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THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS IN CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN REGULAR EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN A SUBURBAN SETTING

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By

LYNETTE MARIE THOMPSON
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THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS IN CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN REGULAR EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN A SUBURBAN SETTING

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

BY

_____
Dr. Jeffrey Maiden, Chair

_____
Dr. Joyce Brandes

_____
Dr. Gregg Garn

_____
Dr. John R. Jones

_____
Dr. Leslie Williams

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of "Granny," Marzelle Kimble. She was not only a granny; she was my friend. She gave me confidence and determination. She gave advice when elicited, and sometimes when it was not. I pray when you were called home on January 2, 2014, you knew the impact you had on so many people, and how much you were love by all. For me…you were my friend, my confidant, and most of all my loving Granny. Thanks for playing such an integral part in shaping my life as I grew from a child into a young lady, and finally into a woman. Thank you for always believing in me.

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I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy. - Philippians 1:3-4

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I will conclude with this quote:

"Every new breath and day is an opportunity to do something; the gift of life is to make a difference in the world." — K.J. Kilton

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Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if there is a relationship between the principal's knowledge in special education and special education students making adequate yearly progress on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT)/ End-of-Instruction test (EOI). Closing the achievement gap between regular education students and special education students is imperative. School administrators are becoming more concerned about the performance of their special education students (Gloeckler & Daggett, n.d.), and given the increased accountability that has placed administrators at high stakes and is continuing to be of grave concern. The three research questions asked whether there was a statistically significant relationship between principals' years of experience, certification and their overall knowledge in special education in and the gap between regular education and special education students test scores. Conceptually, this study was framed around transactional and transformational leadership theories. Data were collected through the utilization of a descriptive survey. Demographic information, years of experience, certification and overall knowledge of special education were collected from principals to provide detailed information for the basis of analysis. The participants included 51 principals from five suburban 6A school districts located in Oklahoma. Data were analyzed using SPSS 24.0 for Windows. The results of this study were insightful despite the study revealing there was no statistically significant relationship between the data collected on principals and the gap between student test scores in the regular education and special education subgroups. This study contributes to education by providing recommendations to

District Administrator and Site Administrators on how they can assist in increasing student achievement in the subgroup area of special education. Principals becoming instructional leaders and focusing on achievement of all students will make a remarkable difference in the academic achievement of students with special needs.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This quantitative study investigated principals' impact on student achievement. Specifically, the study examined the effect of principals' years of experience, certification, and knowledge in the area of special education on academic performance of the special education subgroup compared to the performance of students in general education programs. As instructional leaders, principals' striving to meet the demands set in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was the primary focus of this study. "On December 10, 2015, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama ("Every Student Succeeds Act," n.d., para.1). Every Student Succeeds Act continues the demand of schools showing growth within their respected subgroups. This study addressed the principals' role and their impact on student achievement across all student groups.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is a United States Act of Congress concerning the education of children in public schools (*No Child Left Behind*, n.d.). Former President George W. Bush and his administration originally proposed NCLB, which was signed into law in 2002 (*No Child Left Behind*, n.d.). No Child Left Behind legislation dramatically changed education, affecting schools across the nation. The impact of the legislation has been overwhelming (No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425 (2002). This act is based on this belief, if high expectations and measurable learning goals are set, all students can learn, and students' performance will increase. Principals are now responsible for ensuring their teachers have high expectations for all students.

Marzano (2010) concisely addresses how differentiation stems from innate biases. Teachers are not purposefully lowering expectations for some students. As a part of NCLB, principals are held accountable for subgroups performing the same. The belief all children can learn is no longer being accepted as a spoken belief, but schools are required to prove the expectation for children to learn is in practice. Accountability of this practice will be monitored through the mandates in NCLB.

No Child Left Behind examines schools' academic performance using each state's assessments. The NCLB legislation requires schools to address the achievement of students in different subgroups and students are counted in multiple subgroups. Subgroup categories include All Students, Regular Students, Major Racial/Ethnic Groups, Disadvantaged Students, English Language Learners (ELL), and Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and schools are held accountable for each group to make AYP (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2004). With mandates outlined in the NCLB legislation, principals have been charged with the seemingly unreachable goal of changing how educators perceive best practice in teaching, which sadly enough has been a one-size fits all approach. This practice needs to cease and a focus on learning instead of teaching will assist in narrowing the gap (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). A focus on students' individual needs is expected to "dramatically change the American educational landscape" (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009, p.2). This legislation changed the landscape, "As a means to an end, public education is designed to provide students, regardless of race, gender, social class, or socioeconomic status with skills and knowledge required to participate productively in all aspects of society" (Constantino, 2011, p.

1). It is the educator who can ensure all students are learning. “Many factors contribute to a student's academic performance, including individual characteristics and family and neighborhood experiences. But research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most” (Rand Education, n.d., para. 1).

On Dec 10, 2015, a new law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama. The ESSA preserves the intention of NCLB, but attempts to fix the one size fits all approach. "The goals of No Child Left Behind, the predecessor of this law, were the right ones: High standards, Accountability, Closing the achievement gap. Nevertheless, in practice, the one size fits all approach often fell short. It didn't always consider the specific needs of each community” ("Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)," n.d., p. 1). “While much of the media coverage has emphasized that the new law ’ends’ NCLB and dramatically reduces the federal role in education (e.g., Layton 2015), this has been overstated somewhat” (McGuinn, 2016, p. 14). This new legislation carries some of the mandates in NCLB, but most significant to this study is the continued focus on subgroups.

The focus on individual student learning is anticipated to be a paradigm shift to the traditional one-size-fits-all approach. The average student’s needs are met but consideration for the above average student or the student functioning below average has not been met. Meyer, Rose, and Gordon (2014) agree a paradigm shift in teaching must take place. Experience and common sense suggest that all individuals are unique and learn in ways that are particular to them. Also, in the past quarter century, science has elucidated the great variability of the human capacity to learn. “Yet our educational system is designed around the idea that most people learn the

same way and that a “fair” education is an identical one” (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014, p.80). No Child Left Behind Act will no longer allow for this type of approach to teaching. The new legislation, ESSA, continued to focus on subgroup performance; not only did legislators in authoring ESSA maintain the special education subgroup, but added a subgroup, English-Language Learners ("ESSA Overview," 2016, para. 8). Maintaining subgroups in ESSA reinforced the mandates in NLCB only reinforced the notion to be a successful principal there would need to be a purposeful focus on how to improve the performance of each subgroup. This would be a change for many principals.

Principals need to lead their teachers to adapt to this change by taking the role of instructional/curriculum leaders (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009). This shift has caused principals to lead simultaneously from two different roles, the managerial and instructional roles. The managerial leadership role, the day-to-day running of the school has been the primary focus of principals and a continual practice for decades (Hallinger, 1992). The principal will experience the colossal assignment of leading many paradigm shifts within the educational system. The principal’s responsibility is to lead the school effectively and to hire teachers who teach the curriculum that they learned as a part of their educational programs. In addition to this enormous assignment, principals should assist teachers in not just teaching but looking for evidence of learning (Hallinger, 1992; Dufour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). A shift in teaching to learning is inevitable if a school is going to meet the demand of NCLB and hold up to the scrutiny of the public (Dufour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). Making this change will require multiple shifts.

One shift facing both principals and teachers is the shift from the conventional wisdom that learners learn the same. "That way of thinking isn't a thing of the past; it still fuels much of conventional thinking in education today" (Meyer et al., 2014, p. 82). Meyer et al., (2014) suggest traditional education systems could learn a lot from the Global Positioning System (GPS) devices. It can monitor where a person is and where they are in relation to where they want to go (destination) and adjust for ways to get there. Meyer et al., (2014) proclaims, "Education needs this kind of innovation- emphasizing flexibility and individuality- to remake the way teaching and learning happens" (p.84). Educators should start ensuring that all students are learning what they are teaching to meet the mandates of NCLB and provide optimal learning for all students. The complexity involved in this type of change will not be an easy endeavor (Fullan, 2009).

This change could be led by school administrators equipped to address student subgroups to ensure all students are achieving. "Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement"(Fullan, 2002, p. 16). Principals will lead their respective staff into a new world of education when teachers are ensuring their students are learning. Teachers examining each student's performance and determining if students had learned what was taught and, if not, that the teacher intervenes to assist them in learning will be a new concept for many. Making instructional data-driven decisions is the only way a teacher will know all students are learning the content being taught and ensure each student is making adequate yearly progress (Cotton, 2003; DuFour et al., 2006; Lezotte & McKee,

2006; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Principals, as school leaders, will need to guide and facilitate this process. Each educator's challenge will be to reflect on their teaching and student learning every day for a school to make the necessary changes required to meet the targets in NCLB.

The criterion to meet the target in NCLB revolves around Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the measurement in NCLB to measure a school's effectiveness through standardized testing and subgroup comparison to measure the effectiveness of educators meeting the guidelines of NCLB (Paige, 2002, Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d., *No Child Left Behind*, n.d.). To meet adequate yearly progress, a school must meet a target score based on a maximum score of 1500 and the expectation that all subgroups meet this target by the 2014-2015 school year. "Under ESSA, states still have to submit an accountability plan to the U.S. Department of Education, but states are given more latitude on academic goals for schools" (McGuinn, 2016, p. 14). States will continue to expect schools to show progress with particular attention being paid to subgroups. "ESSA also maintains the requirement that states publicly report student test score data for schools and disaggregate it for different subgroups of students (special education, English language learners, racial minorities, and students in poverty)" (McGuinn, 2016, p. 14).

Sustaining this type of student achievement across subgroups appeared to be impossible to many leaders; however, some leaders achieved this goal (Eckes & Swando, 2009, Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d.). The subgroup responsible for the majority of schools failing to sustain AYP is special education

(Paige, 2002; Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d., *No Child Left Behind*, n.d.; Center on Education Policy [CEP], 2011).

Adhering and leading a school to success under NCLB will not be an easy task and principals must challenge each teacher to make certain all students are learning and meeting the demands of NCLB. States are required, based on the guidelines of NCLB, to create a plan to measure student performance based on standards set by the state. One major goal of NCLB is to close the achievement gap (*Alignment with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* Act, n.d.), A commonly used phrase indicating comparisons across student subgroups. "The "achievement gap" in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students" ("Achievement Gap," 2011, p. 1). The goal is for the test scores to reach an Academic Performance Index (API) of 1500 in all subgroup areas. "The API is a numeric score that measures school and district performance based on a variety of educational indicators. The API scale ranges from 0-1500. A 1500 score would indicate 100% of all students are proficient in tested areas" (Oklahoma State Department of Education [OSDE], 2010. The ultimate responsibility of a school reaching the target API score falls on the principal.

Principals do not often work directly with students. However, it is the principals' responsibility to support teachers with strategies and tools needed to ensure all students are learning (Jones, 2006; Constantino, 2011; Espinoza, 2013; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, Marzano et al., 2005). The principal must be the instructional leader and educate his/her staff because the success or failure of the school rests on the principal's shoulders (Jones, 2006; Constantino, 2011; Espinoza,

2013; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Marzano et al., 2005). "The changing educational context caused by NCLB has altered the manner in which principals function" (Mees, 2008, p. 155).

"Leadership is the professional work of everyone in the school" (Lambert, 2002, p. 37). It is important for a leader to grow leaders. It appears that Transformational Leadership Theory revolves around this important component and it is an essential theory in education. Effective leadership must create a fundamental transformation in the learning culture of schools and the teaching profession (Fullan, 2001). This type of leadership builds platforms for others to be leaders, which impacts sustainability. Friedman believes, "the impact of a transformational principal can be truly remarkable, this change must be sustainable and full of greatness, enduring, once the principal has left the organization" (as cited in Luna, 2011, p. 48).

Building capacity in a school is imperative. One can build capacity by developing leaders within the teaching faculty. "According to Glover, Miller, Gambling, Gough & Johnson, 1999; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Marks & Louis, 1997; Ovando, 1996; Taylor & Bogotch, 1994 several studies have found that teachers participating in decision-making and collaborative teacher-principal leadership contribute to school effectiveness, teaching quality, and improvement in student performance" (as cited in Greenlee, n.d., p. 46). Building capacity creates a staff that can problem-solve and facilitate change in absence of the principal. Part of being a successful principal is when one is out of the building, the professional work, expectations, and student learning continue. "It takes more than one leader to create

a successful school and the principal serves as the “leader of leaders” DuFour, DuFour, Karhanek, & Eaker, 2004, p. 191). The movie *Apollo 13* is an excellent example of a group of people pulling together to problem solve.

> The movie *Apollo* 13 (1995) tells the story of how the men and women of NASA responded to the crisis of a crippled spacecraft that threatened the lives of its three astronauts. Problems emerged that NASA engineers had never anticipated or simulated. They were being called upon to do things that had never been done before in the history of the space program. Time was short as the oxygen in the spacecraft was rapidly depleting. Resources were few. In one powerful scene, an engineer empties a box of varied materials on the table and announces that those materials are all that is available to the astronauts to correct the problem with the spacecraft. The world watched and waited to see how this drama would unfold (DuFour, DuFour, Karhanek, & Eaker, 2004, p. 191).

This movie is very symbolic of the degree of challenges schools face. Challenges come with inadequate resources from which schools are expected to make a significant difference; lives depend on it. It does take strong leaders to advance an organization and build leaders ("Leadership: Learn to lead change," n.d.; Lezotte & McKee, 2006; Southworth, 2002). Principals and teachers should be able to face the challenges and comprehend that failure is not an option for any student as schools to meet the high demands set forth by the NCLB legislation(No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 2002).

Background of the Problem

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is causing the role of the principal to change to ensure all students are achieving and making Adequate Yearly Progress. Not only are states required to look at the overall picture of student performance; instead, students' test scores are now desegregated into many different subgroups (Lee, 2004). Each subgroup must reach the target score on every level, and subject area or schools will be placed on the school improvement list (Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d.). If a school remains on the school improvement list for two consecutive years, the school may receive sanctions (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 2004). One example of a sanction is allowing a parent the right to school choice, while another sanction schools may face is being required to set aside 10% of Title I and Title IIa allocations for professional development in the area where AYP was not met. If a school continues not to make AYP, eventually the State can restructure the school or take over the school by replacing the administrator and some, or all, of the staff. They can even transfer the oversight or management of the school to the State or a private entity ("School consequences," 2006). The stakes to meet AYP are quite high, and many are not meeting the exigencies outlined in NCLB. Even though AYP does not exist in ESSA, states will continue to have a responsibility to show progress. Adequate Yearly Progress may take on a different appearance; nonetheless, the accountability will remain the same.

