

ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE AND PREPARATION  
FOR DECISION-MAKING BY OKLAHOMA  
ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN THE  
AREA OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

By

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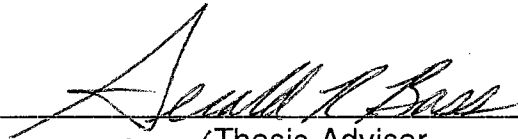
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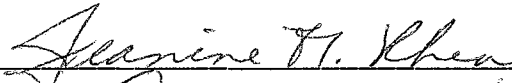
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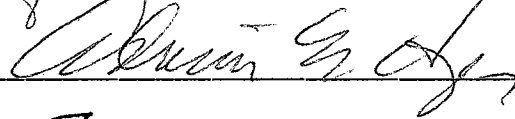
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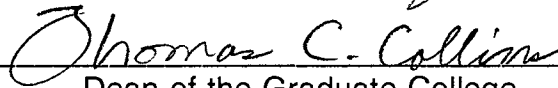


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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The field of school administration encompasses a diverse knowledge base, with task-intensive responsibilities that can challenge the best of leaders. Expertise in finance, curriculum, organizational theory, law, school reform, and public relations are now basic requirements, with other facets of the educational program to be recalled as needed (Finkenbinder, 1981). Adding to the demands for expertise, the field of special education has had both an expensive and time-consuming impact on school administration, despite its relatively short history (Burello & Sage, 1979). Since the 1975 passage of P.L. 94-142, the education of children with disabilities has been a vital concern for practicing superintendents and principals. While the nature of special education services may differ greatly at those two levels of responsibility, each administrator must be cautious of mandates that can affect the legal standing and financial balance of the school district (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1987).

Many school administrators complete their preservice preparation program with the belief that a special education supervisor will have responsibility for that portion of the school program (Mayer, 1982). In reality, there are numerous school districts in which budget limitations prevent the separation of such job

functions. In fact, a teacher is often assigned to "fill in" by assuming the responsibility for the paperwork associated with special education. While these individuals may provide expert guidance to the instructional aspect, they rarely have the background in finance, law, or organizational management to bring true leadership to the program (Cline, 1981; Fineman, 1981; Robson, 1981). This leaves the superintendent and/or principal in charge of major special education programming decisions (Valesky & Hirth, 1992). The only certification requirement in the area of special education for Oklahoma school administrators is an introduction to exceptional children, generally offered at the undergraduate level as a required professional education component of the teacher education program (Tryneski, 1992).

Public schools are challenged by limited financial resources, increasing technological demands, and newly created alternatives to traditional teaching techniques and structures. These, and other issues, will place greater demand on school administrators to respond to the changing needs of both special and regular education (Wang, Walberg, & Reynolds, 1992). Financial resources that could be used to diversify regular education programs are diverted for use in the special education processes of evaluation, identification, and instruction of eligible students (Will, 1986). Special education is a labor-intensive field, with mandated student-teacher ratios, record-keeping, and timelines. While it may be more cost and labor efficient to serve these children in their natural learning environment, the regular classroom, such efforts are stifled by the public's demand for accountability of the public schools (Chandler & Utz, 1982).

Educational reform, through a merger of regular and special education program development, would enhance the learning opportunities for all children. However, a sound knowledge of special education practices is required by administrators in order to provide reform leadership, within the limits of the law (Case, 1992; Will, 1986).

The acquisition of knowledge by school administrators in the area of special education has been of concern since the implementation of P.L. 94-142 (Valesky & Hirth, 1992; Cline, 1981; Stile & Pettibone, 1980; Nevin, 1979). The laws and policies governing special education are subject to constant change by the agencies that regulate the field. P.L. 94-142 has undergone two major revisions since its implementation in 1978 and case law continually establishes new precedents and procedures. State and local education agencies develop policies for compliance in response to these mandates, and the elementary principal is responsible for the implementation of special education policy at the building level. It is therefore necessary for the principal to continually update and refine the changing knowledge base regarding special education (Hirth & Valesky, 1990; Marsh & Podemski, 1982).

The processes of knowledge acquisition and use have been examined by many theorists and researchers such as Bloom and Broder (1950), Bruner (1960), and Tyler (1951). Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives (1956) is considered by many to be the most thorough exploration of the issues and stages of knowledge acquisition and use and thus served as the lens with

which this study was designed. Further review of the application of Bloom's Taxonomy is contained in Chapters II and III.

It has been suggested that special education is a philosophy, an attitude that permeates instruction, but is not dictated by a place or an occurrence (Podemski, Price, Smith, & Marsh, 1984). Such a philosophy of educational practice is developed through training, experiences, lessons, and readings. Knowledge of special education should be planned and nurtured, just as resourcing for special education programs must be anticipated and projected. While superintendents and principals may receive training in legal and financial issues, placement, program, material, and inservice options for special education may suffer if the decision-maker is unfamiliar with such practices (Robson, 1981).

Special education practices and procedures are grounded in major pieces of federal legislation (IDEA, P.L. 101-476, 1990; formerly known as P.L. 94-142, 1975; and P.L. 99-457, 1986), monitored by two separate governmental agencies (the Office of Special Education Programs and the Office of Civil Rights), and interpreted through case law, including such Supreme Court decisions as *Mills v. Board of Education, D.C.* (1972) and *Honig v. Doe* (1988). It is therefore not an area of educational programming that can be left to chance or lack of direct control. Violation of the rights of a student with a disability can result in damaging publicity, lengthy and costly court appearances, and financial burdens for any school district (Mayer 1982).

## Statement of the Problem

Knowledge of special education policies and procedures, and specifically special education law, is an important administrative competency and yet research has shown that principals are lacking in that area (Valesky & Hirth, 1992; Weinstein, 1989; Cline, 1981). One certification course is required for school administrators in the State of Oklahoma concerning the education of exceptional children. That requirement is actually a component of the professional education core within the teacher certification program. Any additional coursework in special education must be taken as an elective, if it is available, or within the instructional content of another administrative course. While preservice preparation will not be the sole source of special education knowledge acquisition, a principal's ability to make decisions in the area of special education could be impaired due to that lack of preparation.

This study was conducted to determine the level of knowledge that Oklahoma elementary principals have regarding special education, specifically those policies and procedures required by P.L. 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). In addition to their knowledge, the study determined their perceived effectiveness in making special education decisions and the degree of preparation they had received in that area.

Research questions that were used to focus this study were the following.

1. What level of knowledge do elementary principals possess regarding the provisions of IDEA (P.L. 101-476)?

2. How do elementary principals perceive their effectiveness in decision-making regarding special education issues?

3. How has information concerning special education been acquired by practicing administrators? To what degree has the information and/or the process of acquisition been perceived as useful and/or effective?

### Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of knowledge that Oklahoma elementary school principals have regarding special education and their perceived decision-making ability, in relation to their knowledge base. Current Oklahoma administrative certification requirements do not include preparation in the area of special education, beyond an introduction to exceptional children class. Additional preparation requirements in the area of special education for school administrators would enhance the existing foundation of professional competencies, enabling them to make clear and informed decisions regarding special education programming at their school site. If there is a positive relationship between the understanding of IDEA mandates and regulations and the principals' perceptions of their effectiveness in program decision-making, then factors that would contribute to an increased level of knowledge should be identified. Such findings could eventually lead to the development of a more comprehensive certification and/or professional development program, to include special education issues, for administrators.

## Limitations of the Study

The applicability of the conclusions of this study may be limited due to the following factors.

1. This study was limited to a sample of elementary principals who belong to the Oklahoma Association of Elementary School Principals.

2. The results reflect only the self-reported perceptions of the participants' effectiveness in this subject area.

3. The survey instrument was designed specifically for doctoral study. While attempts were made to establish validity and reliability, its use has thus far been limited to this study. Chapter III contains specific information regarding its design.

4. The perspectives of the primary researcher may have impacted the design and direction of this study. She has had 13 years of experience as an educator and an administrator of both regular and special education programs. The study was undertaken due to her professional concern regarding the preparation and expected competencies of school administrators in the area of special education. While every attempt has been made to minimize bias in this study, it is assumed that human research studies have that potential.



## Definition of Terms

Special education is defined by the programs and services (classes, instruction, materials, curricula, adaptive resources) designed to allow disabled individuals to obtain an appropriate education and to develop to their maximum potential (Mayer, 1982).

A disability is a physical, mental, or emotional problem that is sufficiently different from the norm and limits the ability to function. The extent of a disability determines whether an individual needs special education services. While not all disabilities make an individual handicapped, the terms disability and handicap are often used synonymously (Mayer, 1982).

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written plan (required by IDEA) that serves as a method of measuring a student's progress in meeting the stated learning outcomes. It is developed through a cooperative effort of the local education agency representatives, parent(s), and student, if appropriate, and assures the availability of resources necessary to achieve the written goals (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993).

The participants of an IEP team must include, for minimum compliance, an administrator or administrative representative, a special education teacher qualified to teach the identified disability of the child, the child's regular education teacher(s), the parent(s), and the child, if appropriate. For initial placements, a member of the multidisciplinary evaluation team must also be present (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993).

The term Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities will be taught with their non-disabled peers. It is the responsibility of the IEP team to document consideration of LRE when selecting the most appropriate learning environment for that child (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993).

An elementary principal is a school administrator whose responsibilities relate to a specific level of school children (usually grades K-6) at a given location.

An administrator, also referred to as a general administrator, is a person who is responsible for overall school programs (e.g., a superintendent, a principal, a director of services).

## Summary

Special education is an area of educational programming bound by federal mandates and case law decisions. Due to the potential for major financial and legal implications, school administrators must become knowledgeable of and understand the practical implementation of special education. The investigative intent of this study was to determine the knowledge level of Oklahoma elementary principals regarding special education and, in addition, their perceptions of their preparation and effectiveness in making special education decisions. Identified factors contributing to the principals' knowledge acquisition may effect a more

comprehensive preparation program, to include special education issues.

Chapter II is used to present a review of the related literature concerning the legal framework of special education, competencies required in administrative preparation, and the relationship of knowledge of special education and the principalship. Chapter II also contains a summary of Bloom's Taxonomy and the conceptual lens it affords for this study. A description of the methods and procedures used to conduct the study is the focus of Chapter III. An analysis of the resultant data is presented in Chapter IV. The summary, conclusions, recommendations, and commentary are included in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to determine the knowledge level of elementary principals in the area of special education and, in relation to that knowledge, their perceptions of their ability to make decisions regarding special education issues. Data were also collected regarding the principals' means of knowledge acquisition and preparation in the area of special education.

This chapter includes a review of related literature on the topics of special education and the preparation of school administrators regarding that area. A summary of the six knowledge levels included in Bloom's Taxonomy, which provides the conceptual framework for this study is also presented.

#### Legal Environment of Special Education

The field of special education has had a relatively short, but eventful, history in comparison to the rest of public education. Prior to World War II, virtually no provisions existed for children with disabilities to be served in regular school programs. Parents often organized special classes called "opportunity" or "sunshine" rooms which were conducted in churches or other meeting halls. Despite those efforts, isolation was the acceptable standard. As veterans' rights became an issue following World War II, an awareness of those

with disabilities and their adaptive needs grew (Weisenstein & Pelz, 1986). The landmark case that changed the civil rights for all students was Brown v. Board of Education (1954), in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against "separate, but equal" schooling. The civil rights movement gathered momentum through the late 1950s and, with the public concern by members of President Kennedy's family in the early 1960s, special education interests "rode the coattails" of the Civil Rights Act which was signed in 1964 (Weisenstein & Pelz, 1986). In 1966, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P.L. 89-313) was amended to provide federal funding for special education programs in public and state schools. The Architectural Barriers Act (P.L. 90-480), which followed in 1968 but was not enforced until 1973, ensured handicapped accessibility to any building constructed or leased through federal funding.

Special education programs are thus bound by laws, regulations, and policies. These may be viewed through the three levels of government: federal, state, and local. At the federal level, interpretations are made through mandates (what must be done) or permission (what might be done). Mandates are backed with the provision or withdrawal of funding to state and/or local entities, while permissive action is encouraged through grant offerings (Mayer, 1982). The states' education officials interpret compliance with the mandates and thus set the guidelines for which the local education agencies (LEAs) are responsible while funding for special education is funneled through the state education agency (SEA). At the local level, a district plan for special education services must be developed and submitted to the state within the framework

established by federal and state regulations. Each level of government has jurisdiction over the next lower level (Weisenstein & Pelz, 1986).

Several significant federal reform bills, written in the 1970s, dealt specifically with individuals with disabilities and educational programming. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 required that recipients of federal financial assistance not discriminate on the basis of handicap. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), more commonly referred to as the Buckley Amendment, required parental access, and student access if over 18 years of age, to school records and, through that access, assurance that the student's records were complete and accurate. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, known as Public Law 94-142, required a free and appropriate public education to be provided to disabled children in the least restrictive environment, at no additional cost to parents. It also established procedural safeguards protecting those rights. P.L. 94-142 is considered a "grant statute," in that the federal government provided supportive funding to those states providing special education within the constraints of federal guidelines (Rothstein, 1990). A revision of P.L. 94-142 occurred in 1986, with passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments (Public Law 99-457). The intent of P.L. 99-457 was to provide early intervention services for children from birth to five years of age, with incentives for development of preschool programs for children with disabilities. The most recent amendments to P.L. 94-142 were incorporated in Public Law 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), which provided grants to states that

complied with the guidelines of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for children with disabilities. IDEA components emphasized the provision of services in the least restrictive environment (LRE), procedural safeguards to ensure FAPE, and parental involvement. A review of IDEA, specifically as it relates to administrative responsibilities, follows in this chapter.

Two other legislative acts have had an impact on the provision of education services to students with disabilities. They are Public Law 93-112, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Section 504 requires that

no otherwise qualified individual with handicaps...shall, solely by reason of his/her handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance (29 U.S.C. Section 794).

