
Family intervention training	10	13.3
Interagency cooperation	9	12

A choice for selection of 14 different content hours were available for each content area. Formal training is defined as teacher or administrative preparation courses at the undergraduate or graduate level. The results of this survey question are rank-ordered. Special education law was the most common content area reported $n = 71$ (94.7%) with the participants having at least 10% of their training within the content of Special Education law. Furthermore, the second most common content area was the area of

characteristic of students with disabilities, *n* =58 (77.3%). Behavior management classes with the emphasis on students with disabilities was ranked third, *n* = 45 (60%). In addition, a focus on crisis intervention was reported by *n* = 44 (58.7%) of the respondents. Fostering teacher collaboration was also a content that was that respondents listed as having at least 10% of their training, *n* = 39 (52%). Lastly, all content categories provided on the survey were areas of focus for at least some of the respondents of this study.

Finally, participants were asked to indicate if they were certified in special education. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 15.

Table 15.

Distribution of Responses to Certification in Special Education

Certified in special education	Frequency	Percent
Yes	14	18.7
No	61	81.3

Table 15 delineates between those respondents who are certified to teach special education, with *n* = 14 (18.7%) who stated "yes" they are certified to teach special education. In contrast, *n = 61* (81.3%) of the respondents indicated that they are not certified to teach special education. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2017, there were 37,980 special education teachers employed nationally. In the state of Ohio, the number of special education teachers is recorded at 1,090. In addition, the state of Ohio, as of May 2017, employs 9,490 principals (elementary through high school) (US Department of Labor, 2017).

Building Demographics

The respondents were asked to address six questions specifically regarding their buildings' demographics. Building administrators responded to the following building information:

- building enrollment
- approximate class size
- percent of students being serviced on an IEP
- percent included in general education
- percent of students identified Speech Language Impairment
- type of disabilities served in the building

In the following section, the building demographic information will be reviewed and examined. Participants were asked to indicate the approximate enrollment in their building. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 16.

Table 16.

Distribution of Responses to Approximate Building Enrollment

Building enrollment	Frequency	Percent
0-250	5	6.7
251-500	32	42.7
501-750	15	20
751-1000	15	20
1000 or more	8	10.7

Table 16 indicates that the majority of the respondents are building level administrators in a building that has between 251-500 students, n =32 (42.7%). The data collected by this question will be used to determine if there is a relationship between the size of the

building and principal attitude towards servicing students with disabilities in the least LRE.

Next, participants were asked to indicate the approximate class size in their building. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 17.

Table 17.

Distribution of Responses to Approximate Class Size

Approximate class size	Frequency	Percent
0-9	1	1.3
10-19	13	17.3
20-29	60	80
40 or more	1	1.3

Based on the information from Table 17, the most frequently chosen class size was between 20-29 students, $n = 60$ (80%) which mirrors the average class size reported in the National Center for Educational Statistics (23.1) (NCES 2018).

Participants were asked to indicate the approximate percentage of students with IEPs in their building. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 18.

Table 18.

Distribution of Responses to Approximate Percentage of Students with IEPs

Percent of students with IEPs	Frequency	Percent
0-5%	2	2.7
6-10%	16	21.3
11-15%	27	36
16-20%	21	28
21% or more	9	12

The responses to this item indicate that *n* = 27 (36%) of the respondents reported that they had between 11% and 15% students with IEPs. Ohio's rate of students being served with an IEP is 14.82% (ODE, 2018). In addition, *n* =30 (40%) reported having 16% or higher of students being served with an IEP. Lastly, *n* =18 respondents reported having 10% or less students being served on and IEP.

Next, Table 19 reports the findings of the percentage of students with IEPs in buildings who are included in general education classrooms for at least 80% of their school day, not including gifted students.

Table 19.

Distribution of Responses to Approximate Percentage of Students with IEPs, in Buildings, Who Are Included in General Education Classrooms for at Least 80% of Their School Day, Not Including Gifted Students

Percent included in general education	Frequency	Percent
0-20%	9	12
21-40%	3	4
41-60%	1	1.3
61-80%	16	21.3
81-100%	45	60

Table 19 establishes that *n* = 45 (60%) of the participants' responses indicate students with IEPs served in general education classrooms for at least 81% of their day. In addition, the results indicate that *n* = 29 (40%) of the respondents reported that students serviced on an IEP between zero and 80% of their day. In general, building level administrators were more likely to report having the majority of their students with disabilities served in the general education setting. According to Ohio's Special

Education Profile data, Ohio's target for students with disabilities being served inside the general education setting for greater than 80% of the day is 64% (ODE 2018).

Participants were asked to indicate the approximate percentage of students with IEPs in buildings who are identified solely as speech/language impaired. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 20.

Table 20.

Distribution of Responses to Approximate Percentage of Students with IEPs, in Buildings, Who Are Identified Solely as Speech/Language Impaired

Percent of students identified as speech/language impaired	Frequency	Percent
Other	1	1.3
0-20%	60	80
21-40%	11	14.7

Table 20 indicates that n = 60 (80%) of the respondents indicated that 20% of their students serviced on an IEP are identified at speech/language impaired. Consequently, n = 11 (14.7%) indicate that students who are identified as speech/language impaired are between 21% and 40% of their students with disabilities. Only one respondent indicated "other" as a category, which should be interpreted as there being more than 40% of students in that building who are identified as speech/language impaired.

Finally, participants were asked to indicate the disabilities that are served in their building. The distribution of responses is provided in Table 21.

Table 21.