The Center on Education Policy (CEP) completed a five-year trend report showing the national percentage of public schools failing to make AYP rose from 29% to an estimated 38% in 2010. Many people predicted this would be a much

higher number with the implementation of NCLB. This policy reported the several reasons that percentages did not go up higher than expected, but the most common issue was subgroups not meeting their target score (CEP, 2011). It appears NCLB was an effort to hold states accountable to ensure school districts are improving. However, with the inconsistencies in policies from one state to another made state comparisons virtually impossible. An example of one inconsistency, some states were allowed to do a modified test and others were not. Just this one example would skew the comparison of test scores across the United States. "The U.S. Department of Education has invited each state educational agency (SEA) to request flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction" (U.S. Department Education, 2012, para.1). Forty-three states decided to pursue a waiver due to the issues and mandates placed on schools with NCLB and the policies set forth, (U.S. Department of Education, 2012 para. 2).

There has been some relief from NCLB requiring that all students meet the target score by the 2014 deadline. "A decade after the No Child Left Behind law rewrote the nation's education policies; President Obama freed 10 states from some of its crucial provisions, including a deadline for bringing all students to proficiency in reading and math by 2014"(Hu, 2012, para. 1). These waivers from NCLB only changed the fact that schools were no longer bound by the law's system of sanctions for schools deemed to be failing or not making adequate yearly progress. However,

states were required as a part of the waiver to create policies to ensure school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). "States will be required to both reward high-performing schools and single out low-performing schools for intervention and develop plans for improving educational outcomes for poor and minority students, non-native English speakers, students with disabilities and other under-performing groups" (Hu, 2012, para. 12). Criteria sset forth by Oklahoma state legislation, House Bill 1456 (2012), principals must have the knowledge and training to lead teachers through the process from a "focus on teaching to a focus on learning" in order to meet these requirements and close achievement gap in subgroups (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Principals having the background, expertise, or the training to meet this demand could experience an unintended consequence of NCLB. Legislators may not have considered any prerequisite before the passing of NCLB. While the intended outcome of increasing student achievement for all students was amazing; passing this bill with deadline dates and starting it immediately without leaders having the training to facilitate the kind of change needed would propose a challenge for school leaders (Jesteadt, 2012). "The angst is not caused by school leaders wanting to shirk their responsibility to help ensure that all students learn at high levels, but rather by the fact those leaders know how to meet rising demands with dwindling resources and possible lack of training" (Jones, 2013, p.1).

More now than ever, principals need to become transformational/instructional leaders because the criteria for success have changed. "The long –standing criteria for success—the campus being clean and aesthetically appealing, the buses running

on time, getting students efficiently fed and safely home—have been changed by the NCLB mandate that *all* students must learn"(Jones, 2013, p.19). "The goal of NCLB was and is correct and critical" (Holcomb, 2012, p. 7). It is equally crucial to meet the demands of NCLB and ensure every student is learning and in order to make it happen in reality, both principals and teachers lead and teach effectively. The ultimate responsibility falls on the leader of the school, the principal (Cotton, 2003; Espinoza, 2013; Fullan, 2002; Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009; Jones, 2013; Lezotte & McKee, 2006; Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). Principals have a duty to make certain their teachers have the instructional strategies, ability to use data for instructional interventions, and the necessary resources to ensure students in every subgroup are making AYP.

Problem

It is important all schools meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to satisfy directives of NCLB. As school leaders, principals have the responsibility to work with teachers and staff to ensure their school meets AYP. Many schools are on the school improvement list as a result of one or two subgroups not making AYP, such as special education (Wasta, 2006). For the most part, principals are not trained in special education; yet they have been demanded to lead a faculty through a shift from teaching to learning for all students including special education students (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). Frequently, it is the special education subcategory causing schools not to make (AYP) (Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d.). "As preliminary state assessment results for the school year 2009-10 continue to come in, a significant number of school districts around the country

report they have failed to make AYP because special education students did not hit target goals on state accountability tests required under NCLB" (Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d., p. 2).

Study Rationale

Closing the achievement gap between regular education students and special education students is imperative. School administrators are becoming more concerned about the performance of their special education students (Gloeckler & Daggett, n.d.), and given the increased accountability that has placed administrators at high stakes and is continuing to be of grave concern. Administrators need to focus on the subgroup causing their school not to make AYP and in most circumstances; it is the special education subgroup. Even though the achievement gap between disabled and non-disabled students has narrowed over the past few years, it is still significant. In 2007, U.S. Department of Education (as cited in Boser, 2009, p. 5) states, "According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), eighth graders who had disabilities earned a scale score of 246 on the 2007 math exam. In contrast, students without disabilities posted a scale score of 284, a gap of more than 38 scale score points – almost four years' worth of learning!" Administrators must attack this issue with urgency (Eckes & Swando, 2009). States have set forth consequences for not meeting AYP, but every year special education students not gaining their potential knowledge is alarming (CEP, 2011; Gloeckler & Daggett, n.d.; Goo & Schwinn, 1997).

Many educators believe if students could achieve at the rate of one year of academic knowledge per one school year, they would not be classified as a special

education student (CEP, 2011). On the contrary, some schools are making adequate yearly progress in the area of special education (Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d.). All principals need to understand the urgency in becoming better equipped to assist teachers in ensuring all students learn and are adequately progressing. Quinn (2005) suggests, "The fact that principals can be removed from school leadership positions as a result of not meeting annual performance goals as outlined in NCLB supports the notions that, for today's school leaders, there is no doubt the stakes are high" (as cited in Steinke, 2010).

There is a plethora of information and studies regarding the importance of the role the principal plays in all students being successful. On the contrary, a limited amount of data were discovered addressing why some schools are doing well in all subgroup areas, and others are not (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Fullan, 2002; Jesteadt, 2012; Lynch, 2012; Marzano & DuFour, 2011; Mees, 2008; Meyer, 2012; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 200; Wallace Foundation, 2012). A deeper investigation is needed to determine why some schools succeed in meeting AYP for all students and others do not, especially in the area of special education. The academic needs of students with disabilities are suffering in many schools, and it has an impact on more than just the students. Over 45% of the people who relocated chose the location to live based on the reputation of the public school (Ihrke, 2014). This dilemma faced by schools in regards to being under the microscope for their test scores affects all stakeholders. The reality is that school officials charged with the endeavor of raising test scores of all students and subgroups and the outcome affect

the entire community (Kowalski, 2010; Ihrke, 2014; Vollmer, 2010). Are principals prepared for this challenge?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if there was a relationship between the principal's knowledge in special education and special education students making adequate yearly progress on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT)/ End-of-Instruction test (EOI). The current study focused on the principal's knowledge of special education. Principals in the study were current practitioners or former principals with at least a minimum of three years of experience at the same site. Principals from five suburban school districts located in a southwest state in which their subgroups are making adequate yearly progress and schools that are not making adequate yearly progress will be asked to participate. The study considered how many of these schools are on school improvement plans due to the special education student subgroup. Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2006) argues that the principal's role is pivotal in the development of educational opportunities for students with disabilities and other at-risk learners. This study examined if principals' knowledge of special education impacted achievement scores of the student subgroup of special education.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between principals' knowledge of special education and the achievement gap as indicated by

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special education and regular education students?

- Null 1: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in test scores between special education and regular education students and principals' knowledge of special education.
- Alternative 1: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in test scores between special education and regular education students and principals' knowledge of special education.
- RQ2: Is there a relationship between principals' administrative experience and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?
- Null 2: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in test scores between special and regular education students and principals' administrative experience.
- Alternative 2: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in test scores between special and regular education students and principals' administrative experience.
- RQ3: Is there a relationship between principals' certification and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?

- Null 3: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in test scores between special and regular education students and principals' certification.
- Alternative 3: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in test scores between special and regular education students and principal certification.

Significance of Study

This study is relevant to many school leaders during this time of public education scrutiny. The critical question asked by stakeholders is, "Can public schools prepare all children to be college and career ready?" Schools should prepare students to attend college or to go into a trade of their choice. Hence, the importance of this study is to uncover variables that contribute to the principal closing the achievement gap between the regular education and special education subgroup. "The literature related to educational leadership often focuses on the site principal, with little or no data related to the special education leadership"(Avery, 2003, p.6). There is currently very little research examining the formal special education training or basic knowledge of special education laws and practice of school principals (Laskey & Karge, 2006). White (1993) reports that research is needed to identify the skills that are most important to the effectiveness of principals in supervising school level special education programs (as cited in Templeton, 2012, p. 4). "Furthermore, there is limited research regarding how principals engage in instructional leadership in ways that benefit students with disabilities" (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2014, p. 11).

With a sense of dire urgency, the accountability of NCLB and the implementation of College and Career Ready Standards drive educational leaders to investigate the differences in the principal's role within the successful school and the non-successful school. "Recognizing this fact, in 2010, the Obama administration joined a call from educators and families to create a better law that focused on the clear goal of fully preparing all students for success in college and careers" ("Every Student Succeeds Act," n.d., para. 5). The goal of the principal should be for all students to learn, even with the difficult accountability mandates set by legislation. "As almost 99% of principals agreed that the principal is responsible for the education of all students in school, principals are taking that responsibility seriously" (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006, p. 170). For a leader to lead effectively, he/she needs to understand the difference in principal leadership within successful and non-successful schools (Lynch, 2012). This study is significant to the field of education and the success of all students, but specifically students with disabilities. The importance of the role the principal plays in whether or not special education students are successful at school will be investigated in this study. "Future research is needed to determine the impact of principals' practices on AYP for students with disabilities" (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006, p. 169). This study provides relevant information, missing from current literature, on the relationship between principal leadership and the success of the special education student subgroup on the OCCT or EOI.

Limitations of Study

Creswell (2003) explains the limitations of this study are the elements to which the researcher has no control. This study depended on the principal participants to fill out the survey accurately and return it promptly. Consequently, web survey response rates are fairly low, with around 11% returned, which threatens the efficiency of the web survey (Jin, 2011). " In comparison to mail surveys, web surveys may yield lower response rates due to the following basic reasons: while a paper-based questionnaire is likely to remain on a respondent's desk and act as a continuous reminder, this is not the case with web questionnaires, especially those with an email invitation" (Manfreda, Bosnjak, Bozen-Blozano, Haas, & Vehovar, 2008, p. 82).

All participating principals will be from schools in a state located in the southwest region of the United States. One limitation will be that the sample size is not representing the diversity in districts. Another factor to consider is the significant and random changes to the accountability system at the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE), such as cut scores, test type and company, and even the accountability system from year to year. In order to overcome this limitation, it will be vitally important for the researcher to analyze Academic Performance Index (API) data based on the size of the gap between regular education and special education students. All of these variables will be considered during the analysis of the results of the study.

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this research, the following definitions are used:

- *Achievement Gap:* National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, n.d.) explains the achievement gaps occur when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in average scores between the two groups is statistically significant (that is, larger than the margin of error).
- *Accountability System* - Each state sets academic standards for what every child should know and learn. Student academic achievement is measured for every child, every year. The results of these annual tests are reported to the public (http://ok.gov/sde/federal-programs#Glossary).
- *Assessment* – often used synonymously with "test". Under *No Child Left Behind*, tests are aligned with academic standards. Schools must administer tests in each of three grade spans: 3rd - 5th, 6th - 9th, and 10th - 12th. Tests must be administered every year in grades 3 through 8 in reading and mathematics (http://ok.gov/sde/federal-programs#Glossary).
- *Instructional Leader:* (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2001) defines instructional leadership as leading learning communities, in which staff members meet on a regular basis to discuss their work, collaborate to solve problems, reflect on their jobs, and take responsibility for what students learn.
- *Proficiency* - The ability to perform at grade level (http://ok.gov/sde/federal-programs#Glossary).
- *Public School Choice* - Students in schools identified as in need of improvement will have the option to transfer to better public schools in their districts. The school districts will be required to provide transportation to

the students. Priority is given to low-income students (http://ok.gov/sde/federal-programs#Glossary).

- *Successful School:* For the purpose of this study, a successful school will be a school with a small gap in scores between regular education and special education students.
- *Teacher Quality* - To ensure that every classroom has a highly qualified teacher, states and districts around the country are using innovative programs to address immediate and long-term needs, including alternative recruitment strategies, new approaches to professional development, financial incentive programs, and partnerships with local universities (http://ok.gov/sde/federal-programs#Glossary)
- *Unsuccessful School*: For the purpose of this study, an unsuccessful school will be a school with a large gap between regular education and special education students

Theoretical Framework

Introduction of Theories

The current study was based on leadership theory. Increasingly, principals are expected more to be effective leaders as well as managers. There is a myriad of leadership theories that could explain the differences in successful and ineffective school leaders. Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, and Dennison (2003) reported the leadership theory evolving from "Great Man" theory to "Transformational Leadership." "For decades, leadership theories have been the source of many studies" ("Leadership: Learn to Lead Change," n.d., p. 1). There are numerous

forms of leadership theories, and each theory takes an individualized look at the leader, many of these theories evolved as far back as the 19th century. This paper will discuss two types of leadership theory, specifically the two appearing to be the most applicable in examining school leadership. Transactional Leadership Theory and Transformational Theory evolved in 1970's ("Leadership: Learn to Lead Change," n.d., p. 1). These leadership theories help to explain the practice and concepts adopted by certain leaders as well as explain their actions too.

Transactional and Transformational Theory

Transactional leadership and Transformational theories emerged around the same period in the 1970s and early 1980s. There is a plethora of scholarly information on these two leadership styles. Bass and Riggio (2006) states transactional leaders are those who lead through social exchange while transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop leadership capacity. Transactional and transformational leadership theories both claim to have a positive impact on the culture of an organization. They both claim to have an impact on the success of the organization. Both theories tend to allow change to happen. However, how significant is the change, and how deep is the change that occurs in the organization are still unanswered questions. Based on the literature, transformational leadership appears to have the ability to make the deeper change and maintain sustainability by building leadership capacity.

Critically, however, the more important questions are: Do either of these leadership styles truly have an impact on student achievement in the educational

setting? Do educational leaders have an influence on student achievement? If either of the styles have an impact on student achievement, does it specifically assist in addressing the achievement of students with special needs? "Witziers reports an average effect (reported as a *z*-score) of 0.02, an estimate that is typically indicating no or a very weak impact" (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008, p. 636). However, Marzano published a meta-analysis that reported the average effect size of .4, which is significantly higher than that of Witziers (Robinson et al., 2008). It is believed that leadership does have an impact on student achievement.