Section 504 only refers to nondiscrimination and compliance with its provisions is monitored by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights. While it differs from IDEA in that there are no grants for funding to the states for educational purposes, enforcement of Section 504 can include assessment of financial penalties for non-compliance (Rothstein, 1990).

Due process and equal protection requirements established by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the federal Constitution began to influence educational practice through court decisions rendered in the 1960s and 1970s. Until that time, the federal role in public education was minimal. However, an increase in monetary support was accompanied by an increase in federal regulation and responsibility. Special education is an obvious example of such

federal influence and, while the states remain responsible for the basic provision of education, issues of funding and due process maintain a federal effect on special education program implementation (Rothstein, 1990).

Court cases that have significantly impacted case law regarding special education programming include Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971), which prevented admission denial without prior notice and due process opportunity; Mills v. Board of Education, District of Columbia (1972), which guaranteed free and appropriate public education, regardless of the degree of impairment; Battle v. Commonwealth (1980), which established that standard educational policy, such as limiting the school year, can violate FAPE for certain disabled students; and Board of Education v. Rowley (1982) which defined "appropriate" as a program of special education and related services that benefits the disabled child and for which due process has been followed in its development (Rothstein, 1990). Two other cases that have affected school practice are Irving Independent School District v. Tatro (1984), in which it was ruled that catheterization and other simple health-related services (not provided by a physician) can be considered "related services" when student access to education is of issue, and Honig v. Doe (1988), which prevents the suspension or expulsion of a disabled student for more than 10 days without first determining whether the misbehavior is a manifestation of the handicapping condition (Zirkel & Richardson, 1988). While few school administrators may take the time to read the full text of legislative mandates, the interpretations and



statements of action set by case law decisions establish procedures that must be adhered to promptly or leave the school district vulnerable to redress through the courts (Mayer, 1982). Knowledge of special education law has thus become essential to ensure an appropriate education for special education students and to reduce a school district's liability for potential litigation (Valesky & Hirth, 1990, 1992; Marsh & Podemski, 1982).

### Special Education Issues for Administrators

Central to the education of children with disabilities is Public Law 94-142, which earned the nickname of "The Bill of Rights for the Handicapped" due to its impact on public education (Mayer, 1982). As noted earlier, P.L. 94-142 has undergone two major revisions, in 1986 and 1990 (P.L. 99-457 and P.L. 101-476), and is now referred to as IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The basic provisions of IDEA have essentially remained the same as first written. The 10 subsections detail intent, grants, state and local plan, due process, least restrictive environment (LRE), non-discriminatory assessment and evaluation, individualized education plan (IEP), comprehensive system of personnel development, other agencies, and parents (Mayer, 1982). A description of these subsections can be found in Appendix A. Since the local education agency is responsible for the provision of educational services for disabled students, it is critical for school administrators, and specifically principals who oversee school site programs, to understand the depth of their responsibility in complying with the mandates set forth by IDEA (Mayer, 1982).

One priority for the administrator supervising special education programs must be accurate record-keeping. (Mayer, 1982) The state education agency (SEA) provides forms that are required to document special education procedures. The completion and maintenance of these forms for each student referred for special education evaluation and/or provided services must meet minimum state requirements and may be audited by the SEA at any time, but no less often than every three years. The students' files must remain confidential and secure with accessibility granted only to school officials, education service providers, and parents, students of age, or their delegates, unless directed by a court of law. Such record-keeping is a responsibility of school site and LEA representatives (Weisenstein & Pelz, 1986).

IDEA requires the LEA officials to make parental involvement in the special education process a high priority (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993). The parents are to be involved in all phases of special education evaluation, eligibility determination, placement, and program development. Informed consent must be obtained by school officials prior to evaluating or placing children in any special education programs and communication must take place in the parents' native language or other mode of communication (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993). The parents are to be informed, through written documentation, of actions taken by the school that may alter the educational service received by their children. While the district officials must make every attempt to include the parents in their children's educational programs, they cannot require parental participation as

part of the educational program (NOLPE, 1993). The "Parents Rights in Special Education" document should be given to parents whenever a formal special education meeting takes place at school. This ensures that the parents have been provided the opportunity to be informed of due process procedures, as required by law. (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993). A commitment to parental involvement and the proper procedures therefore may help the principal avoid possible due process actions through the promotion of good faith communication between the school and home (NOLPE, 1993).

A positive working relationship between the school and the families of students with disabilities is especially important in that disabled children may be eligible for special education services immediately following their birth through the age of 21 years. Public Law 99-457 amended the earlier legislation in P.L. 94-142 to include specific references to the provision of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities. Federal financial assistance was provided to the states so that comprehensive and coordinated educational programs could be made available to these pre-school children. In the State of Oklahoma, the Sooner Start program is in charge of the coordination for the provision of early intervention services for children ages 0 to 36 months. As children reach their third birthday, the LEAs become responsible for providing appropriate preschool programs, unless contractual arrangements are made otherwise (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993). It is therefore possible for an elementary principal to have, at the school site, special education classes serving students as young as three years of age.

It is clear that a variety of programs and placement options must be available in the LEA for students ages 3 through 21 who are in need of special education services. These options must be considered, while other options such as in-district availability and cost may be considered, in making the final determination of placement for an individual student (NOLPE, 1993).

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document that specifies the special education service provisions to be made available at the local level to each student with a disability (Mayer, 1982). The IEP team is responsible for making decisions regarding placement and services for a student with a disability. The elementary principal may serve on the IEP team as the required district representative authorized to make decisions regarding special education and related services and to commit LEA resources (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993). Other members of the team, at a minimum, include the child's regular teacher(s), parent(s), and a special education teacher qualified in the area of the child's disability. IEP team composition beyond this minimum may vary depending on the type of special education decisions to be made (Rothstein, 1990). The IEP document itself must include a statement of the student's present levels of educational performance, annual goals and short-term objectives, specific provisions of special education and related services, dates and duration of those services, and the procedures and criteria used to evaluate the IEP's effectiveness. It is important for the principal or other administrative representative to ensure that the IEP can be appropriately implemented, that the student's needs may be met

through school services and resources, and that cooperation is encouraged among all members of the IEP team (Weisenstein & Pelz, 1986). Effective communication is the key to successful special education programs and school officials must be committed to that objective (Mayer, 1982).

When specific services for students with disabilities are to be determined, options concerning the least restrictive environment (LRE) must be considered and documented on the IEPs. The consideration of LRE is required in order to ensure that the disabled students have the opportunity, when appropriate, to be educated with their non-disabled peers (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993). This can be the most challenging special education issue for school principals (Mayer, 1982). The movement to educate students with disabilities in the regular classrooms (now referred to as inclusion) has received criticism from regular educators, teacher organizations, and parents of non-disabled students (Mayer, 1982). Inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with LRE. While every attempt must be made to provide children with disabilities the opportunity to interact with non-disabled children, the IEP team's determination of LRE and the appropriateness of service for each individual takes precedence (NOLPE, 1993).

The leadership of the building principal is critical to the acceptance and understanding of special education regulations by site staff members (Mayer, 1982). A climate of cooperation can be impaired by the separation of professional disciplines, perceived competition among teachers, and inherent suspicion of the unknown (Weisenstein & Pelz, 1986). Educating regular

educators who may have little special education knowledge and providing support to regular and special education teachers is a responsibility of school district officials. Professional development topics include characteristics and needs of students with disabilities, procedural safeguards, referral and assessment procedures, alternatives to placement, IEP development and implementation, and program evaluation (to include LRE). A district and/or school site commitment to the provision of educational services is in the best interest of all students, and a well-informed staff is essential to program success (Mayer, 1982).

The eight major sub-sections of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112) include: program accessibility, structural accessibility, basic requirements (FAPE, LRE, procedural safeguards), definition of appropriate educational services, transportation, specific definitions, specific prohibitions, and compliance (NOLPE, 1993). Of particular importance to school administrators is the requirement that educational services be provided in such a manner that opportunities exist for the achievement of equal results. These opportunities may be provided separately, if necessary, but access must be considered for the participation of students with disabilities within regular programs. Needed school programs thus must be placed on sites and in facilities that allow access to individuals with disabilities. In addition, the LEA may not support a person and/or entity that practices discrimination of those with disabilities (Mayer, 1982). School principals need to be aware that students who do not meet the eligibility criteria for placement in special

education may still be eligible for alternative services under Section 504. Examples of this include children with physical disabilities who are capable of learning in the regular education environment, but may require curb-to-curb transportation in a bus with a wheelchair lift, students who require catheterization (or other health-related services) during the school day, and students who need specialized equipment, such as voice-activated computers, to perform their classwork (NOLPE, 1993).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is an extension of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and is considered by some as the final step necessary to ensure the integration of individuals with disabilities into the mainstream of society (NOLPE, 1993). The ADA expands the existing requirements (under IDEA and Section 504) for schools in two main areas. Employment discrimination of a qualified individual with a disability is prohibited. Hiring, promotion and retention should be reviewed to assure that equal opportunity exists, without regard to disability. Physical access to programs was already required, but ADA now includes access to facilities such as gymnasiums, stadiums, and auditoriums (Garrett, 1993). Reasonable accommodations must be made unless they impose an undue hardship on the employer or agency. Undue hardship is defined as

an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of factors such as an employer's size, financial resources and the nature and structure of its operation (Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, 1992)

School officials should make every effort to act in good faith with Section 504

and ADA mandates. Non-compliance can result in lawsuits, from which monetary and civil penalties may be assessed (NOLPE, 1993)

### Preparation and Competencies for School Administrators in the Area of Special Education

The intent of the aforementioned federal legislation was, among other purposes, to provide students with special needs an educational opportunity within the regular school programs. While there may be a broad spectrum of special education services available to eligible students, both regular and special educators are responsible for the provisions of each Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the building administrator is responsible for special education programming and procedural issues at the site level (Mayer, 1982). School administrators perceive the degree of compliance with and the extent of commitment to the intent of IDEA to be demonstrated by each individual school district, reflective of the competencies of the personnel involved (Nevin, 1979; Finkenbinder, 1981; Chandler & Utz, 1982). Yet, there is a general consensus in the literature that a principal's knowledge of special education needs improvement (Cline, 1981; Valesky & Hirth, 1989).

In order to obtain an administrative certificate in the State of Oklahoma, a person must have two years of teaching experience and hold a masters degree. An additional 16 course hours, beyond the masters level, were required at the time this research was initiated for a standard certificate as a school principal. At least one graduate course must be taken in each of the areas of school law,



curriculum, human relations management, human development, organizational theory, and supervision and evaluation of instructional programs (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1988). Coleman and Achilles (1987) noted that, while the field of educational administration does not yet have an established core of recommended competencies, the common areas of concern include finance, law, school and community relations, the principalship, curriculum, and classroom supervision. While these align with the Oklahoma requirements listed above, the course content may differ greatly across different administrative programs. If agreement cannot be reached on the content of the ideal administrative preparation program, there is a broad consensus that internships and/or mentorships should be utilized to provide experiences not available in the classroom and to afford the aspiring principal a "guided" opportunity to transform leadership theory into practice (Lumsden, 1992).

School administrators do recognize the need to acquire and maintain knowledge of policies, procedures, and instructional techniques regarding students with disabilities (Nevin, 1979; Cline, 1981; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Indeed, they have demonstrated a greater knowledge of procedural safeguards than of the provision of educational services (Valesky & Hirth, 1989). (But, the principal's knowledge of special education law is not sufficient to ensure that mistakes in the implementation of procedures and/or the provision of services will not occur (Fineman, 1981; Valesky & Hirth, 1989).) Robson (1981) suggested that the principal must either become more knowledgeable and competent in special education service or be willing to relinquish responsibility

for the in-building functions presently beyond the principal's scope of competence.

Nevin (1979) listed the following administrative competencies as essential in the area of special education:

1. ensuring due process;
2. interpreting federal and state laws;
3. applying appropriate leadership styles;
4. ensuring that records comply with the rules of confidentiality and due process;
5. resolving conflicts among program personnel;
6. using evaluation data to make program revisions; and
7. determining staff functions and qualifications (p. 364).

In addition to these competencies, Podemski, Price, Smith and Marsh (1984) suggested that the principal should:

1. inform all building personnel of the status of special education and define their responsibilities according to that status;
2. ensure that the special educator has adequate materials;
3. recognize and accept behavioral problems that are associated with handicapping conditions;
4. assume responsibility within the referral and assessment processes of special education to make cost effective decisions;
5. establish evaluation criteria of program effectiveness and communicate those criteria to special education personnel;
6. ensure that the goals and objectives of the special education curriculum are integrated with those of the regular curriculum;

7. assume an active role in support of the special education teacher and the program as a whole;
8. seek out innovative inservice programs that will benefit the entire staff; and
9. foster communication with parents, staff, external personnel, and outside agencies (p. 4).

These will be difficult tasks to embrace for an administrator who has received little or no instruction or training in the area of special education (Podemski et al., 1984).

Individual state certification requirements could provide an important mechanism for ensuring that those aspiring to school administrative positions receive adequate preparation in special education (Finkenbinder, 1981; Prillaman & Richardson, 1985). In Requirements for Certification, 1992-93, Tryneski (1992) found that only 26 of the 51 states and the District of Columbia had certification requirements for school administrators specific to the education of exceptional learners. Seventeen of those states had requirements for a study of the exceptional child within the professional education core, usually in the form of a two or three credit hour course at the undergraduate level. Four of the 26 states had competency requirements either built into the preservice professional education component or in a staff development package required for certificate renewal. The regulations adopted in those 21 states specified that the exceptional learner component was required for initial teacher certification only, while rules in 5 states specified additional special education competencies for school administrators. For the vast majority of administrative

candidates, an introduction to exceptional learners course, often taken at the undergraduate level, is the only direct exposure to special education issues. While a general school law course required for certification of school administrators may include a special education law component, less than 10% of the instructional time was found to be devoted to that topic (Valesky & Hirth, 1992).