Distribution of Responses of the Disabilities That Are Served in Their Building

Disability	Frequency	Percent
Specific Learning Disabilities	66	88
Speech and Language	65	86.7
Autism	58	77.3
Intellectual Disabilities	55	73.3
OHI Minor	51	68
Emotional Disturbance	50	66.7
Multiple Disabilities	45	60
Developmentally Delay	40	53.3
Hearing Impairment	38	50.7
Orthopedic Impairment	33	44
Visual Impairment	32	42.7
OHI Major	23	30.7
Traumatic Brain Injury	15	20
Deaf-Blind	12	16

Data indicate that all of the disability categories were represented by respondents of the survey. Specific Learning Disabilities was reported as foremost disability category that is served in their buildings by $n = 66$ (88%) of the respondents. The second most common disability category is Speech and Language Impairment, with $n = 65$ (86.7%) of the survey participants indicating that they serve that disability in their building. In addition, Autism, Intellectual Disabilities OHI Minor, Emotional Disturbance, Multiple Disabilities, Developmentally Delay and Hearing Impairment were all disability categories that were all reported by more than 50% of the respondents as serviced disabilities. In contrast, Visual Impairment, OHI Major, Traumatic Brain Injury and Deaf-blind disability categories were reported by less than 45% of the respondents.

Ohio's state average for children identified with a disability is as follow: Speech Language Impairment, 12.9%; Autism, 8.08%; Intellectual Disability, 8.27%,

Developmentally Delayed, 2.02%; Emotional Disability, 6.35%; Hearing Impairment, .82%; Specific Learning Disability, 39.28%; Other Health Impaired Minor, 16.72%; Other Health Impaired Major, .23%; Orthopedic Impairment, .56%; Multiple Disabilities, 4.59%; Visual Impairment, .37%; Traumatic Brain Injury, .59%; and Deaf-blindness, .02%. (ODE 2018).

Research Question 1: Attitudes Towards Inclusion

One of the intents of this study was to determine the attitudes of building administrators in Northeast Ohio towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education setting. The principals' attitudes were calculated using the responses from Section Three of the survey. The total number of particpants completing Section Three is $n = 75$. Section Three contained nine questions with multiple choices response (one to five) and two open-ended questions focusing on LRE. An estimate of the reliability of the responses were assessed by computing a Cronbach's alpha test after reverse coding the negative worded items (Questions 21, 23, 25, 28, and 29); as per Smith (2011), the results indicate that the reliability of the survey was good ($\alpha = .62$) based on guidelines provided by Tabachnick and Fidell (2009). The potential score range was from one to five, with higher values representing favorable attitudes regarding the inclusion of studies with disabilities in general education classrooms. Average responses were between three and five. Table 22 presents the distribution of responses to each of the attitude questions.

Table 22.

Distribution of Responses to Attitude Questions (%)

Items	SD	D	NS	A	SA
NOT only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to successfully teach students with disabilities in a school setting.	2.6	1.3	0	42.3	50
Schools with both students with disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with severe/profound disabilities.	0	1.3	7.7	48.7	38.5
Students with disabilities are **NOT** too impaired to benefit from the participation in activities/curriculum of a general education classroom.	1.3	1.3	0	33.3	60.3
A good general education teacher can do a lot to help a student with a disability.	3.8	0	0	26.9	65.4
In general, students with disabilities should **NOT** be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.	0	2.6	7.7	43.6	42.3
Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities.	1.3	1.3	2.6	32.1	59
General education curriculum should be adapted to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities.	1.3	3.8	3.8	35.9	51.3
It is **NOT** unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities in their classroom.	1.3	0	1.3	30.8	62.8
No, discretionary financial resources should **NOT** be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities.	1.3	2.6	5.1	34.6	52.6

Note: NOT added to items that were recoded due to negative wording

Results indicate that the respondents were more likely to respond strongly agree *n*= 39 (50%) followed by agree *n*= 33 (42.3%) on the question "**NOT** only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to successfully teach students with disabilities in a school setting." On the question "Schools with both students with disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students

with severe/profound disabilities", respondents were more likely to respond agree *n*= 38 (48.7%) and then strongly agree *n*= 30 (38.5%). In addition, not sure was chosen by 7.7% of the respondents.

The summarized results for the question "Students with disabilities are **NOT** too impaired to benefit from the participation in activities/curriculum of a general education classroom" indicate that the majority of the respondents strongly agree with that statement, *n* = 47 (60.3%) followed by agree *n* = 26 (33.3%). The results of the question "A good general education teacher can do a lot to help a student with a disability" indicate that *n*= 51 (65.4%) strongly agree with that statement followed by *n*= 21 (26.9%) agree with that statement.

Table 22 further summarizes the question, "In general, students with disabilities should **NOT** be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them." The results indicate that the respondents were more likely to respond agree *n*= 34 (43.6%) followed by strongly agree *n*= 33 (42.3%). Next, the results indicate that the respondents were more likely to strongly agree with the statement "Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities": *n*= 46 (59%) followed by agree *n*= 25 (32.1%). Similarly, *n* = 46 (59%) of the respondents responded strongly agree to the question "Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities" followed by *n* = 25 (32.1%) who indicated that they agreed with that statement.

The summary of the statement "General education curriculum should be adapted to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities" indicates that building administrators *n* = 40 (51.3%) strongly agree with that statement and *n* = 28

(35.9%) agree with that statement. Question 28 states "It is **NOT** unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities in their classroom." The results in Table 22 indicate that $n = 49$ (62.8%) strongly agree with that statement and $n = 24$ (30.8%) agree with the statement. Finally, $n = 2$ (2.6%) either were not sure or disagreed. Lastly, the statement "No, discretionary financial resources should **NOT** be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities" is summarized with $n = 41$ (52.6%) strongly agreeing and $n = 27$ (34.6%) agreeing. However, $n = 7$ (9%) either indicated not sure, disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement.