Being an effective leader in schools today can be a very laborious and stressful job. Leaders have to fluctuate from being instructional leaders to managers. This change is a difficult thing to balance with all the recent demands placed on leaders. "It is important to explore leadership theories and practices in order to identify effective principalship behaviors" (Constantino, 2011, p. 32). "Never before has a school principal's job been more important and never before has the job been more difficult" (Constantino, 2011, p. 33). After reviewing the literature on leadership styles, it appears that leaders need to possess a multitude of leadership styles to be effective. Leaders' jobs are no longer only managerial or keeping order in the school. The leadership of a school includes a gargantuan amount of responsibilities not including the managerial responsibilities principals are familiar with having on their list of duties.

Growing leaders within an organization helps to build capacity. The results of a study completed by Pounder indicated that instructors displaying transformational leadership qualities in the classroom had a positive and significant influence on

student perception of dynamics measured regarding leadership outcomes: extra effort, effectiveness, and satisfaction (Pounder, 2008, p. 4). When examining the effectiveness of the leader, it is important to consider achievement of all students. Although, there are many leadership theories, the bottom line is how a leader guarantees student achievement and ensures students are positively affected by the actions of leaders at all levels.

"While school principals in the 21st century are expected to fill a multitude of roles, the primary responsibility of today's principal is to facilitate effective teaching and learning with an overall objective of enhancing student achievement" (Sanzo, Clayton, & Sherman, 2011, p. 2). Bakken and Smith (2011) discuss the importance of a "proficient/responsive principal. "Significant research has confirmed the critical role of the culturally proficient/responsive principal in establishing a school's vision and climate" (Bakken & Smith, 2011, p. 36). In Ladson-Billings' view, "culturally responsive pedagogy rests on three propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the social order" (as cited in Bakken & Smith, 2011, p. 1).

Summary

It is interesting to note that the two most prevalent theories that emerged from the literature are contrasting. Despite the fact, both are very prominent in the field of education. For the purpose of this study, the researcher primarily focused on a transformational and transactional leadership and their effect on the ability of principals leading schools to become successful with all students. In this study, a

successful school will be considered a school with a narrowed gap between regular education and special education. It is important for principals to have the necessary tools to help them become instructional leaders especially in leading special education teachers. "With the increased accountability on school leaders for ensuring all children, even children with disabilities, show learning gains, we can no longer push special education to the backburner" (Jesteadt, 2012, p. 25). Furthermore, research has shown most school leaders do not feel prepared to deal with the many different aspects and issues that accompany special education programs (Aspedon, 1992; Dickenson et al., 2003; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003;Doyle, 2001; Keyes et al., 1999; Krajewski & Krajewski, 2000; McClard-Bertrand &Bratberg, 2007; Patterson et al., 2000; Potter & Hulsey, 2001; Smith & Colon, 1998)" (as cited in Jesteadt, 2012, p.26). This study examined the role principals play in special education where students show success in some schools and not in others. It also investigated if this dilemma is related to the principals' knowledge of special education, years of experience in the administration role or certification in the area of special education.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

The first chapter included the introduction, the purpose of the study, study rationale, and research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study and definition of terms used throughout the study. Chapter Two contains a review of literature relevant to the study. The literature uncovers the disconnect between IDEA and NCLB and its impact on education, especially the special education subgroup. Also included in Chapter Two is the information relative to ESSA and the

importance of educating all subgroups endorsed in this new legislation. An overall discussion of leadership in special education at the district and the site level is discussed as well. Chapter Three covers the research methodology. This chapter consists of the purpose of the study, research questions, description of method /research design, methodology, study population /sample selection, description of data collection and data analysis. Chapter Four provides an analysis and interpretation of the results from the study. In conclusion, Chapter Five presents a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Perspective

Four dominant themes have emerged from the literature. First, a new legislative act, Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), replaced NCLB. Secondly, there is evidence of a definite disconnect between NCLB and IDEA. Thirdly, the subgroup of special education appears to be one of the frequent reasons schools are being placed on school improvement. Principals have the great responsibility of making sure their schools make AYP in all subgroup areas. Fourthly, the role of the building administrator has drastically changed since the implementation of NCLB. The belief that has emerged throughout the literature is principals are not adequately trained to take on the challenge of trying to meet the needs of all students. Lastly, the importance of leadership at the site level and district level is crucial for all students to achieve academic success. The district level's role is crucial and imperative in overseeing the function and responsibility of the site level administrator. However, the main responsibility falls on the principal, who will need support from the district level. District level leaders will need to ensure the principal has the training and preparation for the challenges he/she is going to face in the area of accountability and assessment and special education students. In conclusion, the literature reviewed reveals a disconnect between requirements of IDEA and NCLB, but also has demonstrated that school leaders should be effective enough to positively impact all different groups of the student populations such that test scores reflect only a small achievement gap, if any, between regular and special education students.

Every Student Succeed Act

A new act was singed into legislation to replace NCLB. "The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, and represents good news for our nation's schools" ("Every Student Succeeds Act," n.d., para. 1). "NCLB put in place measures that exposed achievement gaps among traditionally underserved students and their peers and spurred an important national dialogue on education improvement." ("Every Student Succeeds Act," n.d., para. 16). ESSA legislation carries this same measure and focuses on subgroups and learning of all students. ESSA maintains an expectation of accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time ("Every Student Succeeds Act," n.d.). However, for the purpose of this study the researcher used NCLB accountability system as it correlates with the ex post data collected. Whether NCLB or ESSA is the school's guide, the focus on the role of leadership has not changed and leaders should assist teachers in how to effectively address meeting the needs of all students. Burdette (2010) "Policy changes in recent years have also shifted from an emphasis on compliance and procedures to accountability for student outcomes, which creates challenges for principals and teachers" (as cited in Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2014, p. 6)

NCLB and IDEA: An Obvious Disconnect

A noticeable tension is growing within schools because of their inability to fulfill both NCLB and IDEA mandates while still trying to focus on the whole child (Nagle, McLaughlin, Malmgren, & Nolet, 2007). Hardman and Nagle (2004) refer

to this phenomenon as "the 'second policy revolution' in special education, [which is] moving beyond access to improving results and establishing accountability for students with disabilities within the general education system" (as cited in Locson, 2009).

The requirements of NCLB have caused an identifiable shift to take place in special education. No Child Left Behind's requirements for students with disabilities are based on a faulty assumption concerning the power of special education to overcome those disabilities (Wasta, 2006). This logic assumes special education can transform student from being a student with a disability to a student who is proficient, which would be more of a definition of a slow learner. Locson (2009) states both NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA have recognized and mandated the need to include students with disabilities in high-stakes testing.

Although both NCLB and IDEA appear to promote inclusion of students with disabilities, there are many areas of NCLB that conflict with IDEA. Special Education and NCLB can co-exist, and students with disabilities can benefit from a law that clearly highlights the significant achievement gap that exists between certain groups of students in this country (Gloeckler & Daggett, n.d.). "Holding schools accountable for the performance of students in subgroups that have too often been ignored in the past (e.g. racial/ethnic, economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities) is a desirable feature of NCLB" (Linn, 2006, p. 15). However, the use of *common sense*, when it comes to the assessment tool for determining if schools make AYP in all subgroup areas, would help these two mandates co-exist with less confusion for educators. In this context,

common sense is defined as simple and sound judgment where there is not a conflict in NCLB and IDEA federal mandates. Schools are not making AYP primarily due to the special education subgroups.

Special Education subgroup AYP

As AYP results were reported, educators sounded the alarm that it is the special education students who are causing their schools to be labeled with the title of "in need of improvement" and that is not fair to the school (Gloecker & Daggett, n.d.). All students were required to be proficient by 2013-2014 for schools and districts to avoid sanctions (Linn, 2006). "What this requirement mandates is that students in the special education subgroup increase their proficiency at a faster rate than their general education peers to maintain full proficiency under the law" (Eckes & Swando, 2009, p. 2481).

Special education students not making AYP have become an increasing dilemma schools face. Eckes and Swando (2009) concluded that when students in the special education subgroup fail it causes the entire school to fail; it is not only unfair to the special education students, but also to the entire school district. Educators are working hard to increase the number of students making AYP. The notion of "closing the achievement gap" assumes that subgroup performance is solely the result of educational opportunity as opposed to intra-child factors (Nagle et al., 2007). With the premise that NCLB is here to stay, principals need to lead a cultural change where all students can learn. Because ESSA continues to place an emphasis on student subgroups, principals must build a sense of urgency that will help staff to move forward. "The simple truth is that only when we begin to assign

as much importance to being intentional about qualifying and quantifying the adult data points (cause data) in the school that we do collecting and poring over the student data (effect data) can we truly hope to create a system that has a significant impact on student achievement" (Jones, 2013, p. 49). Therefore, in creating a system for all students to learn, leaders are going to need a new set of skills different from the traditional skills they were taught.

Effective District and Site Leadership

When one enters into education, whether it is the position of a teacher, principal or superintendent, it is crucial to possess leadership skills. "Every person who enters the field of education has both an opportunity and an obligation to be a leader" (Marzano & DuFour, 2011, p. 1). The importance of site/district leadership is at an all-time high. "Effective leadership depends on support from district and state officials" (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 14). School leaders can no longer sit on the sidelines and let teachers shut their doors and teach the same way they always have taught in years past. Leaders are tasked with the job to facilitate and accommodate to constant change. Lezotte and McKee (2006) state, "Leadership arises from the effective use of a specific set of skills and behaviors that can be learned, practices and refined." Teachers need to be guided through this change with increasing achievement of all students in mind. Halpern (2004) states, "Rapid changes require new kinds of leadership- leaders who have the necessary knowledge to achieve a goal and leaders who can manage amid the uncertainty of nonstop change" (p. 126).

Principals are also responsible for implementing directives from district leadership. District administration set the vision for the district as well as the curriculum that will be taught at each site. District personnel play a viable role in the successfulness of site leaders. Marzano and Waters (2009) state there are five basic findings in their analysis of research in district leadership. These five findings are:

1) Ensuring collaborative goal setting;
2) Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction;
3) Creating board alignment with support of district goals;
4) Monitoring achievement and instructional goal;
5) Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction (p. 21).

These findings indicate the importance for principals in facilitating change because they are based at the school level, which then feeds into district-level achievement. As a district moves forward with the end goal of increasing student achievement in mind, it must shift from a philosophy of teaching to one of learning. The steps listed above will keep a school district headed in the right direction. It is quite a task in a large district to get all school sites on board with any new initiatives; and can be even more difficult for principals who facilitate this change at the school level. "For decades, educators have understood that we are all responsible for student learning" (Lambert, 2002, p. 37). Conley and Muncey (1999) suggested that teachers will need to bcome active in the decision-making process in order to assist leaders in improving student achievement that in the past was intended to be the sole responsibility of the principal (as cited in Espinoza, 2013). It is imperative principals

grow their staff and find teachers that can become leaders among the staff and the staff start holding each other accountable for student achievement (DuFour et al., 2006). "Hierarchical leadership, no matter how good, can never reach the masses but purposeful peers can" (Fullan, 2002, p. 84). Principals are well aware that having leaders within one's staff is an important aspect of an effective school. Critically, however, though this has been understood, according to many experts in the field of education, the education system has not made the progress it should have. Even though principals have understood the concept of supporting the development of leaders, the question one would ponder is whether principals have had the training to grow leaders effectively within their teaching staff.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) discover through effective schools research from the 1970s that an important characteristic of effective schools is the leadership provided. In fact, Marzano et al., (2005) suggest that the research from the 1970s on effective leadership explained that skills included specific behaviors such as "monitoring student progress specific learning goals, supervising teachers, promoting high expectations for student achievement and teacher performance, focusing on basic skills, and monitoring curriculum" (pg. 23). This concept from 1970, an effective way to evaluate teacher performance to ensure all students are learning has started getting attention in the last few years. Districts have had to adopt a teacher evaluation system approved by the State. States are under compulsion to mandate this adoption due to the poor performance of students on the State Tests. As Gardener (1993) wrote, "Every great leader is clearly teaching, and every great teacher is leading" (as cited in Marzano & DuFour, 2011, p. 2).

It is the duty of the principal to ensure that teachers are both teaching students and leading each other; whereas, likewise it is the job of district administrators to ensure the principals are both teaching and leading their staff (Marzano & Waters, 2009). This concept is necessary if principals are going to be instructional leaders with a focus on student achievement. Student achievement inclusive of ALL students is going to be necessary for a school to achieve and for the principal to be considered an effective leader. Principals cannot achieve this alone (Lambert, 2002). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) presents a renewed focus on school leadership and acknowledges the importance of school principals to school improvement and effective instruction (Public Law No. 114- 95, 2015; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). It appears it will take a dedicated staff and someone leading them effectively for a school to be successful.

Accountability

What appears to be missing in the current literature on high-stakes testing and special education is a focus on organizational change and the role of the educational leadership (Locson, 2009). One could argue that accountability is being redefined in special education and the need for leadership development to prepare administrators to successfully lead and manage new expectations for special education accountability is imperative. Principals have to be more than operational managers (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009). There is considerable research suggesting the need for principals to become instructional leaders in order to meet the high-demands of their increasingly complex role. "In order to do this, they will need a "theory of action" or proven strategy that will allow them to successfully navigate the storm (Lezotte &

McKee, 2006, p. 7). Lezotte and McKee (2006) explain, "in the current perfect storm of educational reform, each school and each school district of which it is a part needs a new system of continuous improvement that will lead to improved student learning, year after year, until every child can master specified standards" (p.9). There is no longer a school system that can afford to leave a managerial type principal in the administrative role that has drastically changed and can affect the accountability of the entire district (Trail, 2000).

Hanson (2003) argues that placing instructional accountability on the school, and the process of grading schools, as well as rewarding and punishing them based on their performance has become customary (as cited in Lyons & Algozzine, 2006). In opposition to this, principals have commented that it is the responsibility of the state to assist schools in the endeavor of meeting AYP. Nevertheless, with this responsibility shifting to the building level, it is critical that principals acknowledge and accept the importance of making AYP. Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2006) found that almost 99% of principals agreed that the principal is responsible for the education of all students in their school; principals are taking that responsibility seriously. Even though principals are taking the matter seriously, many do not have the "tools" they need to ensure success. An absence of special education preparation for school principals inhibits their ability to serve all students (Goo & Schwinn, 1997). Most often principals are not offered the training in special education they need to lead staff professional development for the scores of this particular subgroup to be increased. "Lack of awareness of the various types of disabilities and successful intervention strategies will limit the principal's

effectiveness (Cooner, Tochterman & Garrison-Wade, 2005, p. 3).