In the State of Oklahoma, one course, "Education of the Exceptional Child," fulfills certification requirements related to special education for all educational fields except those specific to teaching in special education (see Appendix B). In a review of the syllabi for courses in educational administration at Oklahoma State University, only one course included a reference to special education law. The syllabus for "Legal Aspects of Public Education" contained a notation that one three-hour class session was devoted to the subject of "special needs." The objective given for this topic was to "understand special student populations and their needs" (Harris, 1994). A survey of the eight other Oklahoma universities which offer certification programs for school administrators found that elective coursework in special education was offered in only three programs, while each of the surveyed administrative certification programs had an instructional component of special education law within other general administrative courses.

Stile, Abernathy, and Pettibone (1986) found that state certification requirements in the area of special education had not significantly increased in a five-year period from 1980 to 1985. That finding applied to Oklahoma

administrative certification then, and remains so now. In addition, there is an apparent lack of communication between the state education agencies and institutions of higher learning, which provide the coursework necessary for certification (Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone, 1986; Stile & Pettibone, 1980). Hirth and Valesky (1990) found a lag in the institutional response to the changing requirements of IDEA. In light of these concerns, preparation through such fragmented approaches could be further enhanced by a district-level professional development plan in which the practicing administrators indicate the additional areas perceived as needed in order to perform the principalship more effectively (Daresh, 1988). A realignment within educational administration programs and field-based training systems was also recommended to benefit the preparation of aspiring principals in the area of special education (Lumsden, 1992; Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone, 1986; Nevin, 1979).

Due to their perceived inadequacies regarding special education issues, principals do not always assume responsibility for instructional leadership in that area (Weinstein, 1989; Marsh & Podemski, 1982). They often delegate coordination of special education activities to their assistants, counselors, and/or special education teachers (Mayer, 1982). While it is advantageous to designate one person in authority to oversee the compliance issues, it does not seem logical for the principal and concerned staff members to follow students' progress (or lack thereof) to the point they qualify for special education and then abdicate concern and/or responsibility for the students' instructional program to

the delegate in charge of the paperwork associated with special education (Fineman,1981). Principals should feel empowered to create effective, comprehensive instructional services for all students, with emphasis on individual needs rather than on compliance criteria or mandates. They must have enough knowledge of special education to fulfill its intent, and that means minimalizing regular and special education dualism, especially at the site level (Rose & Gottlieb, 1981; Cline, 1981; Stile, Abernathy, & Pettibone, 1986; Will, 1986). Therefore, a major emphasis by trainers and in professional development programs must be on educating principals. Mayer (1982) proposed seven assumptions regarding the principals' role in special education programming.

1. They perceive the value inherent in special education programs.
2. They view special education as assistive to the regular program.
3. They feel they are responsible for any program placed in their building.
4. They often feel somewhat inadequate in their knowledge of special education issues and law.
5. They feel overwhelmed with the time commitments involved with special education meetings and paperwork.
6. They have a commitment to the implementation and maintenance of quality instructional programs in the building.
7. They must provide leadership and a positive attitude in support of education in the least restrictive environment (p. 128).

Regardless of the size of the administrative team, principals should not delegate the instructional leadership they must practice in support of an environment in which all children can learn (Marsh & Podemski, 1982; Mayer, 1982; Weinstein, 1989). The preparation of school administrators in the area of special education should allow the aspiring principals to explore their personal beliefs, and perhaps unwanted biases, in order to relate those values to the philosophies they bring to their school buildings (Daresh, 1988). Lumsden (1992) found that leadership training is now being conducted with greater emphasis on "thought processes that underlie principals' behavior, rather than on behaviors themselves" (p. 3). It is therefore important for principals to view special education as an educational philosophy to be studied and practiced, not as a mandated event bound by time or place (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1987).

### Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives

Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives - Cognitive Domain (Bloom, 1956) was used to provide the framework for this study, the principles thereof having been used to develop and organize the assessment of knowledge contained in the survey instrument. The Taxonomy was created as a classification of student behaviors representing desired outcomes of the educational process. An individual's behaviors of acting, thinking, or feeling were seen by Bloom as the result of that person's engaging in a learning activity. These behaviors range from simple to complex; described as

hierarchical yet interrelated. They are perceived, then, to serve as a structure for communicating what is known. The premise that guided the arrangement of the assessment statements is that

problems requiring knowledge of specific facts are generally answered correctly more frequently than problems requiring a knowledge of universals and abstractions in a field. Problems requiring knowledge of principles and concepts are correctly answered more frequently than problems requiring both knowledge of the principle and some ability to apply it in new situations (Bloom, 1956, pp.18-19).

Bloom's Taxonomy consists of the domains of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. For the purpose of this study, knowledge, comprehension, and application were the cognitive domains utilized to frame the IDEA assessment instrument. After careful consideration, it was determined that the higher order domains require a different type of study protocol, reaching beyond the scope of the research questions presented in this study. If an elementary principal, however, demonstrated an understanding of special education concepts representative of another, higher category of Bloom's Taxonomy during the interview segment, that was so noted in the analysis of data.

The critical concept in the knowledge domain is to remember. Remembering can occur through either recognition or recall. It can be posed in a different form, and it can range from specific to complex. The processes of relating and judging are involved only to the extent that the person is expected to deal with the problem in ways that differ from its original presentation.



Testing knowledge can occur with relative efficiency, because a small sample of questions or problems can be used to test a large area of knowledge. Although knowledge can be defined universally as the basis of all learning, this category deals only with the remembering of information.

The act of comprehension, according to Bloom, entails the use of objectives, behaviors, or responses that represent an understanding of a literal message contained in a given communication. The message may take a parallel form, but complete understanding is not necessary. Comprehension is viewed through three distinct categories. Translation involves the transformation of communication into another language, other terminology, or an alternative form of communication. Interpretation deals with the reordering of ideas into a new configuration. The final category, extrapolation, means that estimates or predictions can be made based on the understanding of trends and other conditions described in the communication. The essence of comprehension is that one knows what the message contains and can make use of its contents.

Application is the ability to apply information and thus demonstrate the success of the learning experience. The relevant issue is transfer of training. The information must be applied to real life situations and/or tested over a variety of situations. The process of application does not suggest that solutions can be formulated; however, correct usage of the information will occur without prompting.

Analysis is the breakdown of communication into its constituent parts,

and the understanding of the relationships and organization among those parts. Examples of analysis include the ability to distinguish fact from hypothesis, the separation of conclusions from supportive statements, and the identification of relevant, as opposed to extraneous, material. The components of analysis are the elements, the relationships, and the organizational principles. A critique of the connections and interactions of these components enables one to analyze a given message.

Synthesis is the creation of a new product when independent elements are pieced together to form a new pattern or structure. The act of synthesis allows for creative behavior by the learner, within the limits set by a particular circumstance, resources, and/or theoretical frame. In order to benefit from synthesis, one requires freedom to explore other options or to adopt a particular viewpoint that may not conform to the expectations of authority.

The evaluation domain is based on the use of criteria such as effectiveness, accuracy, satisfaction, and economy to make judgments regarding the value of information. Evaluation is not an end product of the cognitive behaviors, but a link to the affective domain, through which liking and enjoying a given topic can take place. It is also a preface to the acquisition of new knowledge. Evaluative judgments can be based on internal criteria such as consistency and logic or on external standards such as comparing and contrasting the work to others in the field. Evaluation can occur through either quantitative or qualitative methods.

Bloom's Taxonomy can affect the use of educational objectives, which

formulate the ways in which learners are expected to be changed by the educational process. Its use can determine the placement of objectives in a learning sequence, facilitate discovery of the conditions under which learning can best take place, and develop appropriate interrelations among objectives. Bloom's creation of the Taxonomy has not only affected the teaching of educational objectives, but the expectation of the learner, as well. Bloom suggests that in fields that undergo rapid change, it should not be assumed that knowledge prove to be "eternally true", but that knowledge is both the basis of methodology in the field and the impetus for critical theory (Bloom, 1956). It is also noted that an increase in knowledge or information equates with a person's acquaintance with reality. Therein lies the premise for this research study.

### Summary

Special education programming is founded upon federal regulations, case law, and civil rights legislation. Two major legislative acts, P. L. 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P. L. 93-112) impact the provision of educational services for students with disabilities. Non-compliance with the mandates set forth by IDEA or the discrimination of individuals with disabilities by school district officials can result in legal action and/or financial sanctions for the local education agency (LEA).

The LEA is responsible for the provision of special education services for

eligible students. Accurate record-keeping, parental involvement, consideration of educational opportunities in the least restrictive environment, and fulfillment of goals established by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) are all components of special education programming. The principal often serves as the administrative representative on the IEP team, which determines the extent of educational services for a student in need of special education.

It is therefore important that school administrators, including site principals, are aware of special education regulations and issues, in order to comply with federal and state mandates regarding special education. The State of Oklahoma requires that one course in the education of exceptional learners be taken in preparation for all educational fields, except those specific to special education. Additional coursework in special education is not required for the certification of school administrators. Whether special education knowledge acquisition takes place in administrative preparation programs, or through professional development opportunities, it is generally agreed that the knowledge level of principals could be improved.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives provided the lens through which the level of knowledge acquisition was viewed in this study. The Taxonomy served as a structure for describing learning behaviors and for communicating what is known. The six cognitive domains include knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The frame of the study was specific to the areas of knowledge, comprehension, and application.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study was to determine the level of knowledge that Oklahoma elementary principals have regarding IDEA policies and, in relation to their knowledge, their perceived ability to make decisions in the area of special education. The research questions that have focused the study are:

1. What level of knowledge do elementary principals possess regarding the provisions of the IDEA (P.L. 101-476)?
2. How do elementary principals perceive their effectiveness in decision-making regarding special education issues?
3. How has information concerning special education been acquired by practicing administrators? To what degree has the information and/or the process of acquisition been perceived as useful and/or effective?

#### Population and Sample

The population for this study included all school administrators who were members of the Oklahoma Association of Elementary School Principals (OAESP). There were 781 individuals in this population, as identified by the 1992-1993 OAESP membership directory. A random sample of 136 members

of the population was selected for this study, representing 17% of the OAESP membership. The choice of this population was made based on the following assumptions.

1. Elementary schools often serve those with a broad spectrum of student characteristics, including those students in need of special education services such as programs for the learning disabled (LD), mentally retarded (MR), seriously emotionally disturbed (SED), and speech-language impaired (SLI). As a result, elementary principals are more likely to be involved with the complete special education process: intervention, referral, assessment, eligibility, placement, and review of placement (Burello & Sage, 1979).

2. Elementary principals usually do not have large support staffs (i.e., assistant principals and/or department heads) and must personally handle many administrative responsibilities, including those involving special education (Mayer, 1982).

3. Elective membership in their state organization would indicate a desire by these principals to remain current on topics of issue and concern. The organization sponsors annual conferences, professional development workshops, and a monthly newsletter through which professional information is made accessible (Joekel, Wendel, & Hoke, 1994).

The intent was to identify the perceptions of elementary principals who, through their professional involvement, have access to a variety of sources through which knowledge acquisition of special education issues can take place. Information regarding the access of these sources was important to the

study of research questions two and three.

Eight elementary principals were selected for follow-up interviews from the survey response record with concern for school district size representation and proximity to the researcher. Four principals were respondents and four principals were non-respondents to the survey. Two interviewees were from metropolitan school districts, two interviewees were from suburban communities with a regional university, two interviewees were from small, non-urban communities, and the final two interviewees served rural schools, which had undergone some form of consolidation within the last three years. One representative of each pair was chosen to form the two groups.

#### Instrument

An instrument was developed specifically for two doctoral studies with the purpose of providing the data necessary to answer the proposed research questions (see Appendix C). Its contents were written by Marilyn Wells, a doctoral program colleague and special education administrator, and this researcher. Ms. Wells was serving as director of a special education cooperative and had 22 years of special education experience as a teacher and administrator. The researcher was serving as the elementary principal of a special services center and had acquired 13 years of experience as a special educator. The original content of the survey instrument was created from research in the literature and the individuals' expertise in the area of special education.

The 40 true-false statements in the knowledge assessment portion of the survey were taken from the Oklahoma Policies and Procedures for Special Education manual (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993), in which the provisions of IDEA are translated into guidelines for use by Oklahoma school systems. Using Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives (Bloom, 1956), the 40 items were structured according to the criteria of the knowledge, comprehension, and application domains. The first 20 statements consist of basic knowledge components of IDEA. The next 20 items require a deeper understanding of the IDEA provisions and how the requirements may be applied to school practice. A response recording of true or false was selected, because the intent was to determine whether that information was readily known, or not. It was also chosen with the assumption that an assessment of special education knowledge may be an uncomfortable experience for elementary principals and ease in completion of the task might enhance the response rate. The instrument contained several items that are "mirrored," in that a statement is rephrased and the opposite response is required for the paired item. This provided a cross-check method for some of the basic knowledge items, to make guessing and/or random response more evident. Each correct item was worth 2.5 points, with a score of 100 possible.

The narrative and demographic sections of the survey were developed by the researcher for the collection of data specific to the research questions posed for this study. The second section consists of five questions regarding principals' perceptions of their effectiveness in handling special education



programming and issues, as well as the effectiveness of their preparation in this area. While a "yes" or "no" response was requested, and scored for correlation purposes, these items have open-ended secondary questions to enable subjects to develop their responses in further detail. The purpose of this section was two-fold: the respondent was given an opportunity to provide qualitative information that could not easily be provided within the instrument itself, and evidence of Bloom's Taxonomy levels beyond knowledge and comprehension may be evident within the narrative data thus provided. The final section of the survey instrument was used to collect demographic information from the respondents regarding the categories of professional experience, educational level, and school site data (including the special education programs served).