Research Question 2: Principal Characteristics and Principal Attitude

A second research question sought to determine if building level administrators' overall attitudes regarding servicing students with disabilities in their LRE is affected by specific characteristics such as age, gender years of experience size, type and geographical location of the school. This attitude score was computed as described above. The attitude-score descriptive analysis indicates that respondents' average scores were $M = 4.45$ ($sd = .38$) with a normal level of skew (-.116) and kurtosis (1.01) based on the guidelines of Tabachnik and Fidell (2009). Table 23 presents the results of the Pearson's Zero-order correlation examining these variables.

Table 23.

Pearson's Zero-Order Correlation: Principal Characteristics and Principal Attitudes

Correlation						
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Attitude Score (1)	-					
Age (2)	-0.09	-				
Gender (3)	0.047	.349**	-			
Years as a building admin (4)	-0.06	.565**	0.013	-		
# students in your building (5)	-0.138	0.152	0.029	0.189	-	
School Topology (6)	-0.084	-0.206	0.122	0.139	0.251	-
School level	0.115	0.053	0.022	0.213	.568**	.270*

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 23, there is a small, non-significant, negative correlation between number of students in the building and building level administrators' attitudes. Additionally, no significant relationship exists between principals' attitudes and building characteristics (building demographics and school location). However, a large to moderate, positive, significant correlation does exist between the age of administrators with gender and years as a building administrator as well as school level and number of students.

Research Question 3: Relationship Between Principals' Knowledge and Characteristics

"What is the relationship between principals' knowledge of special education law and the following characteristics: gender, age, years of experience as an administer, the number of courses taken in special education, and attitude towards providing service to

students in their LRE? The knowledge questions for this analysis included the scenarios' items included in the survey. Table 24 presents the distribution of the scored knowledge question responses.

A knowledge score from these items was computed by taking the sum of the number of correct responses to the items for each participant. The principals' knowledge score frequencies are provided in Table 24.

Table 24.

Distribution of Scored Knowledge Responses

Score	Frequency	Percent
0	3	4
1	26	34.7
2	27	36
3	15	20
4	4	5.3

The descriptive analysis for the knowledge score items indicates that the average score was $M = 1.88$ ($sd = .96$), with normal levels of skew (.34) and kurtosis (-.39). This score was correlated with the various demographic variable responses; these results are presented in Table 25.

Table 25.

Correlations Between Combined Knowledge Score and Item Responses

	Knowledge Score
Gender	0.02
Your age	-0.16
Years as a building administrator	-0.21
Approximate number of special education courses in undergraduate program.	0.07
Approximate number of special education courses in graduate program.	0.13
NOT Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to successfully teach students with disabilities in a school setting (reverse coded item 21)	-0.06
In general, students with disabilities should NOT be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them (reverse coded item 25)	.30**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 25, items 21 and 25 from section three of the survey were included in this analysis. Items 21 and 25 were designed by Praisner (2000) to assess administrators' attitudes towards including special education students in the general education setting. This research indicated that the only variable correlated with this knowledge score was the response to the reverse coded item 25. This result indicates that the higher the knowledge score (based on the scenario items), the more likely the participant was to respond positively to item 25, therefore, indicating an openness to inclusive education. No other items from section three had a correlation with the knowledge score of the participants.

Research Question 4: Interaction Between Principals' Attitudes and Knowledge

Is there an interaction between the principals' attitudes and knowledge based on provided responses? Are there any potential moderators involved in this relationship?

Research question four's intended purpose was to determine if there were any interactions between the principals' attitudes and knowledge scores. While the second research question examined the relationship between specific principals' characteristics and principals' attitudes about servicing students in their LRE, research question four examines the relationship between principals' knowledge and principals' attitudes towards providing services for students with disabilities in their LRE (computed as indicated above). Results of a Pearson's Zero-Order correlation indicates that there is a significant moderate positive relationship between the participants' attitude scores and knowledge scores based on the scenarios (r = .255, p = .027). Additionally, the principals' attitude scores was correlated with the principals' knowledge scores and was further examined in relation based on two open-ended knowledge scores. The correctness of the responses to these items were evaluated by three separate content experts (Kappa = .80). The responses were evaluated indicating the response was incorrect (0), partially correct (1), or correct (2). Based on the guidelines of Tabachnick and Fidell (2009), the findings indicate there is a positive, moderate, significant correlation between the attitude responses and the responses to these two open-ended knowledge items (r = .329, p = .004). The knowledge scores for the scenarios and the open-ended items were summed for a combined knowledge score. These items together have an estimated reliability estimate of α = .66, indicating good consistency in the responses of participants across these items.

Table 26 presents the correlations between the attitude score, the combined knowledge scores, and the other demographic variables.

Table 26:

Interaction Between Attitude and Knowledge Scores

	Attitude Score	Knowledge Score Combined
Attitude Score	1.00	.402**
Knowledge Score Combined	.402**	1.00
Age	-0.09	-0.06
Gender	0.05	0.06
Years as a building administrator	-0.06	-0.29*
Years of full-time general education teaching experience	-0.28*	-0.16
Years of full-time special education teaching experience	-0.02	0.11
Approximate number of special education courses in under graduate program.	0.03	0.11
Approximate number of special education courses in graduate program.	0.10	-0.02
Average class size for all students	-0.09	0.13
Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building	0.10	-0.15
Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building that are included in general education classrooms for at least 80% of their school day	0.09	0.14
Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building that are identified solely as Speech Language Impairment.	-0.01	-0.03
Topology	-0.08	-0.10
School level	0.12	-0.08
Approximate number of all students in your building:	-0.14	-0.08

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with the Attitude Score and combined Knowledge Score as the dependent variable, and the years as building administrator and years of general education teaching responses as the predictor variables, since these items were revealed significantly related in the correlation analysis. The MANOVA revealed no significant interactions or main effects. Figures 2 and 3

present a graphical representation of the data examining knowledge and attitude scores across building level administrations and years of full-time general education teaching.