Additionally, Bravenec (1998) reported (as cited in Cooner, Tochterman & Garrison-Wade, 2005) that principals spent one-quarter of their workweek dealing with issues concerning special education programs. If principals are more prepared to deal with these issues, there is a possibility one would see an increase in student achievement. "Several studies (Cole-Henderson 2000; Bickman & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998, Witzers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003) have evaluated the relationship between principal and student achievement" (as cited in Wakeman, Browder, Flowers & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006, p. 153). These studies found that principals do have a direct and indirect relationship on student performance.

Leaders having knowledge and experience in special education may be helpful; however, being an excellent school leader may supersede needing this specific knowledge on special education. Characteristics of excellent leaders appear in all of the literature about effective schools stating leaders already know how to help kids achieve to high levels. Many times students with disabilities are left out of the equation and ignored in the data. Quenemoen (2008), referred to a large-scale case study, completed in 2004 by the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts. This study, unique in its focus on students with disabilities, shows these students benefit from the same things that benefit students without disabilities. Excellent leaders do not see special education as a separate issue, but a concerning challenge within the data (Quenemoen, 2008).

"To achieve AYP, effective leadership preparation must become a national priority" (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walter-Thomas, 2004, pg. 3). Laskey and

Karge (2009) state their data clearly defines the need for increased special education training of principals in the area of special education. Principals have varied leadership and managerial responsibilities as they carry out their roles. It is crucial principals have the background knowledge to lead training at their sites and hold teachers accountable. There appears to be a lack of literature regarding principals being well trained in the area of special education and its effect on testing. Principals in schools, evaluated by Rick Dufour and colleagues (2010), that had raised the bar and closed the achievement gap between regular education and subgroups had a "loose-tight" leadership. "They were not laissez-fair leaders who allowed individuals to establish personal kingdoms; but rather; they articulated clear parameters and priorities" (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010, p. 190). This type of leadership allows for autonomy with boundaries (Dufour et al., 2010). Leading a school in this manner would leave one to believe this leadership style has the largest impact on closing the gap. Conversely, it stated, "without a solid understanding of IDEA and NCLB, principals cannot administer special education programs effectively (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; NAESP, 2001a; Valente, 1998; as cited in Dipaola & Walther-Thomas (2003, p,11). School leaders lack the knowledge necessary to deal with the many aspects special education programs encompass and this ultimately places special education teachers, programs, and students with disabilities at a clear disadvantage (Jesteadt, 2012). Wakeman, Browder, Flowers and Ahlgrim-Delzell, (2006) recommended, "Future research is needed on the impact of training principals in special education on AYP." Additionally, this research would need to include if this training would be enough for

principals to assist teachers with closing the achievement gap between regular and special education students.

Hiring of Site Level Administrators

Districts may need to consider hiring principals who can be more than just managers. "Traditionally, the principal resembled the middle manager suggested in Williams Whyte's 1950's classic, *The Organizational Man,* --an overseer of buses, boilers, and books" (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 4). A dramatic change in the principal's role is noticed in a report by Wallace Foundation (2012), "they have to be (or become) leaders of learning who can develop a team delivering effective instruction" (p. 4). The Wallace Foundation (2012) also suggests that there are five key responsibilities principals must focus on to become a leader of the 21st century (p.4):

- Shaping a vision of academic success for ALL students based on high standards
- Creating a climate hospitable to education
- Cultivating leadership in others
- Improving instruction
- Managing people, data, and processes (p.4)

It is important these responsibilities be carried out with fidelity. All five of these responsibilities must happen simultaneously, one without the other will not produce the changed needed to have an achieving school. "It's hard to carry out a vision of student success, for example, if the school climate is characterized by student disengagement or teachers don't know what instructional methods work best for their

students, or test data are clumsily analyzed. When all five tasks are well carried out, then leadership is at work" (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 5). There are many leadership theories but for the purpose of this study, the author will delve into the significance of transactional and transformational leadership theory.

Leadership Theories and School Leadership

There is a plethora of research on leadership theories and most of them have been researched in combination with school leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003; Espinoza, 2013; Luna, 2011; Okyere, 2014; Rose, 2006; Smith & Bell, April 2011). " Charry (2012) noted that scholarly interest in leadership increased significantly during the early part of the twentieth century and identified eight major leadership theories" (as cited in Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015, para. 6). Sevkusic et al. (2010) state, however, that some leaders, who engage in transformational and transactional leadership, have a strong base in educational research as well, thus allowing fruitful contextualization in the educational setting. Leadership theory can provide much insight into the traits necessary for a principal to perform as an effective leader. "Leadership theory seeks to identify and predict which leadership characteristics are most effect and why" (Okyere, 2014, para. 4). Hence, for the purpose of this study, the author will focus on Transactional and Transformational leadership theories.

Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional Leadership Theory is where the leader motivates through a reward and consequence model ("Leadership: Learn to lead change," n.d.). Essentially, an exchange takes place between the leader and their followers.

"Transactional leaders determine what subordinates need to do in order for the leader to achieve their own and organizational objectives" (Luna, 2011, p. 9). Sergiovanni (2004) suggests transactional leadership creates an environment to offer positive rewards such as bonus pay or better salaries for jobs well done since more productive performance enhances the quality of job. Ruggeri (2009, as cited in Ashby, 2014) states performance awards are commonly used as motivators and are often used as effective transactional exchanges in motivating employee productivity levels. "Transactional leadership provides the groundwork to move the school forward, as it ensures that the school is viewed as successful when subjected to external measurement criteria" (Smith & Bell, April 20, p. 61).

According to Glanz (2007), "adherence to inspectional and faultfinding supervision under the guise of standards-based and other practices purpose is instilled within the organization and so on" (as cited in Rose, 2006). Commitments remain short-term, and self-interests are underscored (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This leadership style builds an organization whose primary focus is not the organization. Bass and Riggio (2006) suggest individual rewards greatly outweigh the concern for the larger organization. "This creates an everyman for himself type of culture and has serious consequences for the improvement of teaching and student achievement" (As cited in Luna, 2011, p. 9). All the changes in leadership expectations indicate that the day-to-day management of schools is no longer effective, and the top-down practice of transactional leadership may no longer be enough, which is evident in Luna's (2011) study. "Therefore, transformational leadership is another form or way of leading an organization" (Luna, 2011, p. 9).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational leaders go beyond just managing the day-to-day business. "The Transformational Leadership Theory states that this process is one in which a person interacts with others and is able to create a solid relationship that results in a high percentage of trust, that will later result in an increase of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in both leaders and followers" ("Leadership: Learn to lead change," n.d., para. 6). This type of leadership will create a culture in which teamwork ensures all students are achieving. "Mutual interests are shared along with a sense of shared fates and interdependence of leaders and followers" (Bass & Riggio, 2006 p.54). This type of leadership will have a long-term effect on the organization. (Denmark, 2012, para. 6) explains, "Transformational leaders however, make lasting, widespread improvement by following a process that ensures all parts of the school or system are connected and share a common purpose (systems thinking). "Finally, we have found that transformational organizational cultures are more likely to bring about quality improvement" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 56).

Principals who have worked on building a professional learning community focused on building relationships and creating collaborative teams would be considered a transformational leader. "They also provide educational resources that can offer a framework that will assist team members in understanding the changes to be made" (Kaslow & Falender, 2012, p. 49). When a school or district develops a transformational culture, there is a sense of purpose and a feeling of family" (Bass &

Riggio, 2006, p. 103). This type of culture is not only concerned with performance, but with the development of followers becoming leaders. Growing leaders is so important to the never-ending work that challenges schools on a daily basis as Nichols (2008) states leadership must be a shared, community undertaking

Combination of Transactional and Transformational Theories

There is an overabundance of theories, studies, and articles on effective leadership styles. After reviewing the literature, it appears that it may take a balance of leadership styles to lead a school effectively. According to Mintzeberg (2004), effective leadership energizes people to make effective decisions and to make improvements in their organization (as cited in Pepper, 2010, p. 49). An instructional leader who can manage and balance transactional and transformational leadership traits would seem to be the most effective leader in schools today where the focus is mostly on raising student test scores.

"By perfecting the combination of transformational and transactional leadership styles, principals allow the faculty and staff to share their ideas, knowledge, and expertise in making decisions which focus on improving instruction and curriculum toward a shared vision" (Pepper, 2010, p. 50). When principals take advantage of teacher leaders on their staff they begin to build capacity in their buildings creating teachers as leaders. Existing experts on staff can assist in leading a staff forward faster and with less push back opposed to a top-down leadership. "The focus is on developing a collegial atmosphere in which teachers can freely share effective practices with each other, observe on another's classroom and receive focused feedback on their teaching strategies" (Marzano et al., 2011). This approach

assists in keeping sight of the end goal-- enhancing students' well-being and achievement as part of the evaluation process. "The ultimate criterion for expert performance in the classroom is student achievement" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 8). Otherwise, it would be a moot point.

In layman terms, "Leaders are expected to have the answers and to take care of whatever gets in the way of doing what teachers love most—working with kids" (Wagner et al., 2006, Loc 787). However, teaching is much bigger job than just working with kids. Bolman & Deal (2002) established, "The most important responsibility of school leaders is not to answer every question but serve a deeper, more powerful and more durable role." A principal must investigate much deeper within the actual effectiveness of individual teachers. All teachers teach but the evaluation must look deeper to see if students actually learned the material being taught. "A teacher may have taught an apparently coherent and thoughtful lesson, but the real question is what students know and are able to do as a result of the lesson" (Wagner et al., 2006, Loc 1126). Effective supervision must be "frequent, rigorous, and entirely focused on the improvement of instruction" (Wagner et al., 2006, Loc 1127). This is a more informative and less summative approach.

Blase and Blase (1998) stated that effective instructional leaders realize that the majority of teachers expand their range only with carefully designed support and assistance (as cited in Southworth, 2002, p. 76). For this reason, it is crucial for a principal to show empathy and build credibility with teachers. A teaching and learning school is "the most hospitable environment for the exercise for instructional leadership….because professional cultures characterized by openness, trust and

security appear to be the ones where teachers fell confident to become learners" (Southworth, 2002, p. 78). "In a world where more and more enterprises are interested in developing themselves as learning organizations, it is time for school leaders to present themselves as leaders of teachers par excellence" (Southworth, 2002, p. 93). There are many leadership theories yet it is difficult to determine the "one style" that is most effective. No matter what theory or category researchers consider the most successful, one thing is for certain behind every successful school is an effective leader.

The School Site Administrator

Goal setting

As principals focus on specific goals, perhaps these goals should align with district goals. "The principal's role is to ensure that his school adopts school goals that are clear, measurable school-level equivalents of the district's goals" (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 96). It is critical for the principal to communicate these goals to all stakeholders and for all leaders to have a mission and vision statement. As Marzano and Waters (2009) explain, "Effective district leaders ensure that the collaborative goal-setting process results in non-negotiable goals (goals that all staff members must act on) in at least two areas: (1) student achievement and (2) classroom instruction" (p. 6). All staff members need to be aware of the goals and have an action plan in place to create site and individual goals. This process needs to include all stakeholders (Vollmer, 2010), which assists in obtaining "buy-in." Once the leader has buy-in from the majority of stakeholders attaining goals will be a much easier task (Doolittle, Studeck, & Rattigan, 2008).

Evaluation Process of the Plan

The evaluation process was one-step in the school improvement process that was inclusive only in a small portion of the reviewed literature. The researcher was astonished by the fact that this particular step was not more recognized when it seems to be a crucial step in the effectiveness of the plan. The final step, the "plan review," (ECAR, 2001) is probably one of the most important steps that must not be forgotten. Dolence (2004) refers to this step as the continuous self-study stating, "Continuous self-study recognizes the need to constantly assess organizational performance." "Plan Review is required constantly to improve the plan and ensure its execution" (Educause Center for Applied Research [ECAR], 2001). Similar to the expectation of a teacher in the classroom, the importance of frequent assessments to check for student mastery, a strategic planning committee must assess for effectiveness and adjust the plan accordingly; it is suggested this could be done through surveys, review meetings, data collection, and personal observations (ECAR, 2001). Not including all stakeholders in this process would be negligent; "building commitment through broad stakeholder engagement is an increasingly important element of the strategic planning process" (Posey, 2013, p.1.). "It is possible that if partnership building is presented as a core element of the education process and a fundamental means of community involvement in schooling, it is more likely that all children in our communities will have access to what they need to learn to fully and constructively participate in their society" (Hands, 2010).

The Environment

Order is also important to a school's success. There is a safety net built in a school where order exists. Principals have almost had to become police officers. Trail (2000) suggests:

> This role shouldn't be seen as a mandate for a principal to *enforce* rules. Rather, principals work to create a safe school environment, to make their presence known by "walking their beats," and to "keep the peace" through conflict-resolution and mediation. A principal's skill in promoting healthy, productive interactions among the staff is valuable, particularly in making sure that both negative and positive feedback is heard and considered, effectively giving teachers "power" to participate in decision making (p.8).

To establish order, the school and individual classrooms need rules and procedures. Marzano (2007) suggests the importance of establishing school rules and procedures that need to be mentioned in virtually every discussion of effective classroom management. "In most organizations, what gets monitored gets done" (DuFour & DuFour, 2012, p.45). An important role of the leader is to ensure the school and classrooms have rules and procedures in place. There are five action steps to get the desired effect:

1. Organize the classroom for effective teaching and learning;
2. Establish a small set of rules and procedures;
3. Interact with students about school and classroom rules and procedures;
4. Periodically review the rules and procedures and make changes as necessary;
5. Use classroom meetings (Marzano, 2007).

"Leaders must remember that no improvements can fully flourish within a school that does not ensure both physical and emotional security for students" (Williams, 2012, p. 3). It is critical for students to have a safe and secure environment. The Rigor and Relevance Framework created by International Center for Leadership Education addressed the value of relationships. Studies indicate that without the relationship, the rigor and relevance do not make a difference. "As principal, pulling together the often-complex pieces of a physically secure and emotionally supportive environment is one of the principal's most important responsibilities" (Williams, 2012, p. 57).