Once the information for the assessment was selected from the Oklahoma Policies and Procedures manual and restated for purposes of the true-false format, a group of special education experts was selected to review the statements for accuracy. These individuals included the Executive Director for Special Education, State Department of Education; three special education directors; a representative from Pro-Oklahoma, a child advocacy center; five special education teachers; and two parents of special education students. The statements were revised based on their input. The assessment was then piloted by a group of 10 elementary principals in one school district, who were chosen based on their tenure in administration and their experience with a variety of special education programs. These principals were all members of OAESP, but were excluded from the population when the sample was selected.

After completing the instrument, they provided a critique of its clarity and contents. A final revision was then made.

### Data Collection

The proposal for this study was submitted for review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Oklahoma State University. Data collection efforts began following IRB approval of the study (see attachment at the conclusion of this document).

Data collection was performed as a two-tiered process, involving both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A packet of materials was mailed to each subject identified in the random sample. The information contained in the packet included an introductory letter explaining the purpose of the study and procedure (Appendix D); the instrument; a plain, white return envelope for the instrument; and a self-addressed manila envelope for return to the researcher. Anonymity was assured to participants who followed the directions given in the cover letter. The instrument and the white instrument return envelope contained no identifying marks. Once the self-addressed stamped manila envelope was received and opened by the researcher, the two envelopes were separated. The self-addressed envelope was used for accounting purposes only.

A second mailing to non-respondents included a reminder letter (see Appendix D) and a second copy of the survey instrument, with the same envelope return procedure stated above. The third mailing consisted of a

personalized request for participation (see Appendix D), with a third copy of the survey instrument and envelopes for return.

Upon receipt of the surveys, follow-up interviews were scheduled with the eight principals selected for that activity during the week of April 2 through April 8, 1994. Two interviews were held in the principals' homes, five interviews were conducted in the principals' school office, and one interview was held by telephone due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints. This qualitative dimension of the study was intended to provide additional data regarding the interviewees' perceptions of an adequate knowledge base for administrators regarding special education, administrative effectiveness, and current and future training needs in regard to special education.

### Data Analysis

The knowledge assessment portion of the survey instrument was scored based on the number of correct responses and analyzed through the computation of percentage distributions and measures of central tendency. The second portion provided both a quantitative ranking of training and perceived effectiveness that was correlated to the score received on the knowledge test and narrative data that were compiled to report the source(s) of principals' knowledge regarding special education and perceived quality of the administrative training programs. The demographic data were used to characterize the sample and for reporting the score distribution among the various demographic categories. The interviews were recorded and

transcribed. Verbatim data from the interviews were analyzed through pattern matching, in which patterns and/or regularities that recurred formed units of information that provided the feedback necessary to answer the proposed research questions (Yin, 1989; Merriam, 1988). The emergent themes and categories were also compared for similarities or differences found in the narrative responses previously obtained from the survey instrument.

### Summary

A random sample of 136 elementary principals, who held membership in the Oklahoma Association of Elementary School Principals during the 1992-93 school year, was selected for participation in this study. The principals were sent a survey instrument which contained an IDEA knowledge assessment, a narrative section concerning the principals' perceptions of their preparation in the area of special education, and a section regarding demographic information on the respondent. After data were collected from the completed survey packets, follow-up interviews were conducted with selected principals. The knowledge assessment was scored and analyzed through the computation of percentage distributions and measures of central tendency. The narrative and interview data were compared in order to describe the similarities and differences among the respondents' perceptions and also to identify themes and categories that emerged through the data collection process. A comprehensive description of the study findings is contained in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The intent of this study was to determine the level of knowledge that Oklahoma elementary principals have regarding special education and their perceived competency level in making special education decisions. A 40-item assessment instrument was completed by 82 elementary principals in order to measure the level of knowledge they possess regarding the provisions of IDEA, (P.L. 101-476). Narrative responses from most of the respondents and follow-up interviews with eight selected principals were used to gather information on how elementary principals have acquired their knowledge, their perception of that acquisition process, and how effective they perceive themselves to be in special education decision-making.

This chapter contains a summary and analysis of the survey and interview data. The first and second sections of this chapter are used to detail the demographic information gathered, specifically the respondent characteristics and school site descriptions. In the third section are reported the data regarding levels of special education knowledge demonstrated by the study participants. The perceptions of principal preparation programs and experience in the area of special education, as reported in the narrative responses, are summarized in the fourth segment. The final section is used to

detail the themes developed from the interview data.

### Characteristics of Respondents

As described in Chapter III, a survey instrument was distributed to a random sample of 136 of the 781 elementary principals who held membership in the Oklahoma Association of Elementary School Principals (OAESP) during the 1992-1993 school year. Of the 136 principals selected, it was later determined that two principals had retired, one principal was deceased, and 11 principals could not be located in either the 1993-1994 OAESP directory or in the 1993-1994 State Department of Education Administrators Directory. It could not be determined whether the 11 "missing" principals were currently employed in different capacities, different professions, or if they had left the state. Of the remaining 122 elementary principals, 82 returned completed surveys, for a response rate of 67%.

The principals were asked to provide demographic data regarding their years of experience in administration and educational level achieved. Two completed surveys were returned without any demographic information given. As shown in Table I, the vast majority of respondents (79%) indicated that their administrative experience extended beyond 10 years. Neither the State Department of Education nor OAESP headquarters keep statistics on the average number of years experience or the educational level of principals, therefore a comparison to such figures for the population could not be made.

Table I

Number and Percent of Respondent Principals.  
by Years of Administrative Experience

<u>Number of Years</u>	<u>Respondents</u>	
	Number	Percentage
1-3	2	3
3-5	6	7
5-10	9	11
10 or more	<u>63</u>	<u>79</u>
Totals	80	100

Standard certification for elementary principals in the State of Oklahoma requires a master's degree, plus an additional 16 postgraduate credit hours (see Appendix B). Data in Table II indicate that all of the respondents had earned at least a masters degree, with most (90%) having completed additional course hours. Five principals indicated that they had earned doctorates. While the respondents reported the completion of numerous graduate courses, it is perhaps interesting to note that only 13 principals had completed more than the one required course in special education (that focusing on psychology of and/or behavioral characteristics of the exceptional child). Of those 13 respondents, 7 stated in the narrative section that they had completed degrees in special education.

Table II

Number of Respondent Principals,  
by Education Level

<u>Level of Education</u>	<u>Respondents</u>	
	Number	Percentage
Master's Degree	8	10
Hours beyond the Master's	67	84
Ph.D./ Ed.D.	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
Totals	80	100

School Composition

The respondents were asked to describe their school sites by providing data regarding the number of students, the grades served, and the number of special education programs on-site. The student population figures were fairly uniform across categories, with 15 schools serving less than 200 students, 22 schools with 201-350 students, 24 schools with 351-500 students, and 19 schools which were serving more than 500 students. The most common grade level configuration for an elementary school has generally been described as kindergarten through sixth grade. As the data in Table III show, less than one third of the respondents' schools reflected that pattern, while just over one third



of the schools fell into the "other" category which represented a myriad of grade level configurations, from single-grade schools to those with kindergarten through eighth grade.

Table III

Number of Respondent Principals,  
by Grade Levels Served

<u>Grade Levels Served</u>	<u>Respondents</u>	
	Number	Percentage
Preschool- 6th	7	9
Kindergarten-6th	25	31
Kindergarten-5th	20	25
Other	<u>28</u>	<u>35</u>
Totals	80	100

Table IV is used to display the number of special education programs offered at the principals' schools. Because a school site may have had more than one type of program, there were 212 programs listed by the respondents among nine different special education categories. The mean number of programs served was 2.65. Classes for students with learning disabilities and

for those classified as educable mentally handicapped (sometimes referred to as mentally retarded) were the most common programs available. The number of classes for students who were speech-language impaired may appear low, but it was not listed as a classroom offering, due to its predominance as an itinerant service. Some respondents listed speech-language therapy under the "other" category.

Table IV

Number and Type of Special Education Programs Provided  
at Respondent Principals' School Sites

<u>Special Education Program</u>	<u>Respondents</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Learning Disabilities	74	35
Educable Mentally Handicapped	61	29
Trainable Mentally Handicapped	29	14
Seriously Emotionally Disturbed	18	8
Hearing Impaired	10	5
Multihandicapped	10	5
Speech-Language Impaired	8	4
Orthopedically Impaired	<u>2</u>	<u>&lt;1</u>
Totals	212	100

In summary, the typical respondent had 10 or more years of experience in the principalship, and had earned a masters degree plus additional graduate coursework. The principals' school sites varied in size of student population and grade configuration, but most often housed two or three special education programs. These classes were predominantly serving children categorized as learning disabled or mentally retarded.

### Level of Special Education Knowledge

The knowledge assessment portion of the survey consisted of a 40-item instrument designed specifically for this study. As noted in Chapter III, the true and false statements were taken directly from the Oklahoma Policies and Procedures Manual for Special Education (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1991, 1993) and were structured according to the knowledge, comprehension, and application criteria set forth by Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives (Bloom, 1956). The first 20 items were used to test basic knowledge concepts of IDEA. The second 20 statements require an understanding of how those concepts apply to special education programming. The instrument was scored on the basis of 2.5 points per correct item and the total measure was categorized in standard grading terms: 90-100 was considered to be excellent; 80-89 was good; 70-79 was average; 60-69 was poor; and below 60 was failing.

Table V presents the descriptive distribution of scores on the knowledge assessment that were received by the 82 respondents. No one received a

Table V  
 Descriptive Distribution of Respondents' Scores  
 on IDEA knowledge assessment

Range of Scores	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
90.0 - 99.9	16	20
80.0 - 89.9	40	49
70.0 - 79.9	22	27
60.0 - 69.9	3	4
50.0 - 59.9	0	0
40.0 - 49.9	0	0
30.0 - 39.9	<u>1</u>	<u>&lt;1</u>
Totals	82	100
N	82.0	
Minimum	37.5	
Maximum	97.5	
Range	60.0	
Mean	81.2	
Variance	79.2	
Standard Deviation	8.9	

perfect score. The high and low scores recorded were 97.5% and 37.5%, respectively. The survey with the low score appeared to have been answered selectively (only certain items were marked). A comment was noted on the survey that the respondent was unfamiliar with special education, as the task was delegated to other personnel. Since the purpose of this assessment was to determine the principal's knowledge level according to Bloom's Taxonomy, it was determined that this score was a valid measure of that individual's knowledge of special education, and the score was therefore included in the statistical analysis. The mean score of the distribution is 81.8. The exclusion of the lowest score would adjust the mean to 82.35, for a difference of 0.55.

An item analysis was conducted in order to compare the first set of 20 basic knowledge statements to the second set of 20 comprehension and application statements, structured by those domains of Bloom's Taxonomy. Table VI shows that 198 incorrect responses were scored in items 1-20, while Table VII shows 399 incorrect responses were recorded for items 21-40. Therefore, principals were twice as likely to incorrectly answer the comprehension and application items, as they were to answer the basic knowledge items. Table VI also indicates the six paired items included in the basic knowledge section which were "mirrored" contextually. The paired item number is listed in parentheses. There were no significant differences in the number of incorrect responses for these items, except for items 1 and 17, and items 5 and 20. Item 1 is the true definition of least restrictive environment (LRE), while item 17 is more representative of the terminology for

Table VI

Item Analysis of Basic Knowledge Statements

<u>Item</u>	<u>Item Content</u>	<u>Number of Incorrect Responses</u>
1 (17)	Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	7
2	Parental consent	2
3	Independent educational evaluation	5
4 (11)	Individualized Education Program (IEP)	1
5 (20)	Due process	60
6	FERPA	0
7	Due process	27
8 (13)	Reevaluation	7
9 (18)	FERPA	5
10 (12)	Prior written notice to parents	2
11 (4)	IEP	3
12 (10)	Prior written notice to parents	2
13 (8)	Reevaluation	6
14	Independent educational evaluation	29
15	Assessment criteria	5
16	Parent rights in special education	2
17 (1)	LRE	17
18	FERPA	8
19	Assessment criteria	0
20 (5)	Due process	<u>10</u>
Total		198

Table VII

Item Analysis of Comprehension and Analysis Statements

<u>Item</u>	<u>Item Content</u>	<u>Number of Incorrect Responses</u>
21	IEP	1
22	Related services	3
23	IEP	3
24	IEP/Related services	40
25	Transition services	9
26	Surrogate parents	16
27	LRE	16
28	FERPA	0
29	Length of school day	36
30	FERPA	39
31	IEP	9
32	Related services	22
33	Discipline of disabled students	32
34	Eligibility/Related services	45
35	LRE	17
36	Comprehensive assessment	2
37	Discipline of disabled students	14
38	Extended school year program	56
39	Section 504 eligibility	26
40	"Stay put" provision	<u>13</u>
Total		399

mainstreaming or inclusion. As noted in Chapter II, the concepts are not synonymous. Items 5 and 20 pertain to due process hearings and the appointed hearing officer. Item 20 is correct in that the state appoints a qualified hearing officer, not the school district, as indicated in item 5.

The items with the least number of incorrect answers (5 or fewer) dealt with subjects of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Individualized Education Program (IEP), and parental rights in special education. The items with the greatest number of incorrect responses (more than 20), and which occurred more than once, were issues of due process, related services, and the discipline of disabled students. In addition, statements regarding the length of the school day for students in special education, eligibility for the extended school year program, and eligibility under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act were answered incorrectly by more than 25 of the respondents. The items that produced extreme "opposite" results were items 5 and 20 (60 and 10 incorrect responses respectively) which were mentioned previously, and items 3 and 14 (5 and 29 incorrect responses respectively), in which different issues regarding the parents' right to an independent educational evaluation were stated. Appendix E details the complete set of correct answers for the IDEA knowledge assessment.

Using chi-square statistical procedures, a comparison of the assessment scores with the demographic data was conducted. There were no significant correlations between such variables. Appendix F contains the complete



frequency distribution tables for scores and demographic information.