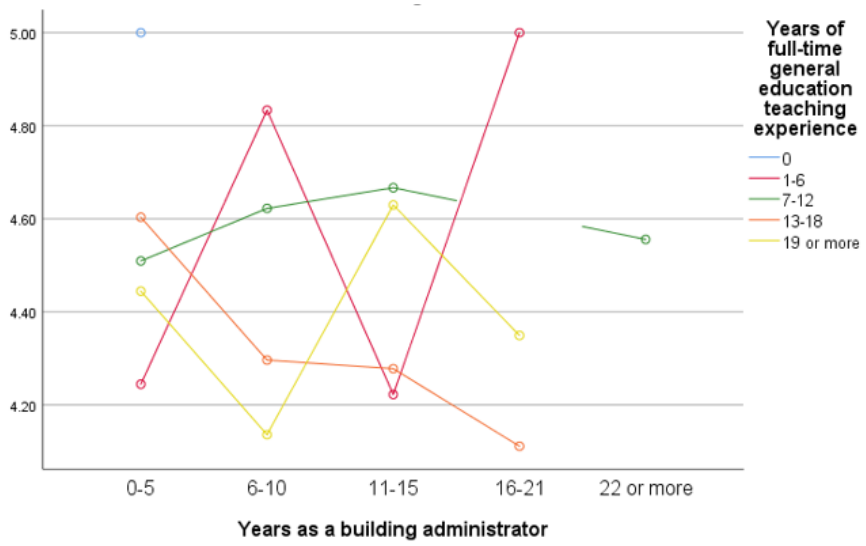

Figure 2. Years as a Building Administrator and Teaching Experience on Attitude Scores

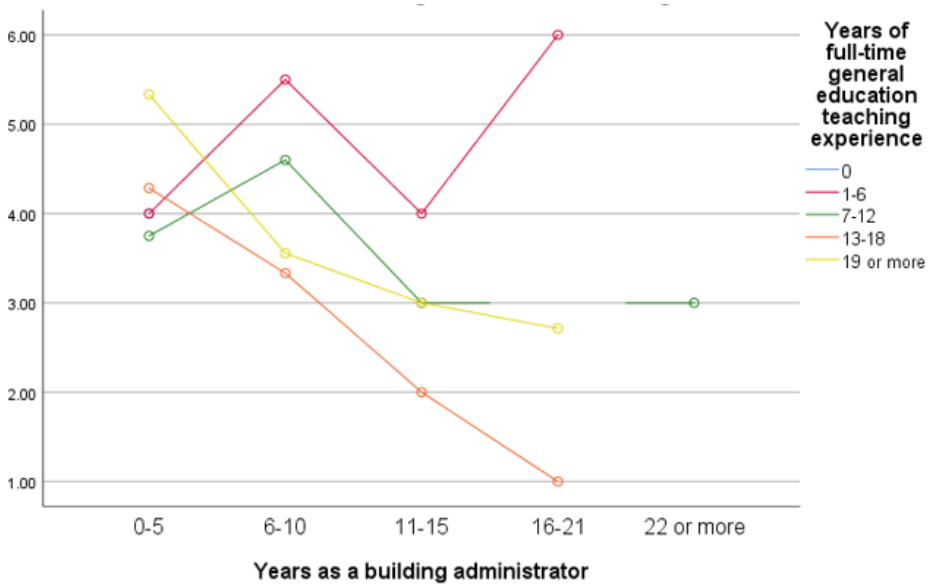

Figure 3. Years as a Building Administrator and Teaching Experience on Knowledge Scores

Open-Ended Responses

Three open-ended questions were asked of the participants: "*How do you define Least Restrictive Environment?", "What do you see as your role in the LRE decision-making?",* and *"What process does your school follow when determining the placement of a student with Disabilities?"* Three individuals who have knowledge, multiple years of experience, and understand special education scored the three open-ended questions using a scale of 0, 1, or 2**;** the scores were than averaged for a final score. A rubric of 0: no evidence of understanding, 1: developing, evidence was present in the response that indicated that the respondent had a basic understanding of the question, and, 2: respondent demonstrated understanding of the questions.

An analysis of the open-ended question that asked: "How do you define least restrictive environment (LRE)?" indicated that the LRE was reported as being and environment where students with disabilities can be successful as indicated in the following statements.

"*An environment that best serves a child in an environment with non-disabled peers."*

"The best educational environment for students to find educational success."

"The best environment for the student to learn and achieve."

"The environment that allows the student to receive their education with the highest level of inclusion with general education peers while being successful and growing as an individual."

In addition, some of the responses indicated that the participants identified LRE as general education as evident by the following statements.

"General education classroom-we need to get all SWD's with same age typical peers with supports."

"In our setting, spending the majority of day with peers, and working with the state standards"

" Inclusion classroom"

The second open-ended question addressed; *"What do you see as your role in the LRE decision-making?"* An analysis of this question indicates that the majority of the respondents saw their role as being a part of the team that makes the decision for the provision of services with the addition of the being the individual who is responsible for ensuring that the IEP is being followed as it is written. The following statements provide evidence of the analysis.

"A member of a team that determines how each child is best served as an individual."

"A part of a team."

"As principal-building leader that is part of a team."

"Ensuring that the decisions are centered around the needs of the student and not the adults."

"I am part of a team process that decides placement on the continuum."

Additional responses that were contrary to the team approach were;

"I don't have a role."

"Special Education Supervisor does the placing."

"Unknown"

"Placing students"

Lastly, the third open-ended question that asked: *"What process does your school follow when determining the placement of a student with disabilities?"* indicated that 16 of the responses indicated the Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) process in a sampling of the responses.

"*Intervention Assistance Process through RTI."*

"Intervention assistance teams meet to discuss each case."