Relationships

Garcia and Cottrell (2002) published a book called, *Listen up, Teacher*! One question interviewers asked students: "Is it important for you to have a good relationship with your teacher?" One student responded, "Developing relationships with us does not mean that you have to be our friend (as in buddy). We want a relationship with you based on mutual respect, fairness, firmness and your willingness to lead us to fulfill our potential" (Garcia & Cottrell, 2002, p. 30). Garcia and Cottrell (2002) reported

> Another student stated, I know that it is probably not easy to establish a relationship with every student that you teach, but make an effort. Some of us are harder to get to know, and some of us will pretend that we do not care. However, the truth is that every student needs and likes to feel that they matter. When this happens, great things happen for and to kids. (p. 32).

Relationships are established through consistency and fairness. Relationship building helps to create order. When principals create a culture that is physically and emotionally safe it changes the overall culture of a school. It is the principal's responsibility to monitor and hold teachers accountable for a consistent culture in each of their classrooms. The district office leadership's consideration to set this as an expectation for principals could be essential for a long-term change in culture. "Ultimately, a culture of making every moment count and of continually improving practice is not an end in itself; it matters insofar as it prepares student to be fully formed individuals"(Bambrick-Santoyo, Lemov, & Peiser, 2012, p. 169).

School Climate

An important role of the principal is to create a school climate that is conducive to learning. When students and teachers do not feel safe in their environment, learning can be virtually impossible. Again, the principal cannot do this job alone (Vollmer, 2010). It takes collaboration from the entire school community to make this happen. A safe school starts with healthy relationships amongst staff and teacher-student relationships, as well. Training and support for teachers in this area are essential. Training and support for teachers implementing interventions to build relationships have a beneficial impact on learning, especially with at-risk students due to low academic achievement (Hughes & Wu, 2012, p 362).

There are many professional development opportunities regarding building relationships. "Part of William Daggett's research on Rigor, Relevance Framework is a focus on relationships" (Daggett, 2005, p. 2). Daggett (2005) suggests rigor and relevance cannot happen without relationships in place. A typical example is in a

situation where a student is sent to the office because he is failing in one teacher's classroom and upon investigation, the principal discovers that the student is passing his other classes. When the student is asked, "Why?" The student responds that he/she does not like the teacher is a simple example of how the lack of relationship can negatively influence student achievement. Ryan states, "teacher-student relationships have an impact on the academic self-esteem of students (as cited in Gallagher, n.d., p. 1)

Continuous Learning

Staying abreast of the latest research- based practices will help educators to be continuous learners. However, teachers are so busy teaching, perhaps it should be the leader's job to convey best practices to his/her faculty. Marzano & Waters (2009) describe Intellectual Stimulation as the act of the principal making the teachers aware of the latest research and theories on teaching and learning and the implication of knowledge, insights, and practices on student achievement. District leaders need to assist principals with readily available resources. "This would include research and theory regarding the advantages of a school being part of a high-reliability organization as opposed to operating as an autonomous unit (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 97).

For principals to effectively evaluate teachers, a research-based system must be in place for evaluations to change practice. "We believe that the face of teacher supervision and evaluation is changing rapidly in K-12 education in the United States" (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011, p. 108). There is much research on effective practices and principals must get this research in the hands of teachers. In

order for a school leader to bring the best practices to faculty and staff, they must have knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; as well as "principals must possess in-depth knowledge of the district's goals and how these goals affect the lives teachers" (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Excluding the teacher, the principal exists as the most powerful factor affecting student performance (Lynch, 2012). "An increased emphasis on student and school performance, as measured by standardized assessment, has magnified the pressure for ALL students to obtain proficient levels of academic performance" (Lynch, 2012, p. 41). The pressure of educating all students has continued to rise. At one time, principals only had to focus on the general education population and students in different subgroups were simply added into the average. Ignoring of subgroups no longer holds true. The role of principal continues to expand. It is important that the principal's knowledge, in the area of curriculum and assessment for all students, continues to grow. "Porter, Murphy, Goldring, Elliot, Polikoff and May suggest there are six crucial steps that a principal must follow in order to carry out his/her leadership responsibilities: (a) planning, (b) implementing, (c) supporting, (d) advocating, (e) communicating, (f) monitoring" (as cited in Lynch, 2012, p 42).

Development of Site Leadership

Leithwood has been studying and developing school leadership research for over forty years and stresses that a key factor for these leaders is the availability of opportunities to "continuously discuss and examine programs and practices to incorporate feedback…to nurture the network…and otherwise act as a steward of the mission" (as cited in Joyce, 2009, p. 496). Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001)

presented the view that teachers can have a powerful effect on students, even when the school does not. If teachers can have a profound impact on student achievement, then it seems that school leaders will need to provide teachers with the necessary tools to achieve the goal.

The final key point that Marzano and Waters (2009) made is the importance of the leader being directly involved in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Odden and Archibald write:

> It should come as no surprise that one result of the multiplicity of activities (in a district that demonstrated dramatic gains in student achievement) was a collaborative, professional culture…Leaders understood that the way to attain their ambitious goals was developing a collaborative and professional school culture, what is commonly called a 'professional learning community' today" (as cited in Marzano & DuFour, 2011, p. 27).

One of the most effective ways to guarantee consistent involvement is to create a Professional Learning Community (PLC). "The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 3).

Site Level Professional Learning Communities

Once PLCs are in place at the site level, school leaders can start scrutinizing the current work they are doing. "A corollary assumption is that if the organization is to become more effective in helping all students learn, the adults in the organization must also continue learning. Therefore, structures are created to ensure staff members engage in job-embedded learning as a part of their routine work

practices" (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 3). The principal must be actively involved in these meetings, especially at the beginning. After the PLCs are properly functioning, the principal should become less of a leader/facilitator in these meetings and instead, take more of an observer's role that will continue to establish accountability. Thus, PLCs should be able to function without the leader. When each individual teacher is working with his/her colleagues to ensure all students are learning, then student achievement will rise.

In addition, as a part of creating a climate hospitable to education, principals need to make sure the focus is on learning, not just teaching (DuFour et al., 2006). Schools need to become a learning community where the subject of the majority of the casual conversation revolves around learning (DuFour et al., 2006). To assimilate this kind of climate, principals must combat teacher isolation, closed doors, negativism, defeatism, and teacher resistance (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Respect and inclusiveness for every member of the school community are essential as Portin, Schneider, DuArmond, and Gundlach, (2003) determined that having "an upbeat, welcoming, solution-oriented, no-blame, professional environment with efforts to involve staff and students in a variety of activities is part of the effort in creating a hospitable environment" (as cited in Wallace Foundation, 2012). It is clearly stated "Professional learning communities set out to restore and increase the passion of teachers by not only reminding them of the moral purpose of their work but also by creating the conditions that allow them to do that work successfully" (DuFour et al., 2006 p. 203). (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010)

Site Leaders – Leading by Example

"Leaders must realize the most important element in communicating is congruency between their actions and their words. " School leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning, according to research" (Wallace Foundation, 2016). "It is not essential that leaders are eloquent or clever; it is imperative, however, they demonstrate consistency between what they say and what they do"(DuFour et al., 2006, p. 28). In conclusion, the relationship between site/district leadership is crucial (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). A system to monitor and evaluate site leadership, a system for site leaders to monitor teachers effectively, and to establish Professional Learning Communities has to be a priority for district leaders.

> Striking the right balance between district direction and school support, and superior execution of the responsibilities and practices we have presented, may be the difference between a failed system and one that delivers on the promise of opportunity and hope for all children through high-reliability education"(Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 116).

Supervision of Staff

"Since the 21st century, emphasis has shifted from supervision to evaluation as well as from teacher behavior to student achievement" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 25). Weisberg, Sexton, and Mulhern, (2009) did a study entitled *The Widget Effect;* it heavily criticized teacher evaluation practices in the United States. The report explained its unusual name in the following manner (as cited in Marzano et al (2011):

> The failure of evaluation systems to provide accurate and credible information about individual teacher's instructional performance sustains and reinforces a phenomenon that we have come to call **The Widget Effect**. The Widget Effect describes the tendency of the school district to assume classroom effectiveness is the same from teacher to teacher. This decades-old fallacy fosters an environment in which teachers cease to be understood as individual professionals, but rather as interchangeable parts. In its denial of individual strengths and weaknesses it is deeply disrespectful to teachers; in its indifference to instructional effectiveness, it gambles with the lives of students" (as cited in Marzano et al., 2011, p. 26).

A key component of effective leadership is the ability to supervise. It is the responsibility of the school leader to supervise instruction in a manner that will improve instructional practices and ultimately increase student achievement.

School Vision

Shaping a school vision to reflect the belief that all students can learn while maintaining high expectations, is not an easy task. It is an even harder task to shift the entire staff's actual belief that all students can learn. All stakeholders need to focus on the same goals. "Schools developing a common mission and vision aimed at improving student achievement contributed to school success" (Doolittle, Studeck, & Rattigan, 2008, p. 309). The principal must guide the vision to include the success of ALL students. "Although they say it in different ways, researchers who have examined educational leadership agree that effective principals are responsible for establishing a school-wide vision of commitment to high standards and the success

of all students" (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 5). Creating a shared vision around state standards is road to success for all students achieving at a higher level and "As the Cheshire cat pointed out to Alice, if you don't know where you are going, any road will lead you there"(Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 6).

Building Capacity

Wallace's (2012) research suggests cultivating leaders is another responsibility of the district staff. According to the research from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto, "the more willing principals spread leadership around, the better for the students" Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 7). Shared leadership is vital to school improvement and the success of all students. "Today's effective principal constructs a shared vision with members of the school community, convenes the conversations, insists on a student learning focus, evokes and supports leadership in others, models and participates in collaborative practices, helps pose the questions and facilitates dialogue that addresses the confounding issues of practice"(Lambert, 2002, p. 39). By growing leaders among their own staff, the principal can build capacity. It is the principal's job to create an environment that focuses on student achievement, regardless of their presence or absence in the building. This type of environment is considered a Professional Learning Community (PLC). "A PLC is composed of collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve a common goal linked to the purpose of learning for all (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 3).

Wallace's research (2012) indicated that improvement of instruction is a major responsibility of the principal. Principals start to focus on the quality of instruction

and “at the heart of the transformation effort involved creating direct, personal relationships between individual central office administrators and school principals specifically focused on helping every school principal become a stronger instructional leader (Honig et al., 2010, p. 5). There must be frequent visits in the classroom and the principal must role model the importance of instruction through daily actions (Marzano et al., 2011). Frequent walkthroughs in classrooms, if followed by feedback, can assist in changing the focus from teaching to learning. “ Reasons for conducting walkthroughs are many: frequent observations of teachers lower their apprehension making formal observations more effective; the more supervisors and instructional coaches in classrooms assist in identification of patterns of instructional practices in a school” (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 57). There is no one strategy that works for all children. Marzano (2009) stated:

> Educators must always look to whether a particular strategy is producing the desired results as opposed to simply assuming that a strategy is being used, positive results will ensue. If a strategy does not appear to be working well, educators must adapt the strategy as needed or use other strategies. The concept of trial and error is another reason why teachers should not be required to use specific strategies. Since strategies are not guaranteed to work, teachers must have the freedom and flexibility to adapt or try something different when student learning isn’t forthcoming” (as cited in Marzano & DuFour, 2011, p. 142).

Because there is not an approach of one-size fits all, it is necessary for the principal to provide teachers with an easily accessible toolkit. A toolkit of resources

will give teachers a plethora of researched-based strategies at hand. One could do a complete dissertation on the importance of improving instruction. The author will sum up by saying it is the educator's job to respond when students are not learning (Marzano, 2007). Karen Chenoweth was quoted, "highly effective schools succeed where others fail because they ruthlessly organize themselves around one thing: helping students learn a great deal." This seems too simple an explanation; "however by focusing on student learning and then creating structures that support learning, these schools have drastically departed from the traditional organizational patterns of American Schools" (Marzano & DuFour, 2011, p. 171).

The last responsibility the Wallace Research (2012) found to be of importance in district oversight was the managing of people, data, and processes that foster school improvement. There are many things that can contribute to school improvement. "When it comes to data, effective principals try to draw the most from statistics and evidence" (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 12). Much of the literature explains that better, more sustainable decisions, and goals can be made when leaders use data (Corrigan, Grove, & Vincent, 2011, p. 84). "Effective leaders view data as a means not only to pinpoint problems but to understand their nature and causes" (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 12). The successful principal has a process in place for how teachers use data to guide their teaching. Data collection has to be intentional and organized (Corrigan et al., 2011). Feedback from assessments or results from a survey are examples of data utilized in the school improvement process, in addition to state test results. "Schools that hope to create a culture of

continuous improvement should provide every teacher with results from frequent, common formative assessments on a timely basis" (DuFour et al., 2006, p. 158).

Jesteadt (2012) focused on principals' knowledge of policy and if it matters where leadership is concerned. While the study expanded the understanding of principals' knowledge of special education policies and procedures through the social justice and ethical reasoning frameworks, Jesteadt stated, "There is, as will always be the case, more work to be done!" (p. 123). Jesteadt study did not examine the data to determine if principals' knowledge, years of experience or certification had an impact on student achievement. Student achievement is the primary indicator of measuring the effectiveness of the principals. Without effective principals, transforming failing schools will be next to impossible; however with an "effective principal in every school comes promise" (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 14).

Summary

It was apparent in the literature there is a true disconnect between IDEA and NCLB. The mandates outlined in the NCLB have made it very difficult for schools to meet the target scores and show adequate yearly progress in the area of special education. Even with the many changes from NCLB to ESSS, one aspect remaining the same in both legislations was the focus on subgroup performance. The mandate of closing the achievement gap is still a vital part of ESSA. In order to meet this demand, the responsibility has fallen on district and site leadership, but ultimately on the principal of the building. It is crucial for principals to find, hire and retain effective special education teachers for students to achieve. The literature failed to show a connection between principals knowledge and background and student

achievement.

Schulze (2008) emphasized that the question whether special education background has an impact on principal leadership has not yet been resolved. Van Horn (2011) from her research on "The Principal's Role in Managing Special Education" reported, "I was unable to find any research comparing principals with and without backgrounds in special education" (p. 135). Hence, the framework for this study was couched by the lack of evidence in the literature as to whether a school is successful or not successful in the area of special education based on principals' years of experience, certification and overall knowledge of special education.