## Perceptions of Preparation and Experience

### in the Area of Special Education

The second part of the survey instrument listed five questions, of which four included a request for both a definitive (Yes-No) and a narrative response. The fifth question was designed for a narrative response only. In Question One respondents were asked what coursework, if any, they had taken in the area of special education. The second question was used to determine whether experience had affected the principals' knowledge of special education more than had formal education. Question Three asked if the respondents perceived themselves to be prepared to make a variety of decisions in the area of special education. The fourth question was used to request the respondents' opinions on whether additional special education coursework should be required for aspiring administrators. Finally, Question Five asked for the respondent to list the type(s) of coursework that would benefit principals in the area of special education. Of the 82 total respondents, 81 answered Questions One and Two, 79 responded to Question Three, and 78 answered Questions Four and Five.

Table VIII contains the frequency distribution of responses to Questions One and Four, which were concerned with coursework in the area of special education. Many principals also provided narrative information in support of their affirmative or negative responses. Only 13 of the 47 affirmative respondents regarding the Question One indicated that they had taken

additional special education classes beyond the "Psychology of Exceptional Children" course required for teacher certification in the State of Oklahoma. Of those 13, 7 noted that they had earned degrees and/or teacher certification in an area of special education. Therefore only 6 of the 81 principals chose to take an additional course in special education, beyond that required for certification or a degree program. In contrast to that reported choice, over three-fourths of the respondents supported the idea of requiring additional coursework in the area of special education, with a majority of the narrative responses to Question Four indicating the need for a course in special education law.

Table VIII

Principals' Responses to Questions Regarding  
Coursework in Special Education

<u>Survey Item</u>	<u>Responses</u>			
	<u>Yes</u>		<u>No</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Question One: Completed a course in special education	47	58%	34	42%
Question Four: Special education courses should be required for certification	59	76%	19	24%

Table IX is used to display the frequency distribution for Questions Two and Three, which were focused on the respondents' perceptions of their preparation for making decisions regarding special education issues. Almost all of the respondents indicated that experience had contributed more to their knowledge of special education than had formal education. A clear majority of the principals also perceived themselves as prepared to make decisions regarding special education.

Table IX

Principals' Perceptions of Knowledge Acquisition and Preparation  
for Special Education Decision-Making

<u>Survey Item</u>	<u>Responses</u>			
	<u>Yes</u>		<u>No</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Question Two: Attributes knowledge more to experience than formal education	75	93%	6	7%
Question Three: Feels prepared to make special education decisions	63	80%	16	20%

Table X is used to compare the mean scores on the IDEA knowledge assessment with the number of special education courses completed by the respondents, as denoted in Question One. Eighty-one of the 82 respondents answered this question.

Table X  
Mean Scores of Respondents, By Amount of  
Special Education Coursework Completed

<u>Number of Courses</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Respondents</u>	
		<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
None	80.7	34	42
One	80.1	34	42
Two or More	<u>83.1</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>16</u>
Total	81.8	81	100

Two narrative comments made by respondents on Question One dealt more with the content of the course, rather than the title. The comments were "the Psychology of Exceptional Child course was not sufficient preparation for working with special education," and "I have never met that student, teacher, or situation presented in the three-hour required course." One respondent simply

stated, "I took a crash course in special ed when I got my first principalship." The data used to construct Table X show that there was no notable difference between the mean scores on the knowledge assessment for those respondents having one course and for those having no coursework. However, respondents who had taken more than one course in special education had a mean score that was higher than those of the other groups.

An overwhelming number of the principals attributed their knowledge of special education more to experience than to formal education as shown in Table XI. However, the mean score of those principals was notably lower (although not significantly different) by 3.4 points, than the mean score of the principals crediting formal education for their knowledge of that subject.

Table XI

Mean Scores of Respondents, by Knowledge Acquisition through Experience rather than Formal Education

<u>Respondents' Perception</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Respondents</u>	
		<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Experience	81.6	75	93
Formal Education	<u>85.0</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
Total	81.8	81	100

A review of the narrative statements for Question Two revealed that elementary principals rely on these elements to enhance their experiential learning of special education: "good teachers," "professional literature and inservices," "working with a variety of special education programs," and "active (IEP) team membership." One respondent underscored the statement "Experience is the best teacher!" and another respondent simply stated that, "OJT [on the job training] is more effective than any coursework I have taken."

Most respondents indicated that they perceived themselves as being prepared to make decisions regarding special education programming. As shown in Table XII, that confidence is supported by their test scores, as principals who perceived themselves to be prepared for special education decision-making had a mean score nearly five points higher than that of principals who did not perceive themselves as being prepared.

Table XII

Mean Scores of Respondents, By Perceived Level of Preparation  
for Special Education Decision-Making

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<u>Respondents' Perception</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Respondents</u>	
		<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Prepared	83.1	73	92
Not Prepared	<u>78.1</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>
Total	81.8	79	100

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The purpose of the related narrative question was to determine the respondents' perceived strengths and weaknesses in this area. The most common strengths cited were "I rely on special education resources," "common sense," "I empower those who know and work with special ed kids," and "my desire and concern to do what is right for students." One principal wrote that "developing a plan of improvement for a special education teacher forced me to research and update needed information." The responses given as weaknesses primarily dealt with the changes that occur in special education policies and procedures. One principal stated that, "Staying current, when there seem to be annual changes means I can never catch up." Other comments on weaknesses included "I need to learn the new changes," "the discipline of behavior disordered students," the diagnosis process," and "what recommendations to make when they don't qualify for services."

Responses to Questions Four and Five, which asked for the respondents' perception of need for additional special education coursework and topics of specific concern in that area, represented a dichotomy of opinions. A clear majority (76%) of principals favored additional coursework requirements in the area of special education for administrative certification. The narrative responses, however, reflected the concern that a course would not provide enough knowledge in relation to the rapid changes that seem to occur in the area of special education. Statements included "class time will never be more valuable than OJT [on the job training]," "interest and dedication are more important than credits," "a class would be outdated with the frequent changes,"

and "we couldn't possibly learn all we needed to know."

School law, procedures for discipline of special students, categorization and placement issues, and policy and procedure up-dates were the most common needs cited by the respondents in Question Five. A few comments contained such phrases as "please help!" and "anything special ed!" One principal suggested that a special education inservice activity be required annually for administrators, while another wrote, "I'm overloaded now with all I'm supposed to know." Another principal simply stated that "a course should be offered entitled 'everything you need to know about special education, but don't know what to ask!'"

#### Interviews with Principals

Follow-up interviews were conducted with eight elementary principals who were members of the original sample. In order to compare and contrast those principals who participated in the study to those principals who did not return the survey instrument, four interviewees were respondents and four were non-respondents. The individuals were selectively chosen from the response record, with concern for representation of district setting and proximity to the researcher. Two interviewees were from metropolitan school districts, two interviewees were from moderately-sized, regional university communities, two interviewees were from small, non-urban communities, and finally, two interviewees administered rural schools that had undergone some form of consolidation within the last three years. One representative from each pair



was chosen to represent the respondent and non-respondent groups. Three of the eight interviewees had more than 10 years of experience as a building principal, while three principals had over 20 years of experience. Two of the non-respondents had less than five years of administrative experience. The four principals who completed the survey had certification in elementary or secondary education only, while two of the non-respondents had earned a masters degree in special education.

The interview questions were developed with the intent of confirming and perhaps expanding upon, the themes and findings identified through the narrative responses given in Part Two of the survey instrument. These questions were used as guidelines only, in order to stimulate dialogue regarding the principal's professional experiences in the area of special education. The interview questions were as follows.

Talk to me about your interactions and/or experiences with special education.

What are your perceptions about your own knowledge of special education?

Where do you believe that preparation of principals in the area of special education should take place?

Who do you think should be responsible for a principal's knowledge acquisition of special education issues and law?

Who, or what agency, has provided the most support in facilitating your knowledge acquisition of the special education process?

What do you consider to be your strengths and/or weaknesses in special education decision-making regarding students, programs, and/or teachers?

There was one additional theme that was pursued after the first interview. Due to the perceived disagreement between what is more important, additional coursework or reliance on experience, this question was posed to the interviewees: "What will make the difference for a new administrator dealing with special education for the first time?"

The resultant responses were categorized according to similarities, differences, and emerging themes associated with the study's research questions. The interview synopsis is therefore written in accordance with these themes: the preparation of elementary principals in the area of special education; support systems available to elementary principals with regard to special education; the perceived comfort level of elementary principals in special education decision-making; and recommendations for new principals with regard to special education. A brief summary of each theme, with selected interview quotes follow.

#### Preparation of Elementary Principals in the Area of Special Education

The focus of this topic was on the manner in which elementary principals obtained a knowledge base regarding special education issues and approximately when that preparation occurred. As noted in the narrative summary of Part Two of the survey instrument, 84% of the elementary principals had taken no more than one course in special education while 76% had reported that additional coursework in that field would be beneficial.

The majority of interviewees (6 of 8) reported that their experiences and

interactions as a building principal had provided them the opportunity to learn about special education. Every interviewee gave credit to special education teachers for helping them with their learning process. This occurred through sitting in on IEP team meetings, conferencing with the special educator on student needs and behavior, and observing in special education classrooms. Only two of the non-respondents credited formal education as the source of their preparation in special education, while one of the respondents mentioned the benefit of taking additional special education coursework after serving as an administrator for over five years. There was no agreement among the interviewees on the entity that should assume responsibility for administrative preparation in the area of special education. Most of the principals indicated that they received their information from site and/or district special education "experts."

In the early years of 94-142, grant money was available for teachers and principals to learn more about special education. I returned to school one summer for six or eight hours.

I worked into special education through osmosis.

In my first principalship, I started off with two SED (seriously emotionally disturbed) classes, and I didn't know ED kids existed. After my first encounter with violent students, I called the administration building and said, "somebody better tell me about ED kids!". The person I called didn't answer the question, but the teachers helped tremendously.

I learned primarily through experience and sitting in on IEP team meetings.

The school of hard knocks is the best teacher.

I learned through OJT and an affinity for underdog kids.

The State Department has to be responsible for training, because they are the official agency, especially for rural schools. The RESC (Regional Education Service Center) helps us alot.

The special services department should train new principals. But they must offer, I don't think new people will call them on their own.

The district sets expectations and then should follow through. It is a shared effort.

Now 504 has impacted the district, but there's no one around to teach that...who will be responsible?

I don't know who should be responsible for special education training. The universities are often one-step behind and the SDE is not often trusted.

#### Support Systems Available to the Elementary Principal in Dealing with Special Education Issues

The responses to Questions Two and Three of the narrative section of the instrument formed a theme that was further developed through the interviews, regarding the elementary principals' perceived support systems in handling special education situations and issues. While 80% of the survey respondents indicated that they were prepared to make special education decisions, their comments generally denoted individuals or groups that provided support for that role. Four of the eight interviewees delegate some of the responsibilities for special education to their site counselor. One of the four was a respondent, while three were non-respondents. The other four rely on the school special education staff, or the special education director to support them at the site level. All but one of the interviewees mentioned that active IEP team membership had contributed to, and kept current, their knowledge and

confidence in special education decision-making. That particular principal, a non-respondent, delegated every aspect of the special education program to the school counselor. She stated, "I delegate all but a parental problem to my staff, because I trust them completely." Most of the respondents spoke of their appreciation for the expertise shared by the special education staff members.

Teachers are a good support base and the Special Education Director is also a strong support for me; we talk often.

I have very positive feelings because of the people I work with. The Special Education Director is a top-notch person.

My counselor was a former special education teacher. He is very competent and knowledgeable.

I appreciate the support I get from the RESC and the superintendent. They work very well with us.

Perception of Comfort Level by the Elementary Principal  
in the Area of Special Education

Part Two of the survey instrument contained a narrative question regarding the principals' perceived strengths and/or weaknesses in dealing with special education issues. This question was again used in the interview protocol, in order to determine specific strengths and weaknesses that may affect principals' levels of comfort in administering special education programs at the site level. All of the interviewees mentioned that their comfort level was affected by the constant changes in special education procedures. They do not perceive that the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) understands the practical aspect of special education, and three principals noted that the OSDE's emphasis on paperwork and bureaucracy negatively

impacted attitudes toward special education.

One interviewee mentioned that he happened to be the district special education director, even though he had no specific training to perform the job. He credited good communication and support from the district as the key to his comfort level. Three other principals also noted that the positive attitude of the district affected their personal perspective. All of the interviewees perceived that the special education program was handled effectively and efficiently in their school district.

Forms are the SDE's comfort zone. It's ridiculous how they change constantly.

The SDE is concerned with paperwork, not kids. I can't keep up! By the time I learn it, they change it.

My weakness is now dealing with new forms, new procedures, and 504.

My strength is my staff.

My strength is my support to the teachers.

I am comfortable because it is a group effort. I don't have to know everything.

I am comfortable with what I know. We don't have a special education director, so we take care of everything in the building. I am uncomfortable with setting up schedules that please everyone, and with conflicts among personnel. I rely on the philosophy, "this too shall pass."

### Recommendations for New Principals with

#### Regard to Special Education

As noted earlier, this theme emerged during the first interview. In spite of the variance among the principals on the ideal site and setting of knowledge

acquisition, the majority mentioned that remaining current on special education issues was important to them. All but one principal, a non-respondent, were motivated to assume responsibility in that area because special education decisions involve their students. Four of the eight principals specified that leadership qualities and personal philosophy have a greater effect on the administration of special education programs than any other factor.

The principal has too many other jobs. Let the counselor and special education director handle special ed.

Anything you can get before you're ultimately responsible would be beneficial. Especially law.

Who becomes a principal makes the difference. They will want service for all students, they will have an open mind, and they will seek out what they don't already know.

A good principal is not made through extra coursework. You need district support and high expectations.