"Intervention team/try many strategies and interventions, meet with team again/ it is 6-week intervals to determine if testing is necessary."

Further analysis confirmed 40 responses indicated that there is a team approach which is evident by the following statements:

"*IEP team meets with parents to determine what is the LRE for the individual student."*
"IEP team would meet and asked on the IEP and student needs the student would be placed."

"The IEP team makes the determination at the IEP meeting to ensure the student is placed appropriately. The use of test scores, success and data collected guides the discussion."

Additional responses that were documented as being not related to the questions are as follow:

"*Available placement"*

"A Guide to Parents Rights formerly Who's Idea is This"

"best fit"

"Consult transition team."

Summary

This chapter presented the results and analysis of the data collected using a modified version of the Principals' and Inclusion Survey (PIS) developed by Praisner (2000) with four knowledge questions adapted from Powers (2007) and three open-ended questions created by the researcher. The statistical analysis performed for each of the four research questions and the results of the statistical tests included narratives and tables. Chapter 4 presented and examined how the relationship between school leadership, attitudes, and knowledge of principals in Ohio schools affects the success of providing services to students with disabilities in their LRE.

The results of the data collected indicated that the reliability of the survey was good, and, that based on the data, the attitudes of school principals in Northeast Ohio are open to the idea of inclusive settings for students with disabilities. In addition, question two attempted to identify if certain principals' qualities affect their attitudes towards providing services to students with disabilities in their LRE. Results indicate no significant relationship exist between principal attitude and characteristics. However, a large to moderate, positive, significant correlation does exist between the age of the

administrator with gender and years as a building administrator as well as school level and number of students. Next, examining the relationship between principals' knowledge of special education law and principals' characteristics indicated that only one variable correlated with the knowledge score: item 25, "In general, students with disabilities should NOT be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them", indicating the higher the knowledge score the more likely the participant responded positively to item 25. In addition, results indicate that there is a positive, moderate, significant correlation between years as a building administrator and years of full-time general education teaching experience. The LRE open-ended responses indicated that building administrators responded more often stating the LRE is an environment where students with disabilities can be successful. In addition, the response indicating that it is a team approach to the open-ended question regarding placement process was more commonly stated.

This chapter provided the data analysis findings and addressed the four research questions associated with the study. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of these findings and discuss the practical implications for special education and LRE. In addition, the limitations of the current study will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be provided.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study was conducted to determine how the relationship between school leadership, attitudes, and knowledge of principals in Northeast Ohio schools affects the success of provision of services to students with disabilities in their LRE. In addition, this study examined if there are certain principal characteristics that moderate the provision of services that support the success of students with disabilities in their LRE. Data were collected and analyzed from elementary, middle, and high schools located in Northeast Ohio via online survey questions that were adapted from Praisner's Principals' and Inclusion Survey (2000), with four knowledge questions adapted from Powers (2007) and three open-ended response questions created by the researcher. The topology of the schools was representative of urban, suburban, and rural communities. Chapter Five provides a summary of the major findings and examines the relationship to existing research. Additionally, the chapter will present the potential research limitations, discuss the implications of the findings and make recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Question one of the survey examined: *What are the attitudes of school principals in Northeast Ohio toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms?* Overall, the findings of this research indicate that building administrators who participated in this survey possessed a positive attitude towards students with disabilities. Findings suggest that building administrators believe that students with disabilities can succeed and benefit from being taught in the general education setting, as well as students without disabilities profiting from being educated with students with

disabilities which reflects similar findings in studies conducted by Smith (2011), Vazquez (2010), Ramirez (2006), and Praisner (2000). Based on the eight attitude questions from the survey, an average of 90.3% of the responses indicated that principals' attitudes favored the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes. There was still a small percentage of individuals who reported a less than favorable attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. Approximately 9% of the respondents indicated either that they were not sure or disagreed with the statement: *Schools with both students with disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with severe/profound disabilities.* In addition, 3.8% strongly disagreed with the statement: *A good general education teacher can do a lot to help a student with a disability.* It is questionable why principals would have strong feelings about the two previous statements; without interviewing the respondents, the motive behind their responses is inconclusive. Research has demonstrated that positive attitudes are often fueled by confidence, self-esteem, and knowledge, therefore the opposite of those characteristics may lead to negative attitudes (Seaward, 2009).

Overall, the findings suggest that the building administers who responded to the survey had a positive attitude towards inclusive education. Principals believe not only that students with disabilities can grow and benefit from an inclusive setting, but, in addition, there are positive benefits for students who are not identified as students with disabilities. As mentioned earlier, not only does school leadership make a difference, it also is second only to teaching as it relates to student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004). Educational leaders serve as guides, catalysts, and facilitators of change; without an effective leader, an inclusive environment will not be successful. A correlation exists

between district leadership and student achievement as well as school leadership and student achievement (Wilson, 2013; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). The role of the principal as the instructional leader is particularly important in special education because the principal's attitude toward special education students will ultimately determine the efficacy of the school's special education services (Lowe & Brigham, 2002). Additionally, the ESSA highlighted school leadership as central to student achievement for all students (United States Department of Education [ED], 2015).

A second research question sought to determine if building level administrators' overall attitudes regarding servicing students with disabilities in their LRE is affected by specific characteristics such as age, gender years of experience size, type and geographical location of the school. A Pearson's Zero-order correlation indicated that there is a small, non-significant, negative correlation between the number of students in the building and building-level administrators' self-reported attitudes. These findings are consistent with the results reported by Praisner (2000), Ramirez (2006), Smith (2011), and Galano (2012). In addition, no significant relation exists between principals' attitudes and characteristics. However, a large to moderate, positive, significant correlation does exist between age of administrator with gender and years as a building administrator and school level and number of students.