Chapter 3

Design of Study

Introduction

The subgroup of special education is not meeting the academic performance index target score set by NCLB and is the primary cause for Oklahoma schools failing to meet AYP (Oklahoma State Department of Education, n.d.). Previous research has not specifically examined the impact that principals have on the academic success of special education students based on the principals' knowledge, certification, and years of experience. This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the impact that principals have on the academic success of special education students based on their knowledge, certification, and years of experience.

The researcher analyzed the impact on student achievement based on different variables pertaining to principals. "If the research problem calls for (a) the identification of factors that influence an outcome, (b) the utility of an intervention, or (c) understanding the best predictors of outcomes, then a quantitative approach is the best" (Creswell, 2009, p. 18). This study tested hypotheses through use of inferential analyses. Finally, the researcher considered the audience, a necessity reinforced by Rovai, Baker, and Ponton (2014). If a researcher were conducting the experiment for the purpose of publication, the approach most generally accepted in the field and typically supported would be a wise choice for the researcher. "The experiences of the audience with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method studies can shape the decision made about this choice" (Creswell, 2009, p. 19). In the case of an educational study, any of the above methods would be acceptable, so the

researcher considered the purpose of the study, the instrument being used and other data collected to determine the appropriate method. "According to Gall, Gall, and Borg, the primary focus of quantitative research is to explain aspects of reality by collecting numerical data on observable behaviors or samples and statistically analyze the data" (as cited in Burton, 2008, p. 89). The researcher substituted the degree of rich data present within a qualitative study for a level of statistical certainty that the hypothesized relationships were not established by pure chance (Pagano, 2009). After careful consideration of all the literature, a quantitative study appeared to be most appropriate.

This study employed a non-experimental survey research design through use a survey instrument that included 22 standardized questions and 18 hypothetical scenarios to collect the quantitative data. Participants were not assigned to treatment and control groups, and were not administered a pretest or posttest. An email survey that was previously tested was utilized to solicit information from principals about their certification, years of experience and overall knowledge in the area of special education. However, web survey response rates are low, with around 11% returned, which threatens the efficiency of the web survey (Jin, 2011). " In comparison to mail surveys, web surveys may yield lower response rates due to the following basic reasons: while a paper-based questionnaire is likely to remain on a respondent's desk and act as a continuous reminder, this is not the case with web questionnaires, especially those with an email invitation" (Manfreda, Bosnjak, Bozen-Blozano, Haas, & Vehovar, 2008, p. 82). A follow-up contact was necessary to achieve a higher response rate. The researcher sent out a follow-up email after the survey was

sent out. After one week, the researcher sent out another reminder about the significance of the study and reminded the recipient to fill out the survey. After the second week, the researcher sent another email to recipients requesting participation. The researcher used all leads and personal contacts in an attempt to maximize the response rate. For each survey subsequently returned, the researcher gathered three or more years of publicly available ex post testing data, from each respondent principal's school. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 24.0 for Windows, a statistics program, was utilized for the data analysis.

Research Questions

The intention of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between principals' knowledge in special education, certification and years of experience, and the disparity of educational growth of special education students as compared to regular education students on the Oklahoma State Achievement test. The following research questions guided this study:

- **Research Question 1:** Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal knowledge of special education and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?
- **Research Question 2:** Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal administrative experience and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?

- **Research Question 3:** Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal certification and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?

Research Hypotheses

The current study hypothesized that there is a statistically significant relationship of special education students' performance on the OCCT/ EOI based on principal knowledge, certification or years of experience, as follows:

- Null 1: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal knowledge of special education.
- Alternative 1: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special education and regular education students and principal knowledge of special education.
- Null 2: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in achievement scores on the between special and regular education students and principal knowledge of special education.
- Alternative 2: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal knowledge of special
- Null 3: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal administrative experience.

- Alternative 3: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal administrative experience.

Population

The study participants were school principals in five urban/suburban school districts in Oklahoma. These districts consisted of 138 school sites that house grade 3 or higher. Principals of these schools were the target sample population because of similar demographic characteristics and district size. All districts were 6A sized suburban districts on the outskirt of a large urban district. All districts utilized in the study had a variety of ethnicities, poverty levels, and special education populations.

The survey instrument was re-created into Google Forms, allowing all responses to be collected on an Excel spreadsheet. The survey instrument collected information about principal's certification, knowledge of special education, and years of experience as well as information about their particular site. Data about the school lead by each respondent principal were collected from each school's district office. Among these data were the school API Report, test scores, and AYP.

There were 138 surveys disseminated to potential respondents, which was necessary because of typically small response rates. A total of 62 principals responded to the survey. Of these, eleven respondents had less than three years of experience as a principal and were omitted, resulting in a final study sample of 51 principals. The final response rate was 36.96%. According to Jin (2011) web survey response rates are fairly low (typically around 11%), which threatens the efficiency of the web survey. Though the response rate in the present study was higher than

11%, the resultant sample size (N= 51) may lack sufficient statistical power to infer relationships in the population.

The participants in the study were mostly female representing 64.7% and 35.3% were males. Most participants (74.2%) only had their Masters; while 13.7% had 30+ hours over their Masters and 11.8% had their doctorates. K-5 principals were responsible for 64.7% of the surveys returned. Participants from schools with an average daily attendance between 0-999 accounted for 82.3% of the returned surveys. Only 13.7% of principals surveyed had certification in the area of special education.

Instrumentation

In addition to collecting demographic information, the researcher utilized a two-part survey from a study conducted in 2012 by Jesteadt (2012). This instrument was developed, piloted, and validated by the author and is titled Principals' Knowledge of Special Education Policies and Procedures (PKSE). The author of the PKSE was contacted, and the researcher was granted to use the survey as a part of this study (See Appendix A).

The survey consisted of 22 questions that gather information about the principals' background, their professional development, and course work specific to special education. "The second portion consisted of 18 hypothetical scenarios with four answer choices provided. For each question, there was one correct and two incorrect and a response that indicated the topic was not learned" (Jesteadt, 2012, p. 72). For the purpose of this study, one answer was correct; all other answers were considered incorrect indicating the subject did not learn the topic. After each of

these questions, the survey included a question to probe into the perceived source by which the administrator learned the topic.

As surveys were being returned from principals the researcher started collecting AYP and API scores for each of their school sites based on the years the principal reported working at a specific site. This information was collected at the principal's District office.

Validity/Reliability

The survey was previously tested for validity, usability, and the feedback from these tests indicated that changes to the survey were not necessary. Jesteadt (2012) confirms that the instrument is valid. "The survey was submitted to six experts in the field of special education, who were well-versed in special education law and who were able to assess the clarity, correctness, and content validity of the survey" (Jesteadt, 2012, p. 72). The survey was also tested for usability. Feedback from this validity test indicated that no changes were necessary. "The survey was piloted with a group of five district employees, who had served as school principals, in the last two years" (Jesteadt, 2012, p. 74). The data was collected using the researcher's method for verifying reliability and validity of the survey. Jesteadt (2012,) indicated: "The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 19.0 was used to establish this estimate of internal consistency. It was determined that Cronbach's alpha reliability statistic for this instrument was .723" (p. 74).

"While Gay (1987) states that reliability coefficients greater than .90 are acceptable for any instrument, and cautions that lower coefficients are often

acceptable with new instruments, at least initially" as cited in Jesteadt (2012). Tavakol and Dennick (2011) quotes Nunnally J. & Berstein L, Bland J & Altman D., DeVillis R, as saying "there are different reports about the acceptable values of alpha, ranging from 0.70 to 0.95" (p.54). Further, George and Mallery's research (as cited in Jesteadt, 2003), agreed the commonly accepted rule of thumb for describing internal consistency, whereas alphas equal or greater than .7 are acceptable for judging the acceptability of the alpha. Based on the findings from Jesteadt (2012), the researcher is confident that the survey has endured through each phase of analysis to confirm its reliability and validity and is highly content in using the survey.

Documents

After the surveys from the principals were returned, the researcher collected ex post data from District office of each of the school sites. The survey collected the name of the school site to identify which survey linked to which school in order for the information to be gathered. For each school led by a principal who responded to the survey, the researcher collected AYP and API data for the years that the principal reported they were at that specific site. These data were collected, and scores were added into an excel document in order for the researcher to effectively and efficiently work with the data.

Variables

Independent variables used for this study were the principals' years of experience, certification, and knowledge of special education. Principals self-reported their exact years of experience and the variable was treated as a continuous

measurement. The certification portion of the survey included the principals' level of degree as well as if they possess certification in special education or not. Certification information was dummy coded by zero or one. Knowledge of special education was guided by coursework taken, and a mini-test as part of the survey assisted in the evaluation of the principal's knowledge of special education. The test measured the level of knowledge a principal has in the area of special education and the variable was treated as a continuous measurement. The dependent variable used in this study was the gap between regular education students and special education students on the State tests, OCCT/ EOI. The gaps were calculated by the difference in the API score for regular education and special education students. The achievement gap was treated as a continuous level measurement. Hence, the researcher examined the impact the independent variable had on the dependent variable to explain the gap existing at some schools and not others. The researcher was optimistic that the outcome of this research would influence and drive decision being made on training needed for principals to make certain all students are successful.

Data Analysis

The raw survey responses and archival data were entered into SPSS version 24.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were utilized to examine the trends of the nominal and continuous level variables. Participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria were subsequently removed.

To address the three research questions, a multiple linear regression was used to examine the predictive relationship between principal knowledge, years of

experience, special education certification, and achievement gap scores. A multiple linear regression is an appropriate statistical analysis when assessing the predictive relationship between a group of predictors and a continuous criterion variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The predictor variables corresponded to principal knowledge, years of experience, and special education certification. Principal knowledge and years of experience were treated as continuous level variables. Special education certification was treated as a dichotomous nominal level variable. The continuous dependent variable corresponded to achievement gap scores. Prior to analysis, the assumption of normality and homoscedasticity were assessed by examination of scatterplots. The *F* test was used to make the overall determination of whether the predictor variables have a collective effect on continuous criterion variable. Individual *t*-tests were used to evaluate the predictive effect of each of the variables on achievement gap scores. Statistical significance for the inferential analyses was evaluated at the generally accepted level, $\alpha = .05$.

Summary

This purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the predictive impact that principals have on the academic success of special education students based on their knowledge, certification, and years of experience. This chapter justified the application of a quantitative research design through use of a non-experimental approach. The research questions and hypotheses were outlined, and the population and sample were described. The reliability and validity of the instrumentation were provided. A multiple linear regression was used as the primary inferential analysis

to address the research questions and hypotheses. The next chapter will explore the findings of the data analysis.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to assess the principal knowledge, administrative experience, and principal certification as they relate to the achievement gap among the subgroup of special education students. Once the data collection process was complete, the data were analyzed using SPSS version 24.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were utilized to examine at the trends in the variables. Frequencies and percentages were examined for the nominal level variables, while means and standard deviations were calculated for continuous variables of interest. To address the research questions, a multiple linear regression was used as the primary inferential analyses. An alpha level of $\alpha = .05$ of was used to evaluate the significance of the findings.

Pre-Analysis Data Screen

The data were collected from a total of 62 respondents. Eleven individuals submitted incomplete questionnaires and their responses were subsequently removed. All of these omitted respondents indicated they had less than three years of experience. The final sample size consisted of 51 principals.

Descriptive Statistics

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographics

The frequencies and percentages of the respondents' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. The majority of individuals were females (*n* = 33, 64.7%). Many of respondents had a master's degree (*n* =38, 74.5%), while seven respondents (13.7%) had a master's degree + 30 semester hours, and six

respondents (11.8%) had a doctorate degree. A majority of the respondents were presided over elementary schools (K-5) (*n* = 31, 60.8%). Most of the respondents' schools included average daily attendance of between 500 and 999 students. (*n* = 25, 49.0%). A few of the respondents' schools included 0 to 499 students (*n* = 17, 33.3%), 1000 to 1499 students (*n* = 2, 3.9%), or more than 1500 students (*n* = 7, 13.7%). A majority of the respondents did not have special education certification (*n* = 44, 86.3%).

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographical Data

Demographic	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	18	35.3
Female	33	64.7
Education		
Masters	38	74.5
Masters + 30 semester hours	7	13.7
Doctorate	6	11.8
Grade Level at Schools		
Preschool (K-5)	2	3.9
Elementary (K-5)	31	60.8
Middle school (6-8)	11	21.6
High school (9-12)	6	11.8
No response	1	1.9
Average Daily Attendance		
0-499	17	33.3
500-999	25	49.0
1000-1499	2	3.9
1500+	7	13.7
Special Education Certification		
Yes	7	13.7
No	44	86.3

Note. Due to rounding error, percentages may not always sum to 100%.

Frequencies and Percentages of Knowledge Reception

The frequencies and percentages of the respondents' knowledge reception are in Table 2. The majority of respondents indicated they had learned how to deal with special education students and discipline on the job (*n* = 40, 78.4%). Similarly, the majority indicated they had gained the most knowledge of Nondiscriminatory Evaluation (*n* = 39, 76.5%), Least Restrictive Environment (*n* = 34, 66.7%), Free and Appropriate education (*n* = 23, 45.1%), and Due Process (*n* = 29, 56.9%), and parental participation on the job (n=39, 76.5%). Academic course chosen by only two principals (n=2; 3.9%) in all areas except one, while in the last year of parental participation it was not chosen at all (n=0; 0%). See Table 2 (p. 75)

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages for Knowledge Reception

Survey item	*N*	%
Please mark where you received the majority of your information for Zero Reject (discipline).		
Academic coursework	2	3.9
District in-services	7	13.7
On the job	40	78.4
Self-taught	2	3.9
Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Nondiscriminatory Evaluation.		
Academic coursework	2	3.9
District in-services	7	13.7
I never learned this	1	2.0
On the job	39	76.5
Self-taught	2	3.9
Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Least Restrictive Environment.		
Academic coursework	2	3.9
District in-services	3	5.9
I never learned this	2	3.9
On the job	34	66.7
Self-taught	10	19.6
Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Individualized Free Appropriate Public Education.		
Academic coursework	2	3.9
District in-services	8	15.7
I never learned this	15	29.4
On the job	23	45.1
Self-taught	3	5.9
Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Due Process Procedures.		
Academic coursework	2	3.9
District in-services	9	17.6
I never learned this	9	17.6
On the job	29	56.9
Self-taught	2	3.9
Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Parent Participation.		
District in-services	6	11.8
I never learned this	1	2.0
On the job	39	76.5
Self-taught	5	9.8

Note. Due to rounding error, percentages may not always sum to 100%.