You must have it "inside" to make it successful. Compassion in your nature outweighs the teachings and support provided by others.

Leadership is demonstrated through the type of person you are.

### Synthesis of Interview Information

These interviews with the eight elementary principals provided several pieces of important information. Through an analysis of the interview text, it was noted that there were no major differences between the survey respondents and non-respondents. While the circumstances were unique to each individual, their perceptions and concerns were far more similar than different, regardless of school size, community, or district special education leadership. Only one of

the eight principals delegated virtually every special education task to another staff member. While the categories and themes that emerged in the narrative section guided the development of the interview questions and the written responses were often paralleled through the interview text.

### Summary

Data for this study were gathered from responses to a survey instrument and follow-up interviews. The typical survey respondent had 10 or more years of administrative experience, had earned a masters degree plus additional graduate coursework, and administered an elementary school site which housed two or three special education programs.

The mean score for the IDEA knowledge assessment was 81.8. The total scores ranged from 37.5 to 97.5, out of a possible 100. Forty of the 82 respondents scored in the 80-89.9 range. Respondents were twice as likely to miss assessment items requiring a comprehension or application of the stated topic, as compared to items testing basic knowledge of IDEA provisions.

Five survey questions were designed to ascertain the principals' perceptions of their knowledge acquisition and preparation for decision-making of special education issues. While 58% of the respondents had taken at least one course in special education, 76% indicated the need for additional coursework in that area. Almost all of principals attributed their knowledge of special education more to experience than formal education. A clear majority also perceived themselves as prepared to make special education decisions,



but many respondents listed areas of concern in which they would like to continue their professional development.

Interviews were conducted with eight elementary principals, four of whom had responded to the survey, and four had not. The themes developed from the interview text included the preparation of elementary principals in the area of special education, support systems available to elementary principals with regard to special education, the perceived comfort level of elementary principals in special education decision-making, and recommendations for the new principal with regard to special education. No obvious differences were noted between the respondents and the non-respondents, and only one of the eight interviewees had minimal interaction with the site special education programs. Responses given through the narrative section of the survey instrument and interview text reflected similar themes and common concerns associated with the principalship and special education issues.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTARY

This chapter presents an interpretation of the findings of this research study. A summary of the analysis of data begins the chapter, followed by the conclusions drawn from the reported information. The third section details recommendations for practice and further study. Final remarks and observations of the researcher are included in the commentary.

#### Summary

The investigative intent of this study was to determine the level of knowledge accrued by Oklahoma elementary principals regarding the policies and procedures of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (P. L. 101-476; also known as IDEA) and, in relation to that knowledge, their perceptions of their ability to make decisions regarding special education issues. Factors contributing to their current knowledge base were identified by the respondents, in order to construct recommendations for administrative preparation programs and/or continuing education opportunities in the area of special education.

Research questions that focused this study were the following.

1. What level of knowledge do elementary principals possess regarding the provisions of IDEA (P.L. 101-476)?
2. How do elementary principals perceive their effectiveness in decision-making regarding special education issues?
3. How has information concerning special education been acquired by practicing administrators? To what degree has the information and/or the process of acquisition been perceived as useful and/or effective?

Data were derived from two primary sources: a three-part survey instrument and selected interviews. The assessment instrument was developed specifically for this study, focusing on the various policies and procedures of IDEA as identified for implementation in the Oklahoma Policies and Procedures for Special Education (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1991,1993). The instrument was included in a survey packet, which also contained narrative questions regarding preparation and perceived effectiveness of elementary principals in the area of special education and requests for demographic information. The survey was mailed to a random sample of 122 elementary principals, 17% of the population of administrators who held membership in the Oklahoma Association of Elementary School Principals (OAESP). Eighty-two completed surveys were returned for a response rate of 67%. Based on the demographic data provided, the typical respondent had 10 or more years of experience as an administrator, held a master's degree with additional post-graduate hours, and supervised two or three special education programs at the

school site.

From the response record, eight elementary principals were selected for follow-up interviews. Four of these principals were respondents, and four were non-respondents. The interviews were conducted at each principal's school or home, with the exception of one which was conducted over the telephone due to scheduling conflicts.

Through an analysis of data, it was determined that the mean score on the knowledge assessment was 81.8 (out of a possible 100), with one high score of 97.5 and one low score of 37.5. Of the 82 respondents, 40 obtained scores from 80 to 87.5, representing 49% of the sample. The assessment items were structured according to the first three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives (Bloom, 1956). The first 20 items measured basic knowledge concepts, while items 21 through 40 measured comprehension and application concepts. The respondents collectively had 198 incorrect answers in the first half of the assessment, and 399 incorrect answers in the second half.

When asked for their perceptions regarding their preparation and decision-making ability in the area of special education, 58% of the principals reported that they had taken at least one course in special education; however 93% felt that experience had contributed more to their current knowledge of special education issues than had formal education. A clear majority, 80% of the respondents, indicated a perception that they were prepared to make special education decisions at their schools. The respondents supported, by a margin of three to one, the provision of additional special education coursework

within the administrative preparation program, especially in the areas of law, policy, and procedures.

Those respondents who had taken one or more courses in special education scored approximately two points higher on the knowledge assessment than did those respondents who had never taken such a course. The principals who attributed their current knowledge of special education to experience scored 3.4 points lower than did those principals who credited formal education for that knowledge. Principals who perceive themselves as prepared to make special education decisions scored notably higher (by 5 points) than did principals who did not feel prepared. There was no obvious difference in the scores of those respondents who favored the requirement of additional coursework and those who did not.

The narrative responses and interview text established several themes, through which contributing factors to special education knowledge acquisition could be identified. While coursework was acknowledged as beneficial to any preparation program, the respondents perceived that the rapid changes in special education policy limited the scope of a course's effectiveness. Due perhaps to their average length of tenure (10 or more years in administration), the respondents attributed their knowledge of special education to experience and credited several different sources of support, which included special education teachers, special education directors, district-level administration, and the Regional Education Service Center staff. Most principals were comfortable with their knowledge levels and considered themselves to be

capable of making decisions regarding special education. They again cited their sources of support as contributors to that perception of comfort. When asked what will make the difference for a new administrator handling special education issues, the interviewees suggested utilizing the people who have expertise in the area; and yet the belief was also clear that quality leadership was innate, regardless of the skills required or gained.

### Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the information gathered in this study.

1. Elementary principals are knowledgeable regarding the policies and procedures of IDEA, demonstrating a better grasp of basic knowledge, as defined by Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Objectives (Bloom, 1956), than of concepts requiring comprehension and/or application of the law regarding school practice.

2. A more in-depth knowledge of special education, characterized by the higher levels within Bloom's Taxonomy of synthesis, analysis, and evaluation, is not perceived as essential by the elementary principals, due to their reliance on various special education support systems.

3. Experience is perceived to facilitate special education knowledge acquisition more than formal education.

4. Elementary principals feel capable of making decisions regarding special education, as long as they have an adequate support system and they

can justify their decisions based on the best interests of the students. However, they are frustrated by the seemingly constant change in special education regulations.

5. The addition of special education course requirements for aspiring principals would initially be beneficial, but the principals' effectiveness over time will be influenced more by their involvement in special education at their school sites, their pursuit of continuing education opportunities, and their own styles of administrative leadership.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on information derived from this study. The first six recommendations deal with the acquisition of knowledge in preservice and/or inservice by elementary principals and reflect the finding that principals acquire such knowledge both through formal education and on the job training. The final four recommendations are made to encourage and guide future research on this topic.

1. Colleges and universities offering certification programs for school administrators should make every attempt to offer elective coursework focusing on the administration of special education programs. In addition, faculty teaching public school law courses should allocate more instructional time for the teaching of special education law, policy, and procedure.

2. Colleges and universities should provide opportunities for aspiring principals to perform internships in the public schools, through which the

activities and knowledge related to the administration of special education programs could be observed and acquired or enhanced.

3. The Oklahoma State Department of Education, in association with the various professional administrators organizations such as The Oklahoma Association of Elementary School Principals (OAESP), The Oklahoma Association of Secondary School Principals (OASSP), and The Oklahoma Association of School Administrators (OASA), should offer annual special education up-date sessions via state conferences and/or regional meetings. These meetings should be prepared specifically for administrators and cover not only legal up-dates, but information on innovations in instructional programming.

4. Local school district special education directors often plan annual policy and procedures meetings for special education teachers. An abbreviated version of this session should be planned for administrators only to discuss interpretation of federal and state policy at the local level. District expectations and guidelines must be clearly specified at this time. Private school administrators and cooperative agency directors should also be included in these meetings.

5. A list of available special education resource persons should be developed at both the state and local levels for elementary principals. While such information is provided as a requirement to parents through the special education parental rights statement, school administrators should not have to rely on "trial and error" in attempting to contact someone with expertise, in order



to receive complete and correct answers. A resource base would facilitate the creation of a support system for a new principal, who may not know who to call.

6. Principals who have experience with a variety of special education programs and who feel confident in the supervision of such programs should offer or be encouraged to offer their skills as mentors to beginning principals. Their perceptions will be relatively different from, but perhaps more realistic than, those of special education experts whose perspectives may be limited to that arena.

7. This research study should be replicated to determine the knowledge levels and perceived needs of secondary principals. Their recommendations for practice may differ, since the responsibility for special education at the secondary level may often be delegated to counselors or special education faculty or department chairpersons.

8. Similar research efforts could be focused solely on first year administrators, in order to observe and/or measure knowledge acquisition at that point in their careers and their use of course-acquired knowledge in actual practice.

9. A qualitative research study would be useful for detailing daily interactions and decision-making by elementary principals in the area of special education. A qualitative study could also denote behavior observed within the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956).

10. A leadership study could be conducted specific to the administration of special education, following up on the theme suggested by the interviewees.

Input should be gained from principals, teachers, and parents, in quantitative and/or qualitative form.

### Commentary

This research study was initiated in part because of a concern that faculty and others associated with administrator preparation programs were ignoring the importance of training in special education law and procedures and therefore conveying, through omission, an absence of significance for the aspiring administrator. It is still the belief of the researcher that any educational program that carries the degree of legal responsibility and potential impact on students' future success as does special education deserves more attention than it currently garners. However, through the process of data collection and analysis, this researcher's opinion has been modified as to the time and place of knowledge acquisition.

A certain amount of ambiguity was evident through reading and listening to the respondents' comments. Educators naturally value the power of learning in a classroom, but the respondents also answered from the realistic perspective of years of administrative experience. The view from the principal's office is not always the idealistic vision shared in graduate school. Experiential learning and continuing education are critical components of any leadership position. Given a basic understanding of special education issues and a strong base of support at the local and/or state level, it is possible for school leaders to be successful in making special education decisions for their students.

According to several interviewees, the key to the above conclusion is the term leader. No matter what the administrative task, their belief is that true leadership skills cannot be learned through a class.

That opinion is powerful in relation to administrative preparation programs. It means that universities and colleges must be very selective in admitting potential candidates into their graduate programs. It means that local school districts must be cautious regarding the promotion of internal prospects. It underscores the value of mentoring and internships for aspiring administrators. And it emphasizes the importance of the modeling, support, and expectation that the school district leadership offers to its new principals. It would thus be most helpful in the field if those individuals with special education expertise made a concerted effort to inform others.

One interviewee spoke candidly about the bureaucratic "stronghold" the State Department of Education holds over special education. It is the opinion of two principals that the Department's emphasis on paperwork and its administrators' myopic views of compliance negatively impact administrators' attitudes regarding special education and negate the true intent of the law. Another interviewee noted that the integration of regular and special education programs is often hindered by "territorialism."

Special education is too segregated; they [special educators] must assume a more global perspective. When it [special education] first started, regular educators were told, 'we're taking them out, you don't have the expertise', and now they're told, 'teach them; you should know how.' It seems everything mandated turns out not to be the animal it was designed to be.

It is obviously critical to follow the letter of the law. But if the responsibility for children is being transferred from regular education to special education when the dotted line is signed at placement, then the entire education community is upholding the principles of segregation, and the provisions of IDEA are worth no more than the paper they are printed on.

In closing, it is this researcher's hope that aspiring and practicing administrators will continue to seek knowledge of special education in order to provide leadership for all of the instructional programs at the school site. It is important to know the right thing to do and, of even more importance, to do the right thing for children.

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## APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A  
IDEA SUBSECTIONS

Major Subsections of IDEA, P. L. 101-476,  
formerly known as P. L. 94-142  
and P. L. 99-457

1. Intent

All handicapped persons ages 3 to 21 must be provided an appropriate educational program which includes related services such as speech-language therapy, physical and/or occupational therapy, and transportation at no cost to parents. Local education agencies must seek out the handicapped, with a priority on the unserved and then the inappropriately served.

2. Grants

Historically, the burden of implementation fiscally impacts the state and local levels, yet IDEA grants are available with the intent of matching authorization and appropriation. The state is responsible for providing greater technical assistance, due to a "funneling" of federal funding. Long-term planning is essential for grant recipients as it makes pre-school programming and removal of architectural barriers for program placement possible.

3. State and Local Plan

The local education agency (LEA) is responsible for documenting and reporting compliance of IDEA regulations, in accordance with the states' policies and procedures. The state will monitor the LEA to ensure it is complying.

#### 4. Due Process

Parents are to be informed and involved members of the educational process. The state and local agencies will have policies and procedures in place in order to avoid unnecessary difficulties with parents. Procedural safeguards can effect a district plan for due process when and if it should occur.

#### 5. Least Restrictive Environment

The least restrictive environment (LRE) does not equate to mainstreaming or inclusion, common terms used to describe the placement of special education students in the regular classroom environment. LRE is based on the consideration of the full spectrum of special education services for an eligible student by the IEP team. Proper assessment procedures are critical to LRE decision-making. It is also imperative that students, parents, regular and special educators, and administrators receive proper orientation in the LRE decision-making process.