Districts can use the findings of this research when selecting new building administrators. The importance of recruiting and hiring the appropriate candidate for a position is supported in the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN, 2018) Implementation Science framework. This framework provides guidance for districts to use when selecting, training, and coaching staff. This research can impact all of the

components from the selection of the approriate candidate for success to the training and coaching that will be required to build and maintain capacity (NIRN, 2018). Through the lens of Implementation Science districts need to not only select the appropriate candidate, but, also, the need to support them with training and coaching is avialable.

Question three sought to examine the relationship between principals' knowledge of special education law and the characteristics of gender, age, years of experience as an administrator, the number of courses taken in special education, and attitude towards providing services to students in their LRE. Similar to Praisner (2000) and Horrock (2008), the researcher did not find that gender was a significant predictor of attitude towards inclusion. The only variable correlated with this knowledge score was the response to the reverse coded item 25: "In general, students with disabilities should NOT be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them."

The findings can aid educational administrative programs such as administrative preparatory programs as well as district-based professional development learning opportunities that focus on understanding of special education laws and requirements, examine how to best service students in an inclusive setting, and how building administrators can support teachers. Special education is evolving and complex with specific guidelines that need to be understood so that building administrators can be confident that they are providing the most appropriate placement and services for students with disabilities. To extend the learning of our building administrators' beyond formal educational opportunities, districts should consider providing on-going, high quality training that is sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom focused (ED, 2015); such training should focus on annual special education

law updates, services, inclusive education, and practical application. Principals' understanding of special education law improves their attitude of inclusive education, climate, and culture of the building.

Research question four's intended purpose was to determine if there were any interactions between the principals' attitudes and knowledge scores and providing services for students with disabilities in their LRE. Results of a Pearson's Zero-Order correlation indicates that there is a significant, moderate, positive relationship between the participants' attitude score and knowledge score based on the scenarios. Results indicated that there was a significant related correlation between the knowledge score and the years as building administrator and years of general education teaching experience. Similarly, in Ramirez's (2016) research, principals' knowledge had an effect on the principal's placement of students with lower incident disabilities.

The results of the current investigation support the findings of previous research suggesting that principals have a positive attitude and are open to the idea of inclusive settings for students with disabilities and that attitudes of inclusive education have evolved over time. This research features the concepts that targeted professional development of special education law and the understanding of continued supports for both building administrators and teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive settings.

The findings of this research directly aligned to the work of the State Support Team (SST) and county Educational Service Centers (ESC). SSTs and ESCs are two distinct organizations that operate and provide services for school districts through different lens. Though each organization is charged with providing professional

development opportunities to align and enhance the needs of districts, the focus would be distinct, yet, collaborative in nature.

The SST lens of focus is on the achievement of students with disabilities on a regional level. By using the data from this research, an LRE professional development opportunity could be developed to help district leaders understand the depth of LRE and the role that they play. This idea is substantiated by the knowledge score of this research. The knowledge descriptive analysis for the knowledge score items indicates that the average score was $M = 1.88$ ($sd = .96$). This score is not surprising to the researcher given that 41.3% of the participants have been in the administrative role five or fewer years. Further analysis of this average, based on limitations of an electronic survey, could be that participants may not have fully understood the intended outcome of the knowledge question. In addition, to structured high quality professional development opportunities, SSTs would be able to use the data to provide coaching to building and district level administration surrounding this topic to ensure understanding and application. Additional areas of development could be learning opportunities on evidence-based strategies to improve instruction and performance for students with disabilities, promising practices of inclusive education, understanding building data and how to analyze it, building awareness of social justice, and building the capacity of our building administrators through on-going learning opportunities. An area of data reported by the participants was that 12% indicated that they do not have students identified as Specific Learning Disabled SLD). With the state average being 39.4% for SLD, it seems as though it would not be possible to have a building that does not service students with this handicapping disability. This would lead the researcher to speculate that building

administrators may need some assistance in being able to access the building data to ensure that there is a complete understanding of the students who are identified and that they are being serviced appropriately. A building administrator needs to be able to understand how to access data through the statewide data collection system, Educational Management Information System (EMIS), to make educational decisions.

ESCs could also use the data to provide high quality professional development opportunities in content-specific instructional strategies that promote achievement for all students on an individual county level for both teacher and administrator as well as special education law, leadership, and systems' change. Leadership is critical for students' achievement, effective instruction, and school climate. (Wilson, 2013; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004) Currently there are organizational structures that are in place such as administrative meetings for curriculum, special education directors, and superintendents that would be viable vehicles to consistently develop participants' understanding of education law updates and professional learning communities on multi-tiered systems of support which should be explored and developed.

Lastly, collaboratively, SSTs and county ESCs can work to build the capacity of building and district-level administrators by providing learning opportunities to develop their understanding of the provision of services for students with disabilities. Research supports that the more knowledge and understanding administrators have, the more willing they will be to support inclusive education. This research also suggests that the participants who were surveyed possess the belief that students with disabilities are capable of being successful in general education settings; yet, district data from Ohio's Special Education Profile would suggest that there are districts that do not have the

majority of their students, who are identified, in the general education setting for at least 80% of the school day (ODE, 2017). Further investigation is recommended to determine why this occurs.

The results of the current investigation will benefit superintendents, curriculum directors, special education directors, principals, and high-learning institutions in developing and sustaining a plan towards meeting the needs of all students with the focus on students with disabilities through developing the capacity of building leaders, By offering educational leadership learning opportunities in the area of of instructional practices, school climate and special education that are high quality and embedded they are investing in their building leaders and indirectly effecting student outcomes. The knowledge score of *1.88* supports the need to provide learning opportunities for building administrators to augment their understanding of how to service students with disabilities in their LRE, and to understand the nuances of continuum of services and how it is applied in their building or their district.