Descriptive Statistics of Continuous Variables

Descriptive statistics for the continuous variables of interest are presented in Table 3. Principals' years of experience ranged from 3.00 years to 36.00 years, with *M* = 10.00 years and *SD* = 6.73, while principals' knowledge scores ranged from 3.00 to 12.00, with *M* = 7.20 and *SD* = 1.94. Achievement gap scores ranged from 77.00 to 843.00, with *M* = 355.52 and *SD* = 167.37.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Continuous Variables

Continuous Variables	*Min*	*Max*	*M*	*SD*
Years of experience	3.00	36.00	10.00	6.73
Principal knowledge	3.00	12.00	7.20	1.94
Achievement gap scores	77.00	843.00	355.52	167.37

Inferential Results

Research Question 1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal knowledge of special education and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?

Null 1: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal knowledge of special education.

Alternative 1: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special education and regular education students and principal knowledge of special education.

Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal administrative experience and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?

Null 2: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal administrative experience.

Alternative 2: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal administrative experience.

Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal certification and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?

Null 3: There is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal certification.

Alternative 3: There is a statistically significant inverse relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal certification.

Assumption Testing

Prior to the main regression analysis, the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were assessed. The normality

assumption was tested by inspection of a normal P-P plot between the expected cumulative probability and the observed cumulative probability. The data closely followed the trend line, thus the assumption of normality was met (see Figure 1). Homoscedasticity was tested by visual inspection of a residual scatterplot. The homoscedasticity assumption was met due to there not being a recurring pattern in the data (see Figure 2). The absence of multicollinearity assumption was tested by variance inflation factors (VIFs). Due to the all VIF values being below 10 (highest VIF = 1.14), it can be assumed that there was not high collinearity between the predictor variables (Stevens, 2009).

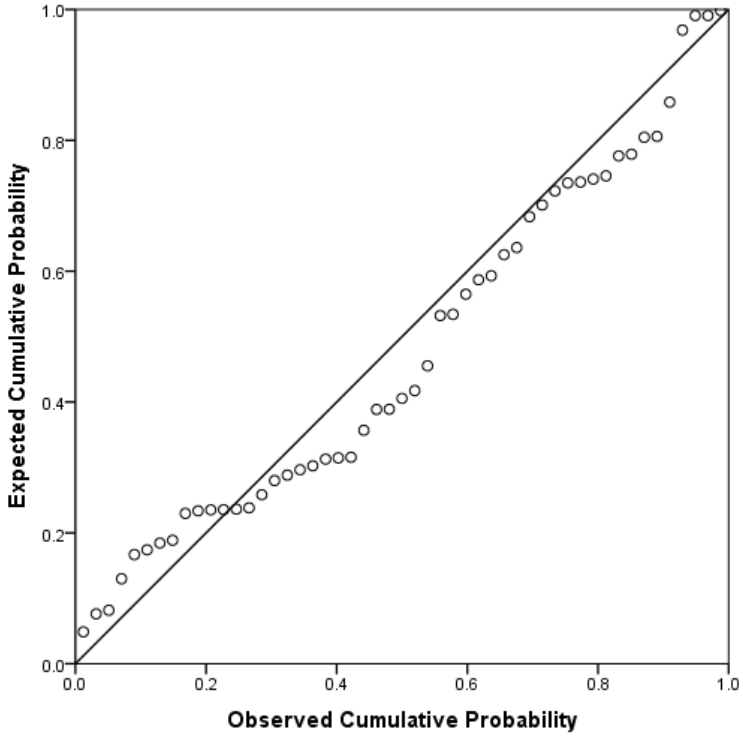


Figure 1. Normal P-P plot for achievement gap scores.

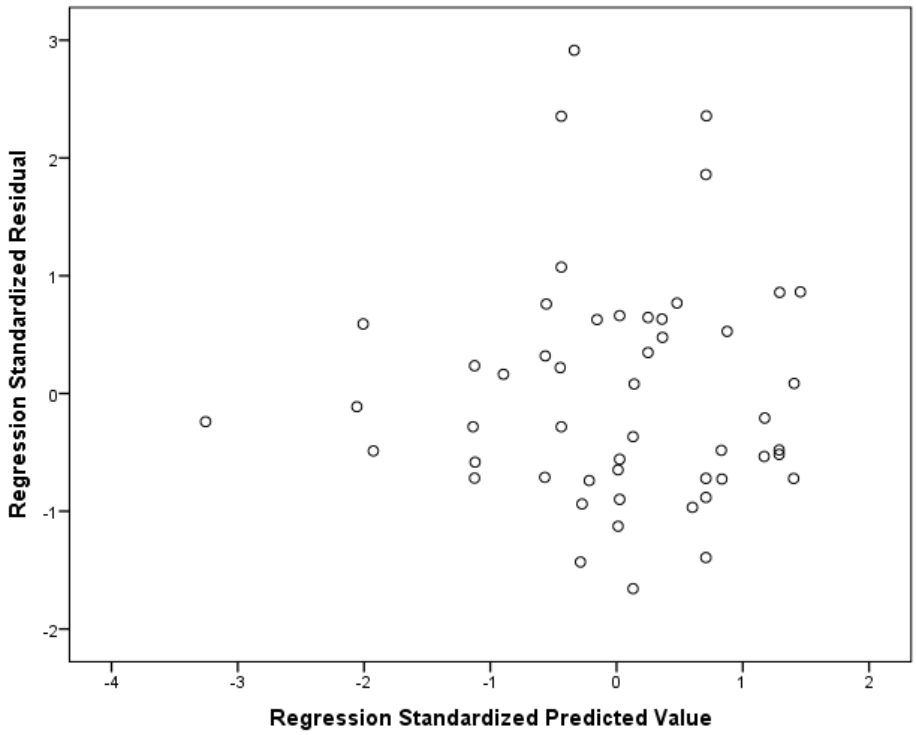


Figure 2. Standardized predicted values versus standardized residuals for the regression on achievement gap scores.

Results of the Multiple Linear Regression

Table 4 presents the results for the multiple linear regression. Results of the overall model of the multiple linear regression were not statistically significant, ($F(3, 47) = 0.41$, $p = .746$, $R^2 = .026$), suggesting that collectively there was not a significant predictive relationship between principal knowledge, years of experience, special education certification, and achievement gap scores. The R^2 value indicates that approximately 2.6% of the variance in achievement gap scores can be explained by the predictor variables.

To address the research hypotheses, the individual predictors were examined further. Principal knowledge ($B = 9.29$, $t = 0.72$, $p = .477$) was not a significant predictor in the model. Likewise, neither years of experience ($B = -3.06$, $t = -0.83$, $p = .410$) nor special education certification ($B = -17.26$, $t = -0.23$, $p = .817$) were

significant predictors in the model. Due to non-significance of all three predictor variables, none of the null hypotheses were rejected. The conclusion is that there is no statistically significant relationship between the gap in achievement scores between special and regular education students and principal knowledge of special education, principal experience, and principal certification.

Table 4

Results for Regression with Principal Knowledge, Years of Experience, and Special Education Certification Predicting Achievement Gap Scores

Source	*B*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*	*VIF*
Principal knowledge	9.29	12.97	.11	0.72	.477	1.09
Years of experience	-3.06	3.68	-.12	-0.83	.410	1.06
Special education certification	-17.26	74.10	-.04	-0.23	.817	1.14

Note. $F(3, 47) = 0.41$, $p = .746$, $R^2 = .026$

Summary

The purpose of this study was to assess the principal knowledge, administrative experience, and principal certification and achievement gap among the subgroup of special education students. This chapter presented the findings of the data analyses. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the nominal level and continuous level variables. Due to non-significance of principal knowledge, years of experience, and special education certification as predictors of achievement gap scores, the null hypothesis for each research question was not rejected. The next chapter will provide the statistical findings in connection with the literature and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if there is a relationship between principals' knowledge of special education and special education students making adequate yearly progress on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End-of-Instruction test (EOI). Chapter 5 begins with a brief review of the methodology utilized in this study. The summary of results and comparison to the literature, in addition to conclusions, implications and recommendation for practice and future research are discussed in this chapter. The intention of this study was to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between principals' knowledge in special education, certification and years of experience, and the disparity of educational growth of special education students as compared to regular education students on the Oklahoma State Achievement test. The study attempted to determine if more training is needed for principals in order to carry out the role of educating all students. The following research questions guided this study:

- Research Question 1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal knowledge of special education and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?
- Research Question 2: Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal administrative experience and the achievement gap as indicated by

Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?

- Research Question 3: Is there a statistically significant relationship between principal certification and the achievement gap as indicated by Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) and End of Instruction (EOI) test scores between special and regular education students?

A survey instrument was utilized to assist the researcher with answering the three research questions. The first part of the instrument consisted of 22 questions that gathered information about the principals' background, their professional development, and course work specific to special education. The second part of the instrument included 18 hypothetical scenarios with four multiple-choice answers. Each question had one correct answer, two incorrect answers, and a one answer that the principal had not learned this topic (Jesteadt, 2012). This survey was disseminated to principals in five urban/suburban 6A school districts in Oklahoma. The survey was emailed to 138 principals with a return rate of 62. However, eleven of 62 were principals who did not meet the parameter of having a minimum of three years of experience, which routed immediately to the end of the survey. Consequently, there were 51 principals able to complete the survey and participate in the study.

The data were analyzed by SPSS version 24.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were interpreted to look at the trends in the variables. Frequencies and percentages were used for the nominal level variables, while means and standard deviations were calculated for continuous variables of interest. To address the

research questions, a multiple linear regression was used to analyze the principals' knowledge in special education, certification, and years of experience as they relate to the gap in their regular education students' and special education students' test scores.

Research indicates there is a lack of emphasis on instructional leadership that includes learning for all students. "Elmore 2004; Hallinger 2009 stated, Although leading for learning has received a great deal of emphasis in the leadership literature, instructional leadership is not always a priority for principals" (as cited in Billingsley et al., 2014, p. 11). Not only has the research emphasized this importance, but the authorization of NCLB 2001 and then ESSA in 2015 have both maintained a focus on subgroups and the importance of educators educating all students.

In an era of accountability for all students' learning, principals need to have the tools necessary to assist teachers to meet the demands set forth by federal regulations. "For decades, educators have understood that we are all responsible for student learning" (Lambert, 2002, p. 37). It can be advantageous for principals to have a leadership team to collaborate about decision that need to be made about student achievement. Conley and Muncey (1999) suggested that teachers will need to become active in the decision-making process in order to assist leaders in improving student achievement that in the past was intended to be the sole responsibility of the principal (as cited in Espinoza, 2013).

Being a more inclusive school is very difficult and some do not believe students with disabilities can be successful in this environment, even though some students with disabilities have been high-achievers (Olson, 2004). "As educators it

is our job to help students with disabilities to overcome their disabilities in order to meet accountability standards" (O'Connor, n.d., p. 1).

Principals must train their staff on how to set high expectations and help students reach them. Teachers cannot achieve this alone; principals must assist them in this endeavor (Espinoza, 2013). It is imperative principals grow their staff and find teachers who can become leaders among the staff as well as for the staff to hold each other accountable in order for all students to achieve (DuFour et al., 2006). Until principals and teachers have the tools needed, there is little chance that students with disabilities will start performing at the same success rate as their peers. Wells (2016) stated "Students who receive special education services significantly lag behind their non-disabled peers in their performance on required statewide, standardized assessments. The achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers is significant and pervasive" (p. iii).

Implications of the Study

To answer Research Question 1, principals were given a survey with 18 hypothetical scenarios to test their knowledge in special education. Principals' surveys indicated there was a varied knowledge base in the area of communication amongst the participants, with the lowest score being three and the highest score being 12. The median range was 7.20 with a standard deviation of 1.94. Due to non-significance of the predictor variable, knowledge, the null hypothesis could not be rejected. The non-significant results of this study may be a function of a lack of statistical power (N=51). There is no way to be entirely certain if the results are statistically or theoretically explained.

This finding is important because based on these data, principals do not need a lot more training on special education in order to close the gap between regular education and special education students test scores. The results of the data analysis may indicate that leaders have knowledge and experience in special education, which may be helpful; however, being an excellent school leader may supersede needing this specific knowledge of special education. What appears to be missing in the current literature on high-stakes testing and special education is a focus on organizational change and the role of the educational leadership (Locson, 2009). "In order to do this, they will need a 'theory of action' or proven strategy that will allow them to successfully navigate the storm" (Lezotte & McKee, 2006, p. 7). A proven strategy that emerged from the literature was the effectiveness of transformational leadership in sustaining change and building capacity. "The Transformational Leadership Theory states that this process is one in which a person interacts with others and is able to create a solid relationship that results in a high percentage of trust, that will later result in an increase of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, in both leaders and followers" ("Leadership: Learn to lead change," n.d., para. 6). This type of leadership will create a culture in which teamwork ensures all students are achieving. "Mutual interests are shared along with a sense of shared fates and interdependence of leaders and followers" (Bass & Riggio, 2006 p.54). Even if a principal possesses the skills of a transformational leader, the demands on them are still great and research indicates principals cannot do this alone.

Frequency and percentages reported on principals' reception of their knowledge of the five principle areas tested indicated only a small portion signified

the content was learned from their college classes as most indicated they had learned on the job. This concept of principals not being able to accomplish this task in isolation was supported in a substantial amount of the literature reviewed. "Effective leadership depends on support from district and state officials" (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 14); especially because principals are being taught a limited amount of special education. Based on these data, guidance and support from district personnel is at an all- time high. Halpern (2004) stated, "Rapid changes require new kinds of leadership- leaders who have the necessary knowledge to achieve a goal and leaders who can manage amid the uncertainty of nonstop change" (p. 126). Principals have the task of ensuring all students are achieving is a change in the traditional role of the principal. If principals are not attaining information on how to close the achievement gap and make change in their schools, they are going to need support. Again, the principal cannot do this job alone (Vollmer, 2010).