#### 6. Non-discriminatory Assessment and Evaluation

Testing of children to determine eligibility for special education services cannot involve cultural or language discrimination. Appropriate notice of the intent to evaluate a child must be given in advance to the parents and certified examiners must be available to ensure proper testing procedures are followed. The LEA is also responsible for the public notice of available services for disabled individuals through the Child Find program.

## 7. Individualized Education Program

Representatives from the school and home form a team that is responsible for the design of a disabled student's educational plan. Parental involvement is not only preferred, it is mandated. School personnel must develop skill in writing and implementing IEPs, as modification of traditional curriculum and instruction is required. Accountability lies in the process of the plan, not in student progress.

## 8. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD)

Funding is provided to the LEA for professional development activities specifically designed to train personnel and parents working with disabled children. Positively impacting attitudes toward the disabled is a priority. CSPD goals must also include inservices that provide measurable benefit to the regular instructional program.

## 9. Other Agencies

Resources will be made available to the LEA to build cooperative arrangements with outside agencies. These agreements are best developed in advance of need, therefore school officials must be knowledgeable and proactive in resourcing. The LEA may elect to utilize private schools, but a parental-school agreement must exist (the IEP remains the responsibility of the LEA).

## 10. Parents

Parental participation is to be increased in a positive fashion, both in school involvement and the teaching of their own children. The school is to encourage parental involvement throughout the entire educational process, but it cannot require parents to be responsible for the fulfillment of IEP goals. Parents are to be consistently informed and up-dated on their rights in special education procedure.



APPENDIX B  
OKLAHOMA AND OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR  
ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

### PART I. Introduction

This certificate authorizes the holder to serve as principal of accredited elementary or middle schools in Oklahoma.

### PART II. Special Criteria

#### A. Standard Certificate

1. The applicant shall satisfy all "General Regulations" specified on pages 5-11.
2. The applicant shall have had two (2) years of teaching experience in an accredited elementary or middle school.
3. The applicant shall hold and maintain a valid Oklahoma Standard or Provisional Certificate in one of the following areas: Early Childhood, Elementary Education, Library Media Specialist, Speech-Language Pathology, or Elementary-Secondary.
4. The applicant shall hold a master's degree granted by an institution accredited by a regional accrediting association.
5. The applicant shall have completed an approved graduate program in educational administration. The program shall include sixteen (16) semester hours of post-master's work in school administration and other work appropriate to school administration beyond the work required for the provisional certificate. Graduate credit should be designed to meet the objectives cited in Part III, and shall include a minimum of one (1) course in each of the following areas (a-f):
  - a. Development, Organization, and Control of Public Education
  - b. Human Development in Elementary Education
  - c. Human Relations Management in the Elementary School
  - d. Elementary School Services and Curriculum
  - e. Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction and Special Programs in the Elementary School
  - f. Legal Aspects of Public Education
6. Work in any of the areas (a-f) in Part II.A.5 above taken as a part of the program for the provisional certificate may be accepted toward fulfilling the standard certificate program if taken on the graduate level. This will not reduce the total number of semester hours required of post-master's degree work in school administration.

**B. Provisional Level II Certificate**

1. The applicant shall satisfy all "General Regulations" specified on pages 5-11.
2. The applicant shall have had two (2) years of teaching experience in an accredited elementary or middle school.
3. The applicant shall hold and maintain a valid Oklahoma Early Childhood, Elementary, Elementary-Secondary, Library Media Specialist, or Speech-Language Pathology Certificate.
4. The applicant shall have completed a minimum of eighteen (18) semester hours of graduate course work which is acceptable in satisfying the requirements for the standard certificate. The courses shall be designed to meet the objectives cited in Part III and shall include at least one course from each of the six areas (a-f) listed in PART II.A.6. above.
5. The applicant shall hold a master's degree.
6. The applicant shall pass the state teacher certification test for Elementary Principal.

**PART III. Elementary School Principal Certification Objectives**

The objectives for the Elementary School Principal Program appear in the Objectives manual of the Oklahoma Teacher Certification Testing Program.

ADMINISTRATOR GUIDELINES: Elementary/Secondary Principal/Superintendent

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**A. REQUIREMENTS FOR A PROVISIONAL LEVEL II**

General Requirements for all Administrators

- |   | <u>Has</u> | <u>Needs</u> |
|---|------------|--------------|
| 1. Valid Standard Teaching Certificate  | ___        | ___          |
| 2. Master's Degree: Date: _____<br>From: _____  | ___        | ___          |
| 3. Two years of teaching experience at appropriate level in an accredited elementary or secondary school. | ___        | ___          |
| 4. Eight hours in EAHED from OSU  | ___        | ___          |
| 5. Curriculum Examination Passed <u>Date</u> _____  | ___        | ___          |
| 6. EAHED 5813-Public School Administration  | ___        | ___          |
| 7. EAHED 6263-Supervision   | ___        | ___          |
| 8. EAHED 6453-Legal Aspects of Education  | ___        | ___          |

In addition, for the Principalship:

- |   |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|
| 9. ABSED 5103-Human Development in Psychology   | ___ | ___ |
| 10. EAHED 6253-The Principalship  | ___ | ___ |
| 11. CIED 5053-Fundamentals of Curriculum Development<br>or CIED 6113-Curriculum of Elementary School<br>or CIED 5173-Kindergarten-Primary Curriculum<br>or CIED 5123-Curriculum in the Secondary School | ___ | ___ |

In addition, for the Superintendency:

- |  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| 12. EAHED 6393-School Personnel Administration                                 | ___ | ___ |
| 13. EAHED 6323-Public School Finance   | ___ | ___ |
| 14. EAHED 6573-School Facilities   | ___ | ___ |
| 15. CIED 5053-Fundamentals of Curriculum Development                           | ___ | ___ |
| 16. A graduate course in Education Psychology                                  | ___ | ___ |
| 17. Nine post masters hours  | ___ | ___ |
| 18. One year of supervisory or administrative experience.                      | ___ | ___ |
| 19. A total of at least 24 semester hours of the approved certificate program. | ___ | ___ |

COMMENTS:

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

EVALUATED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

**B. REQUIREMENTS AND ELECTIVES FOR A STANDARD CERTIFICATE**

General Requirements for all Administrators

- |  | <u>Has</u> | <u>Needs</u> |
|--|------------|--------------|
| 1. ABSED 5633-Behavior Characteristics of Exceptional Children   | ___        | ___          |
| 2. EAHED 6243-Organization & Administration of Education   | ___        | ___          |
| 3. Nine (9) hours required with three (3) hours from each area:<br>a. Research (3) ABSED 5013-Introduction to Graduate Study and Research in Education<br>b. Statistics & Measurements (3) ABSED 5373-Educational Measurements<br>c. Foundations (3) PHIL 5610-Phil. Issues in Education<br>CIED 5023-Comparative Education<br>CIED 5823-Inst. History of Education<br>CIED 5883-Educational Sociology | ___        | ___          |
| 4. A total of at least 34 graduate semester hours of coursework  | ___        | ___          |

In addition, for the Superintendency:

- |  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| 5. EAHED 6333-Public School Business Management  | ___ | ___ |
| 6. EAHED 6353-The Superintendency  | ___ | ___ |
| 7. EAHED 6870-Legal Issues   | ___ | ___ |
| 8. <u>ELECTIVES</u> -Additional semester credit hours as needed to total at least 30 semester credit hours in addition to provisional certificate. Suggested courses:<br>EAHED 5633-Community Education<br>EAHED 6363-Ed. Finance: A National Perspective<br>EAHED 6473-Practicum in Instructional Supervision<br>EAHED 6603-Organizational Theory in Education<br>EAHED 6420-Politics of Education<br>EAHED 6730-Planning & Educational Change<br>Other _____ | ___ | ___ |

- |   |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|
| 9. No more than 12 hours to be accepted from a non-doctoral granting institution  | ___ | ___ |
| 10. A minimum of 12 hours must be taken at OSU.   | ___ | ___ |
| 11. To receive a STANDARD CERTIFICATE, the applicant shall have served for one year as an (assistant principal/ principal or assistant superintendent/superintendent) during the validity of the appropriate provisional certificate. | ___ | ___ |

**C. REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION ENDORSEMENT**

- |  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| 1. In addition to Standard certificate, a course in Org. and Adm. of Vo-Tech Programs; OAE 5333 meets requirement. | ___ | ___ |
|--|-----|-----|

APPENDIX C  
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

## IDEA KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

Directions: Circle True or False

- |   |   |     |  |
|---|---|-----|--|
| T | F | 1.  | Least restrictive environment represents a continuum of alternative placements available for consideration by the team.  |
| T | F | 2.  | Parent consent must be given before preplacement evaluation and before initial placement is made in special education.   |
| T | F | 3.  | Parents have the right to be informed where an independent educational evaluation may be obtained and have it considered when placement and program decisions are made.  |
| T | F | 4.  | IEP means Increasing Educational Potential.  |
| T | F | 5.  | Parents in Oklahoma have a right to request a due process hearing with a qualified hearing officer appointed by the school in which they live.   |
| T | F | 6.  | Parents can inspect and review the child's records and request copies.   |
| T | F | 7.  | Parents have the right to request an impartial due process hearing to question only the placement of the child.  |
| T | F | 8.  | The child will be reevaluated every five years or more often if the parent or child's teacher requests it.   |
| T | F | 9.  | The school can destroy information in the child's file without informing the parent.   |
| T | F | 10. | Parents must be given prior written notice before the school can initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child or provision of a free appropriate public education. |
| T | F | 11. | IEP stands for Individualized Education Program.   |
| T | F | 12. | Prior notice to the parent is not necessary for the initial placement into a special education program.  |
| T | F | 13. | A student will be reevaluated every three years in the child's native language or other mode of communication.   |
| T | F | 14. | An independent evaluation cannot be obtained at public expense.  |
| T | F | 15. | An IQ score is sufficient information in order to determine eligibility in special education.  |
| T | F | 16. | The parent can withhold or revoke consent at any time, understanding that the school has the right to request a hearing.   |
| T | F | 17. | Least restrictive environment means that the child will be educated in the regular educational environment.  |
| T | F | 18. | The parent will be informed before information in the child's file is to be destroyed.   |

- T F 19. No single procedure will be used as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for the child.
- T F 20. Parents have the right to an impartial due process with a state appointed hearing officer.
- T F 21. The IEP can only be reviewed on the date assigned on the last page.
- T F 22. Related services are defined as supportive services as required for the disabled child to benefit from their specially designed education. Examples would be speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, etc.
- T F 23. An IEP can be written for 14-18 months before it is reviewed.
- T F 24. The team could write one IEP for the educational program, another for the speech therapy program, and a separate IEP for physical therapy.
- T F 25. Transition services do not have to be addressed on the IEP until the senior year in public school.
- T F 26. The training of surrogate parents as IEP team members, is to be provided by the school district or responsible educational agency.
- T F 27. Instruction in institutions is not considered a service delivery option for teams to consider as they determine the least restrictive environment.
- T F 28. In recording grades on a permanent record, such as a transcript or report card, there must not be any discrimination or reference to the student's placement in special education.
- T F 29. When determining the length of school day for the student, the team can take the school bus schedule or parents working schedule into consideration.
- T F 30. If a school has a disclosure or transfer policy in their Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act policy, a school may disclose or transfer personally identifiable and confidential records to the school in which the student seeks to enroll without written parent permission.
- T F 31. A school provides personalized instruction with sufficient support services to permit the child with disabilities to benefit educationally from the instruction; therefore, the IEP should be reasonably calculated to enable the child to achieve passing marks and to advance from grade to grade.
- T F 32. Catheterization at school would not be considered a "related service" under IDEA because it doesn't serve a need arising from the effort to educate.
- T F 33. Suspension of a student with disabilities cannot exceed ten days at a time, but may extend beyond that number (in accumulation) during the school year.
- T F 34. A child not eligible for special education according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act can still receive physical therapy from school if the parent or administrator requests it.
- T F 35. If a student is eligible for the category of Learning Disabilities, it means he/she will go into the LD lab for at least 30 minutes per day.
- T F 36. Adaptive behavior information from both home and school must be assessed as part of the comprehensive view of the child by the multidisciplinary team.

- T F 37. Local school officials are prohibited from expelling students whose disabilities are the cause for their disruptive behavior. The school's course of action is to review the IEP.
- T F 38. Disabled children are entitled to a summer program to prevent regression of progress made during the regular school year.
- T F 39. A person may be eligible for services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 but not eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- T F 40. The Act requires that "during the pendency of any proceedings conducted,... the child shall remain in the then current educational placement ... until all proceedings have been completed." This is considered the "stay put" provision of the law.



## **PART TWO**

Directions: Circle and Respond

YES    NO    1. Have you taken a college course involving the instruction, diagnosis, or administration of special education?  
If yes, describe the course (title, level, what institution, etc.):

YES    NO    2. Can your acquisition of special education knowledge be attributed more to experience than formal education?  
Describe your knowledge background:

YES    NO    3. Do you feel prepared to make a variety of decisions regarding special education programs at your site?  
List specific strengths and/or weaknesses:

YES    NO    4. Should additional credit(s) in the area of special education be required for administrative certification?

YES NO 5. What type of coursework would benefit school administrators in this area?

Why?

6. Additional Comments:

### **PART THREE**

Directions: Circle the appropriate categories:

Years of Experience: 1 - 3                      3 - 5                      5 - 10                      10 or more

Educational Level:    Masters                      Masters +                      Ph.D/Ed.D

School Size:    0 - 200                      201 - 350                      351 - 500                      500 or greater

Special Education Programs Served:    LD    EMH    TMH    SED    HI    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU**

APPENDIX D  
CORRESPONDENCE

228 Randall Dr.  
Midwest City, OK 73110  
405-737-2750

## ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Administration at Oklahoma State University. With the guidance of my dissertation advisement committee, Drs. Jerry Bass, Adrienne Hyle, Ed Harris, and Jeanine Rhea, I am conducting a research study on the actual knowledge of special education provisions and the ideal competency level for practicing administrators in Oklahoma elementary schools.