Limitations

As with any study there are potential limitations in the current investigation. One limitation would be the sample size of the research. While the sample size was limited to 75 respondents, this response represented approximately 37.5 % of the sampling frame. The data collection was conducted until the school year ended, so it is believed to be exhaustive of potential participants. This study is unique because of the inclusion of both principals and assistant principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. In addition, it was strengthened by not limiting the geographical area to one type of school but instead included urban, suburban, and rural areas. Results of this study were not

limited to one type of building administrator, particular grade level, or geographical area which would positively affect the generalizability of the results to additional regions.

An additional limitation may be the survey instrument that was used to collect the data. By nature of a self-reporting instrument, the researcher relied on the integrity of the respondents; it is possible that the respondents' answers to the questions were not truthful or may have reflected answers that they thought would be more acceptable. In addition, the on-line survey option, though it is very popular, allowing researchers to reach a variety of populations in a timely fashion while capitalizing on the ease of collecting and analyzing the responses, its limitations could be the responses and understanding of the open-ended questions. This was made apparent with the responses to the open-ended question that asked participants to describe the process that was used to determine a student's LRE. Approximately 30% of the responses included the IAT process or Response to Intervention (RTI), which leads the researcher to believe that respondents did not understand what the question was asking. Nonetheless, reliability estimates suggest that the responses had good reliability, suggesting that the responses were consistent and represented an authentic effort on the part of the participants. Lastly, not all building administrators are afforded the same level of support and control. District policies and responsibilities may play a role in the answers provided by the respondents. Individual's knowledge is impacted by their experience and well as their exposure to a certain content. In this particular study, the researcher was not able to determine the level of experience that the participants had with qualified and knowledgeable mentors or influences.

Recommendations for Further Study

There is no ceiling to the further areas of study that are applicable based on this research. Further research should include, but would not be limited to, conducting a comparison study on attitudes and knowledge towards LRE with teachers and superintendents in the same region, to explore if there are any correlations between the groups. This research than can be compared with the data collected regarding Principals and Assistant Principals.

Another critical area to investigate would be the achievement levels of students who are in an inclusive setting to determine if students in a general education setting have acheivement levels that indicate higher growth than similar students not educated in the general education setting. Related to this would be an examination of the academic achievement of general education and special education students within an inclusive environment and exploration of the score differences.

Further studies could be conducted to explore if there are any differences within special education placement and handicapping conditions, and if there is an affect on building administration attitudes. Limited research has been done regarding disability categories and bulding administrators as this researcher was reviewing the data that was collected in this survey, the positive attitudes were profoundly present. The research could not help but to wonder if disability categories would have an impact on attitude.

A comparison analysis including all of the 16 regions of Ohio would provide additional data for consideration and could directly impact the work of the all SSTs across Ohio in the way that service is provided to districts, the type of technical assistance that is offered, and the professional development that is offered.

In addition, a comparison study analyzing the attitudes of both building and district-level administrators along with teachers towards LRE, would investigate the impact that attitudes towards LRE have on students'acheivement and success. Analyzing the alignment of attitudes across the varying positions and comparing the results with the acheivement scores and attitudes of students would provide insight on the benefits of the service model of schools and would allow replication of successful programs.

An indepth comparison study that reviews attitudes of principals across the states regarding disabilities categories in LRE would provide data that would inform instructional outcomes and the individual states' interpretations of federal regulations.

Finally, conducting a study examining the attitudes of families and students themselves on the benefits of inclusive classrooms and the type of services that they receive could be beneficial, whether it is consult, facilitative support, co-teaching or self-contained, and the role of the building administator and teacher.

Conclusion

The results of this study are beneficial in gaining a deeper understanding of how building administrators' attitudes and knowledge affect the placement of students in their LRE. Due to the current direction of ESSA, this should be a catalyst for school districts and preparation programs to provide learning opportunities on special education law, inclusive education, instructional strategies for all students, and social justice; in doing so, building administrators would gain the confidence and the knowledge to serve all students. The outcome of this research can be directly used to understand the impact of the work at the State Support Team Region 5 (SSTR5). One of the focuses of SSTR5 is to ensure that students with disabilities are serviced apropriately and to address the

achievment gap between student groups. This is done through providing professional development opportunities and technical assistance to the school districts in the region. A second focus is to work directly with district leadership teams to improve climate and learning outcomes for all students by looking at district data that are both qualitative and quantitative. The outcome of this work will directly influence the professional development learning opportunities that are offered, as well as the technical assistance and coaching that is done with the districts under the auspices of LRE and the provision of services for students with disabilities, and create opportunities for district building administrators to ask questions, build their capacity and work collaboratively together.

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Appendix A

Dr. Karen H. Larwin and Ms. Marla Peachock are conducting a study with the following survey. Your participation is appreciated.

This survey is being used to understand your opinion about students with special needs and their educational experiences. The benefits of the study have the propensity to assist school districts in serving their students with disabilities by impacting the knowledge of building administrators.

A cross-sectional survey will be utilized for this survey, which is the design that is frequently used to document particular characteristics in a population. This type of survey provides the researcher with the opportunity to evaluate relationships between variables while investigating the impact that a principal's attitude has on the integrating students with disabilities in the general education setting and the continuum of services.

You will not be harmed by participation in this study. Participation is voluntary. Your identity will not be collected. Students must be at least 18 years old. Submission of this survey implies your consent. If you have questions concerning this research, contact Dr. Karen Larwin at (330)941-2231 of khlarwin@ysu.edu or Marla Peachock at (330) 423-5393 or marla.peachock@sstr5.org.

No personally identifiable information (like the name of the respondent, address of the school) will be collected through the use of the survey. Any Survey that might have inadvertently included names or other identifying information will be immediately destroyed. Data will be securely kept in a password protected cloud space.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research project, you may contact the Office of Research at Youngstown State University at (330)941-2377 or YSUIRB@ysu.ed

SECTION I- Demographic Information

Research Questions

Section 1- Demographic Information.