As an elementary principal and former special educator, I assist many of my colleagues in both the interpretation and daily practice of special education programming. Due to its impact in virtually every school setting, I would like to determine if principals perceive a current need for requiring special education coursework in the administrative certification process, and/or continuing education opportunities provided through the university or organizational setting.

I am asking for your assistance in completing this research project. Your responses will remain strictly confidential. Please follow these instructions to facilitate confidentiality:

1. Complete all sections of the instrument. Do not identify yourself on any of the pages.
2. Place the completed instrument in the white envelope.
3. Place the white envelope in the return envelope and mail. Upon receipt of the instrument, the envelopes will be separated and the manila envelope will be used for accounting purposes only.
4. If you wish to receive an answer key for the first section of the assessment, or if you want a copy of the final results; please check that preference on the return envelope. I will be happy to send out the results upon completion of this research project.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. It is my hope that your involvement will help determine if there is a need for expanded educational opportunity in the area of special education for school administrators. Best wishes to you as the new school year begins.

Respectfully,

Christi Winkle  
Ed.D Candidate

January 17, 1994

Dear Elementary Principal,

Several months ago, I asked for your help in completing the data collection for my dissertation on administrative preparation and knowledge in the area of special education. Due to extraordinary circumstances, I am just now able to get back with you and remind you that I still need your input for this project.

Please complete the enclosed survey and return it to me by January 31. I have enclosed a stamped return envelope for your convenience.

I appreciate your assistance! I hope that your school year has been productive and enjoyable.

Respectfully,

Christi Winkle  
EAHED Graduate Associate

February 21, 1994

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

*Dr. Jerry Bass suggested that I write to you and ask for your assistance in completing my research project. I would greatly appreciate your input!*

*Please seal the survey in the unmarked, white envelope and return to me in the manila envelope.*

*Thank you for your help.*

*Sincerely,*

*Christi Winkle*

*EAHED Graduate Associate*

*Oklahoma State University*

APPENDIX E  
IDEA KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT  
ANSWER KEY

IDEA KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT  
ANSWER KEY

1. TRUE - Each public agency shall ensure that a continuum of alternative placement is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1993, p.89).
2. TRUE - Parental consent must be obtained before conducting a preplacement evaluation and initial placement of a child with a disability in a program providing special education and related services (OSDE, p. 30).
3. TRUE - Each public agency shall provide to parents, on request, information about where an independent educational evaluation may be obtained. A parent has the right to an independent educational evaluation at public expense if the parent disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the public agency (OSDE, p. 62).
4. FALSE - IEP means Individualized Education Program (OSDE, p.65).
5. FALSE - A hearing shall be conducted by an impartial hearing officer. The term "impartial hearing officer" shall mean the appointment of a trained individual by the SDE, Special Education Section, for the purpose of presiding at the due process hearing (OSDE, p. 112).
6. TRUE - Parents and eligible students have the right to make reasonable request for and receive an explanation and interpretation of the content of records maintained by the LEA. They also have the right to request and receive a copy of the individual student's records if failure to receive the copies would effectively prevent the parent or eligible student from reviewing and inspecting the records (OSDE, p. 19).
7. FALSE - A parent or public educational agency may initiate a hearing regarding the public agency's proposal or refusal to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child or the provision of a free appropriate public education to the child (OSDE, p. 179).
8. FALSE - Each child who is receiving special education and related services must receive a comprehensive, multidisciplinary evaluation at least every three years, or more frequently if conditions warrant, or if the child's parent or teacher requests an evaluation (OSDE, p. 42).



9. FALSE - The public agency shall inform parents when personally identifiable information collected, maintained, or used under this part is no longer needed to provide educational services to the child (OSDE, p.23).
10. TRUE - Parents must be given written notice a reasonable time before the public agency proposes or refuses to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child or the provision of a free, appropriate public education to the child (OSDE, p. 30).
11. TRUE - see item 4.
12. FALSE - Federal regulations require that parental consent must be obtained before conducting an initial, preplacement evaluation; and initial placement of a child with disabilities in a program providing special education and related services (OSDE p. 30).
13. TRUE - SEAs and LEAs shall ensure that tests and other evaluation materials are provided and administered in the child's native language or other mode of communication, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so (OSDE, p. 39).
14. FALSE - see item 3.
15. FALSE - No single procedure is used as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a child (OSDE, p. 39).
16. TRUE - The parent understands and agrees in writing to the carrying out of the activity for which consent is sought, and the describes that activity and lists the records (if any) which will be released and to whom; and understands that the granting of consent is voluntary on the part of the parent and may be revoked at any time (OSDE, p. 29).
17. FALSE - The purpose of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirement is to ensure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities receive instruction with children who do not have disabilities. The IEP team must clearly document that a variety of options are considered to determine placement. The selected placement should be appropriate in terms of the child's needs rather than what can be conveniently provided by the LEA (OSDE, p. 89).
18. TRUE - see item 9.

19. TRUE - see item 15.
20. TRUE - see item 5.
21. FALSE - It is the responsibility of the LEA to initiate and conduct meetings to develop, review, and revise the IEP for children with disabilities that are residents of the LEA. A meeting must be held for this purpose at least once a year. If the child's parents or teacher feels that the placement or IEP services are not appropriate for the child, it would be appropriate to hold another meeting at anytime during the year (OSDE, p. 67).
22. TRUE - Under federal regulations, related services are defined as those developmental, corrective, and supportive services which are *required* to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education (OSDE, p. 85-87).
23. FALSE - see item 21.
24. FALSE - Annual goals and short term objectives shall be written in the IEP for all related services. The IEP shall clearly specify the amount of time each related service is being provided and shall not be described merely in terms of a range or maximum amount of time within a school week (OSDE, p. 87).
25. FALSE - Transition services must be addressed by the IEP team at age 16 younger, if appropriate (OSDE, p. 77).
26. TRUE - Training of surrogate parents is to be provided by the LEA. Surrogate parents have the responsibility and rights to represent the child with disabilities in all matters relating to: identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child; and provision of a free appropriate public education for the child (OSDE, p. 35).
27. FALSE - The continuum required must include the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education: instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions, and make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement (OSDE, p. 89).
28. TRUE - In recording grades on a permanent record there must not be any reference to the child's placement in special education. A student's transcript must not contain any information which is considered to be discriminatory based on a disability. This would include any reference to special education placements or categories, special services, test information or reference to a disability (OSDE, p. 79).

29. FALSE - Children with disabilities are entitled to the same length of school day offered all children as established by the Accreditation Standards approved by the State Board of Education. However, determination of length of school day for children eligible for special education may be made on an individual basis by the IEP team in order to meet the needs of the child (OSDE, p. 8).
30. TRUE - The LEA may disclose personally identifiable information from a student's education record to other school officials, including teachers, within the LEA; to officials of another school system or postsecondary education institution where the student seeks or intends to enroll, in accordance with FERPA regulations (OSDE, p. 22).
31. TRUE - Federal regulations do not hold LEAs accountable for a child reaching a certain level of achievement. However, the LEA is responsible to ensure that the IEP is appropriate and implemented as written. The IEP should be reasonably calculated for the child to benefit from the program and if educated in the regular classroom to enable the child to receive passing marks and to advance from grade to grade (OSDE, p. 78).
32. FALSE - The Supreme Court upheld a Court of Appeals decision that clean intermittent catheterization (may) be a "supportive service required to assist a handicapped child to benefit from special education ". Without availability of the service during the school day, a special education child could not attend school and access eligible services (Rothstein, 1990, p. 142; Irving Independent School District v. Tatro, 1984).
33. TRUE - OCR has determined that a series of separate suspensions during the school year that total 10 school days or fewer is not considered to be a "significant change in placement." A series of separate suspensions during the school year that, in total, exceed 10 school days is *likely* to be considered a "significant change in placement". Factors to be considered are the length of each suspension, the proximity of the suspensions to one another, and the total amount of time the child is excluded from school. OSEP has concluded that the "ten-day suspension clock would start again once the placement of a student with disabilities who previously had been suspended for misbehavior has been changed through the appropriate procedures for reviewing the student's IEP" (OSDE, p. 83).

34. FALSE - see item 22 for the definition of related services.  
Prior to the initial placement of a child with a disability, a comprehensive, multidisciplinary evaluation shall be accomplished in all areas related to the suspected disability of the child. The purpose of the evaluation is to determine the presence of a disability(ies), any adverse effects on academic performance, the child's educational needs, and whether the child requires special education and related services.  
(OSDE, p. 38)
35. FALSE - see items 1, 17, and 27 for references to LRE.  
The IEP must identify specific special education and related service that will be provided as part of the student's educational program. The types of services, amount and frequency of services, and the projected dates for initiation and duration of services shall be included in the IEP (OSDE, p. 77).
36. TRUE - The multidisciplinary evaluation shall include information from the home and school in order to provide a comprehensive perspective of the child (OSDE, p. 47).
37. TRUE - Suspension of a student with a disability for more than 10 consecutive school days constitutes a change of placement. Before such a change in placement may be implemented, the school must first conduct a review to evaluate the child's placement. As a part of this process, the IEP team must convene and determine if the student's misconduct is a result of the disability or due to an inappropriate placement. In making this determination, the IEP team shall consider all pertinent information, including current informal and standardized assessment data. Additional assessment may be necessary before the IEP team can make this decision (OSDE, p. 81).
38. FALSE - Special education and related services must be provided through an Extended School Year program when determined by the IEP team that a child has regressed, or is predicted to regress, to such a severe degree in a critical skill area that recoupment of such skill loss following the summer break in programming is unlikely or would require an unusually long period of time (other factors are also given).  
(OSDE, p. 6-7)
39. TRUE - To be entitled to protection under Section 504, an individual must meet the definition of a handicapped person (see P&P Manual, p. 79), and be "otherwise qualified" for all of the program's requirements (Special Education Law, p. 26). The criteria for eligibility under IDEA, are specific to the categories identified (OSDE, pp. 47-60).

40. TRUE - During the pendency of the hearing the child shall remain in the present educational placement until the final due process hearing and appeal decision has been issued, unless the parents of the child and public agency agree otherwise. While the placement may not be changed, this does not preclude the agency from using its normal procedures for dealing with children who are endangering themselves or others (OSDE, p. 114).

APPENDIX F  
TABLES OF MEAN SCORES,  
BY DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES

Table XIII

Mean Scores, by the Number of Years Experience  
Reported by the Respondents

<u>Years of Experience</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
1-3	75.0	2
3-5	87.0	6
5-10	79.0	9
10 or more	<u>82.0</u>	<u>63</u>
Total Number	81.8	80

Table XIV

Mean Scores, by the Educational Level  
Reported by the Respondents

<u>Educational Level</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
Master's	82.5	8
Master's +	81.7	67
Ph.D./ Ed.D.	<u>82.5</u>	<u>5</u>
Total Number	81.8	80

Table XV

Mean Scores, by Size of School

Reported by Respondents

---

<u>School Size</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
0-200	81.0	15
201-350	81.0	22
351-500	85.0	24
500 +	<u>79.0</u>	<u>19</u>
Total Number	81.8	80

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Table XVI

Mean Scores, by School Grade Configuration

Reported by Respondents

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<u>Grade Levels Served</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
Pre-6	77.0	7
K-6	81.7	25
K-5	79.3	20
Other	<u>85.0</u>	<u>28</u>
Total Number	81.8	80

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Table XVII

Mean Scores, by Number of Special Education Programs  
Reported by Respondents

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<u>Special Education Programs</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
0	78.5	3
1	85.0	8
2	82.5	27
3	79.7	27
4	78.9	7
5	87.5	7
6	<u>90.0</u>	<u>1</u>
Total Number	81.8	80

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2  
VITA

Christia Sodowsky Winkle

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

**Thesis:** ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE AND PREPARATION FOR  
DECISION-MAKING BY OKLAHOMA ELEMENTARY  
PRINCIPALS IN THE AREA OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

**Major Field:** Educational Administration

**Biographical:**

**Personal Data:** Born in Stillwater, Oklahoma, On September 2, 1959,  
the daughter of Marilyn S. King and Dr. Roland E. Sodowsky.

**Education:** Graduated from Stillwater High School, Stillwater, Oklahoma  
in May 1977; received Bachelor of Science degree in Special  
Education from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma  
in December 1980; received Master of Education degree in  
Special Education from the University of Central Oklahoma,  
Edmond, Oklahoma in July 1986. Completed the requirements for  
the Doctor of Education degree with a major in Educational  
Administration at Oklahoma State University in July 1994.

**Experience:** Taught special education (learning disabilities and mental  
retardation) in the Midwest City-Del City school district from 1981-  
1990. Became assistant principal at Epperly Heights  
Elementary, 1990, and principal at Westside Special Services  
Center, 1991 to present.

**Professional Memberships:** National, Oklahoma, and Mid-Del  
Associations of Elementary School Principals, Oklahoma  
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Phi  
Kappa Phi, Kappa Delta Pi, Omicron Delta Kappa

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

RECEIVED

JUL 23 1993

DEAN'S OFFICE  
EDUCATION

Date: 07-19-93

IRB#: ED-94-001

Proposal Title: AN ANALYSIS OF ACTUAL AND IDEAL SCHOOL  
ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCIES IN THE AREA OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

Principal Investigator(s): Dr. Gerald Bass, Christi Winkle

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

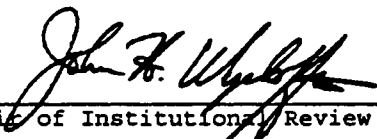
APPROVAL STATUS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW  
BOARD AT NEXT MEETING.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A  
CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR  
BOARD APPROVAL. ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO  
BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

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Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for  
Deferral or Disapproval are as follows:

Signature:

  
Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: July 22, 1993