1. Approximate number of all students in your building:
   - 0-250
   - 251-500
   - 501-750
   - 751-1000
   - 1000 or more

2. Average class size for all students
   - 0-9
   - 10-19

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40 or more

3. Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building: (Do not include gifted)
   - 0-5%
   - 6-10%
   - 11-15%
   - 16-20%
   - 21% or more

4. Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building who are included in general education classrooms for at least 80% of their school day: (Do not include gifted)
   - 0-20%
   - 21-40%
   - 41-60%
   - 61-80%
   - 81-100%

5. Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building that are identified solely as Speech Language Impairment

   - 0-20%
   - 21-40%
   - 41-60%
   - 61-80%
   - 81-100%

6. What disabilities do you serve in your building?

   - Autism
   - Intellectual Disabilities
   - Deaf-Blind
   - Developmentally Delay
   - Emotional Disturbance
   - Hearing Impairment
   - Multiple Disabilities
   - Orthopedic Impairment
   - OHI Major
   - OHI Minor
   - Specific Learning Disabilities
   - Speech and Language
   - Traumatic Brain Injury
   - Visual Impairment

Section 2- Training and Experiences.

7. Your age:
   - 20-30
   - 31-40
   - 41-50
   - 51-60
   - 61 or more

8. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

9. Years of full-time general education teaching experience
   - 0
   - 1-6
   - 7-12
   - 13-18
   - 19 or more

10. Years of full-time special education teaching experience
   - 0
   - 1-6
   - 7-12
   - 13-18
   - 19 or more

11. Years as a building administrator
   - 0-5
   - 6-10
   - 11-15
   - 16-21
   - 22 or more

12. Do you serve as the district representative on IEP teams in your building?
   - Yes
   - No
   - As needed

13. What is your teaching license? (i.e., general education, special education, performing arts)

14. Approximate number of special education courses in your undergraduate program
   - 0
   - 1-3
   - 4-9
   - 10 or more

15. Approximate number of special education courses in your graduate program
    - o 0
    - o 1-3
    - o 4-9
    - o 10 or more

16. Approximate number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices in the last 5 years.
    - o 0
    - o 1-8
    - o 9-16
    - o 17-24
    - o 25 or more

17. Mark the areas below that were included in your formal training such as courses, workshops, and/or significant portions of courses (10% of content or more). Formal training would include college classes and workshops facilitated by qualified individuals.

    - o Characteristics of students with disabilities
    - o Behavior management class for working with students with disabilities
    - o Academic programming for students with disabilities
    - o Special education law
    - o Crisis intervention
    - o Life skills' training for students with disabilities
    - o Teambuilding
    - o Interagency cooperation
    - o Family intervention training
    - o Supporting and training teachers to handle inclusion
    - o Change process
    - o Eliciting parent and community support for inclusion
    - o Fostering teacher collaboration
    - o Field-based experiences with actual inclusion activities

18. Are you certified in special education?
    - o Yes
    - o No

Section 3- Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Students with Disabilities.

19. How do you define Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?

20. What do you see as your role in the LRE decision-making?

21. Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to successfully teach students with disabilities in a school setting.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

22. Schools with students with disabilities and students without disabilities enhance the learning experiences of students with severe/profound disabilities.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

23. Students with disabilities are too impaired to benefit from the participation in activities/curriculum of a general education classroom.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

24. A good general education teacher can do a lot to help a student with a disability.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

25. In general, students with disabilities should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

26. Students without disabilities can profit from contact with students with disabilities.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

27. General education curriculum should be adapted to meet the needs of all students including students with disabilities.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

28. It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with disabilities in their classroom.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

29. No discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with disabilities.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

30. It should be policy and/or law that students with disabilities are integrated into general educational programs and activities.
    - Strongly Disagree
    - Disagree
    - Not Sure
    - Agree
    - Strongly Agree

Section 4- Hypothetical Scenarios.

Please indicate your response as "Yes" if you agree with the hypothetical scenario, "No" if this action is incorrect, or "Don't Know" if you feel the language of the hypothetical scenario is not clear, or if you do not know whether the principal's response was appropriate.

31. After completing four years of study in a special education high school program, a special education student was recommended for graduation and termination from special education. The student had met special education requirements as listed on the

IEP as well as credit requirements for graduation. The parents met with the principal and said they didn't think their child was ready to graduate. Was the principal correct in informing the parents that the standard for graduation and termination of services was based on IEP completion?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

32. For various reasons, a school was closed. Special education classes were moved from one elementary building to another elementary building. Parents demanded a due process meeting as they felt there was a change in the educational placement of their child. Were they correct in their assumptions?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't Know

33. A parent transferred a second grader into a new school at the end of May. Her child had a history of learning difficulties and the parent requested a formal evaluation for her child to be assessed for special education services. The principal informed the mother that testing could not be initiated until the start of the new school year. Was the principal required to start the evaluation before the end of the school year and complete it over the summer?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Don't Know

34. What process does your school follow when determining the placement of a student with disabilities?

35. (Optional question) What is your School name, District name, or County name so that data can be connected?

Appendix B

Youngstown
STATE UNIVERSITY

One University Plaza, Youngstown, Ohio 44555
Office of Research
330.941.2377
www.ysu.edu

October 10, 2017

Dr. Karen Larwin, Principal Investigator
Ms. Marla Peachock, Co-investigator
Department of Counseling, School Psychology and Educational Leadership
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 024-2018
TITLE:

Dear Dr. Larwin and Ms. Peachock:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that it is exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 3 exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Hripko
Associate Vice President for Research
Authorized Institutional Official

MAH:cc

c: Dr. Jake Protivnak, Chair
Department of Counseling, School Psychology and Educational Leadership