The results for Research Question 2 indicated there was not a statistically significant relationship between principals' years of experience and the achievement gap between regular education and special education students' scores on the Oklahoma State tests. Principals involved in the study years of experience ranged from 3 years to 36 years. The median was 10 years of experience with a standard deviation of 6.73. Some research suggests that it takes approximately five years for a principal to "put a teaching staff in place as well as impact the school's performance" (Center for Public Education, 2012, para. 18). Effective principals can still make a substantial difference in their first years (Center for Public Education, 2012). This could be due to the fact even a great principal may need time to become

great in their new environment. "Experienced principals who focus on instructional leadership, give specific, informal feedback to teachers, and share the workload can have a significant, measurable impact on student achievement" (Center for Public Education, 2012, para. 36). The researcher did not find any specific literature on principal experience that could either support or negate the findings of this study.

Research Question 3 gleaned the same outcome as Research Questions 1 and 2, declaring there was no statically significant relationship between the principal certification and gap between regular education and special education students' test scores. Only 13.6% of participants currently hold special education certification.

The importance of this finding is that District administrators do not need to concern themselves with the specific certification principals obtain in the area of special education in order to affect special education students' achievement. The researcher would also like to note that due to the non-significance of the three predictor variables, the null hypotheses could not be rejected in support of the alternative hypotheses: principal knowledge (B = 9.29, t = 0.72, p = .477), years of experience (B = -3.06, t = -0.83, p = .410), and special education certification (B = -17.26, t = -0.23, p = .817) were not a significant predictor in the model.

Conclusions and Limitations

Closing the gap between special education students and regular education students on state tests is important and is just as much a focus with ESSA as it was with NCLB. Not only were the parameters set by NCLB for increasing special education students' performance on tests banned from ESSA, on the contrary they were affirmed as a part of the new law (ESSA, n.d.). The findings of this study were

insufficient in determining the essential factors for principals to possess in order to make an impact in special education student achievement.

There were a few limitations of this study. First, the researcher used a survey to gather information. The participants self-reported information, which could have not accurately represented their answers. Second, the sample size in this study was small with only 51 principals participating, which is not representative of the diversity in many school districts. The small sample size resulted in low statistical power, which might explain the lack of statistically significant findings. Another factor to consider is the only information known about the participants is the small amount of demographical data collected. Third, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) frequently change the cut-scores and testing companies, thus it is very difficult to draw conclusions from the scores on state tests. However, the reseacher only considered the gap so the mulitude of variables caused by the OSDE were not a factor. Last, this study was not a quasi-experimental and was nonexperimental; hence caution should be taken when inferencing because no control group was used and only principals in five 6A suburban district participated in the study. The limitations of this study lead to numerous recommendations.

Recommendations

Recommendations for District Administrators

District administrators should be cognizant of the new role of being an instructional leader required of site principals and the support they will need in order to be successful. Principals must find a way to assist teachers in ensuring all students are learning. The results gathered from the study and information obtained

from Chapter 2 makes it very clear of the magnitude of this challenge for principals. Principals are not being prepared for the challenge of leading a school that is effective in being accountable for the learning of all students. In this study, the findings showed the amount of certification, years of experience, and knowledge in special education did not have an impact on whether or not students with disabilities achieved academically. Keeping that in mind, the researcher is recommending the following interventions for district administrators and site principals:

1. Provide professional development to principals in the area of special education. Principals should not have to learn special education as issues arise; they should be able to be proactive and make data-driven decisions to increase academic achievement in the special education sub group.
2. Because the amount of certification, years of experience, and knowledge in special education did not have an impact on whether or not students with disabilities achieved academically, district administration needs to ensure building principals have the expertise in leading a staff through change.
3. Helping principals make data-driven decisions to better guide their actions.
4. Provide principals with the tools to create a learning culture.
5. Keep principals abreast of the Federal and State laws and policies that dictate their practices.
6. District administrators should be available to assist, guide, and coach site principals in leading their building through the change process.

All prior research revealed principals cannot achieve all of the demands bestowed upon them alone. District administration must play an active role in the professional growth of principals.

Recommendations for Site Principals

1. Principals need to guide their teachers in using data in order to make decisions about student learning.
2. Principals should build a Professional Learning Community where teachers are comfortable sharing learning outcomes of their students with colleagues.
3. Principals should seek out professional development in the area of special education in order to be proactive and not reactive to situations.
4. It is important to build a culture that is not just cooperative but collaborative. Principals can achieve this by providing a safe environment where teachers feel safe and content. This environment encourages teachers to be reflective of their own practices and share in order to grow professionally.
5. Fostering a climate where everyone not only believes all students can achieve at high levels but their actions demonstrate belief.
6. Principals need to stay abreast of Federal and State laws and State and District policies that affect their practices.
7. Principals may not need to learn specifically about special education practices in order to close the achievement gap, but they do need to learn

best practices, sound interventions, and strategies for meeting the needs of all learners.

Recommendations for Further Research

There has only been a small amount of studies conducted around this particular topic. This study was quantitative and only investigated principals' years of experiences, certification, and overall knowledge of special education. Therefore, based on the results of the study, the researcher is suggesting the following recommendations for future research on this topic:

1. Duplicate this study with an added component of principals' interviews. This would provide more information on "why" principals felt they had a small or large gap in special education students test scores versus regular education students. It would be important to increase the sample size as this could highly impact the results of the study.
2. Duplicate this study increasing the amount of participants through broadening the number of school districts invited to participate in the study. Whereas, this study indicated there were no statistically significant findings increasing the sample size could result in a different outcome.
3. There is a need for a more comprehensive study to be completed to determine why students with disabilities and other subgroups are not performing as well in some schools. This would assist school leaders in meeting the demands of accountability placed upon them with the ESSA of 2015.

4. Because this study revealed the principals' expertise in special education did not have an impact on whether or not students in the special education subgroup were achieving or not, a study conducted to determine what or who is responsible for the lack of student achievement would be plausible. The study could investigate if teachers of special education and the types of courses, training and by what means they obtained certification would be advantageous at attempting to uncover the reason in the difference in achievement levels within the regular and special education student subgroups.
5. A study investigating various regions across the United States to uncover the dilemma of why the gap between regular education and special education students' state tests vary from site to site and possibly state to state would assist in creating schools where all students are provided the opportunity to academically achieve at a high-level.

Summary

Principals are faced with an enormous job of running a school (managing) and leading a school through meeting the academic needs of all learners (instructional leadership). Since the passage of NCLB of 2001 and subsequent passage of ESSA of 2015, there has been a challenge to ensure students of all subgroups are progressing comparably. Principals must have the tools required to accomplish this task.

The purpose of this study was to determine if principals' certification, years of experience, or overall knowledge of special education affected the gap between

regular education and special education students' test scores on the Oklahoma state tests. The findings indicated there was not an identified relationship among these factors. The results of this study should weigh in on the specific training principals do not need in order to close the achievement gap. Having an understanding that the above variables do not impact student achievement, higher education and district personnel need not waste time on this type of training, but instead they should focus on the interventions that researchers are showing impact student learning for all.

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Appendices

Appendix A- Principals' Survey

Principals' Knowledge of Special Ed and the Impact on the Gap between Reg and Special Ed. Students' test scores.

* Required

School Demographics

1. Have you had 3 or more years of experience as the Principal in the same building/site? *
   Mark only one oval

   ◯ Yes

   ◯ No

Skip to Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this survey. However, one parameter of the study was that you had to be a building principal for at least 3 consecutive years. You indicated you had less than three years in the same building which prohibits you from being a part of this study. I would like to thank you again for your willingness to fill out the survey. Thank you!

Demographic and Certification information

Please answer all questions in regards to when you were a principal for 3 years at one site. You can use any school that is within 2001-- 2016 school years.

Name of your school

Please list the name of the most recent school and district in which you were a principal for more than 3 consecutive years. If more than one please use the school that you would like to use as a part of this study. (Your District/Site)

2. School District and School Site (BE SURE TO INCLUDE BOTH DISTRICT AND SITE) *

   _____

3. Indicate the grade level of your school *
   Mark only one oval.

   - ⬭ Elementary (K--5)
   - ⬭ Middle School (6--8)
   - ⬭ High School (9--12)
   - ⬭ Other: _____

4. What years were you principal at this site? (ex 2003--2009) *

   _____

5. How many spec ed teachers do or (did) you have on your faculty during these years? *

   _____

6. How many bootcamp spec ed teachers do or (did) you have on your faculty during these years? *

   _____

7. How many emergency certified spec ed teachers do or (did) you have on your faculty during these years? *

   _____

8. How many spec ed teachers with categorical certification (e.g. LD, ED, Mentally Handicapped etc.) do or (did) you have on your faculty during these years? *

   _____

9. Which category describes the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) or your school? *
Mark only one oval.

- 0--499
- 500--999
- 1,000--1,499
- 1500-- +

10. What is the percentage of students receiving special education in your school?

_____

11. What is your gender *
Mark only one oval.

- M
- F

12. How many years have you served as a school principal? (the last year you were at the above site)

_____

13. Do you have any teaching experience in special education? *
Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

14. How many years of teaching experience in special education? *

_____

15. Have you ever been involved in special education litigation, where parent(s) brought a suit against your school as a School Administrator? (principal or asst. principal) *
Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

16. Indicate your Highest Degree you have attained? (at the time you were serving as principal at the school you listed above) *
Mark only one oval.

- Master's
- Master's + 30 semester hours
- Doctorate

17. How many total college or university classes, which were focused directly on special education, have you successfully (no less than a 2.0) completed in your entire educational career? (please use whole numbers) *
Mark only one oval.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

18. Have you taken special education coursework in any of the following areas?* *Mark only one oval per row.*

	Yes	No
Inclusive Education for Gen Ed Teachers: Gives General education teachers the opportunity to understand their roles and responsibilities in teaching students with special needs		
Exceptionalities: Types of disabilities and their characteristics		
Programming: Creating programs and curriculum for students with special needs		
Assessment: Administration and interpretation of assessment instruments or special needs students		
Instructional Practices: Teaching exceptional students		
Behavior Strategies: Classroom management; ; ABA, Positive behavioral supports		
Strategies: Cognitive; Metacognitive Learning Strategies		
Creating IEPS		
Compliance: Laws, Policies and Procedures pertaining to Special Ed.		
Transition Planning: Implementation of curricula (social, Vocational, academic, and daily living) for students with disabilities		
Collaboration: Collaborative interaction skills when dealing with an array of supports for the exceptional student		

19. Do you have a special education certificate *
Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

20. How much information about special education/laws do you feel you received in your administration/leadership licensing or degree (Master's or Doctoral) program? *
Mark only one oval.

- None
- A little
- Some
- A Lot

21. How frequently do you attend special education in--services when you were serving as a principal or as a current principal? *
Mark only one oval.

- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Yearly

22. Where do you get most of your assistance for professional needs with regard to special education? Please rank from most to least (1= most and 6 = least)*
Mark only one oval per row.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Central Office (Asst. Supt. or Supt.)						
Special Education teacher						
Spec ed Coursework						
Conferences /Workshops						
Policy Manuals						
Special Education Director						

Zero Reject--Discipline

2 questions

23. The school year has just started and Mrs. Bishop comes in to enroll Jimmy into the 8th grade. When Mrs. Bishop enrolls Jimmy, she tells you that she feels Jimmy has an emotional/behavioral disability and hands you a letter requesting an evaluation. One week later, Jimmy is involved in a major fight/disruption in the cafeteria. All students involved were given 10 days out--of--school suspension with a recommendation for expulsion. What must you do? *
Mark only one oval.

◯ Expel Jimmy, as you would any general education student who was involved in a major fight/disruption in school.

◯ Have a manifestation meeting for Jimmy, as you would with any student with a disability who was given 10 days out--of--school suspension with a recommendation for expulsion. Request consent at that time for an evaluation.

◯ Suspend Jimmy until an evaluation can be conducted (possibly in the home) and the team can determine if Jimmy has a disability. If he is found to have a disability, then he should be disciplined under those guidelines.

◯ I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

24. Dylan just re--enrolled in your school from a Department of Juvenile Justice Program. This is the second time he has returned to your school from this program. Dylan receives special education services under the Other Health Impaired. Last time he was on campus, he was a behavior problem and was frequently in the Dean's office. When he enrolls, you want to make sure he understands the rules in the student code of conduct and what is expected of him. What do you do? *
Mark only one oval.

◯ Meet with Dylan and his mother when they come in to enroll him for school. Have Dylan sign a behavior contract which states that he will abide by all school rules and expectations and if he has done this by a certain date, he will have the same rights as any other student on campus.

◯ Hold an IEP meeting for Dylan to determine appropriate services and supports. During the meeting, have Dylan sign a behavior contract which states that he will abide by all school rules and expectations and if he has done this by a certain date, he will have the same rights as any other student on campus.

Hold an IEP meeting for Dylan to determine appropriate services and supports. Explain to Dylan what the school rules are and the consequences for not following these rules.

I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

25. Please mark where you received the majority of your information in order to answer the last two questions on Discipline Please mark only one. *
Mark only one oval.

- academic coursework
- district in--services
- self taught
- on the job
- I never learned this

Nondiscriminatory Evaluation

2 Questions

26. Mid--way through the school year, David and his mother show up to enroll David in school. David just arrived here from Puerto Rico, is 16 years old, and has never been in school. David and his mother do not speak English. You observe David as the translator is speaking with his mother. During the observation you notice that he appears to have characteristics similar to those of children with Autism. Additionally, while David is sitting in the chair, he is waiving his hand and fingers in front of his face and appears oblivious to everything going on around him. Since David is new to Oklahoma and has never been in school, he is not identified as having a disability. What do you do? *
Mark only one oval.

Enroll David in school and provide him with ELL services. Immediately call an RTI team meeting and initiate the RtI process and begin collecting data, get consent an evaluation to be done to determine he is a student with a disability.

Enroll David in school and provide him with ELL services. Have David's mother sign paperwork for an initial evaluation and place David in the special ed program. Initiate an initial evaluation and collect the back--up documentation to show he should be in the ID program.

Postpone David's enrollment in school until an evaluation can be conducted (possibly in the home). Once the evaluation is complete, enroll David in school with the most appropriate services and supports.

I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

27. Sidney is a second grade student who was retained in first grade and has struggled academically since Kindergarten. The RtI team put interventions in place for Sidney in both reading and math. The team progress monitored and the gaps between Sidney's academic achievement and those of her peers were actually widening. The team met with Sidney's father and obtained consent to conduct and initial evaluation. The team used the data they had available and also requested additional testing from the school psychologist. Once the testing was completed, the team attempted to set up a meeting with dad to explain the results of the testing as well as the other information the team had gathered through the intervention phases. The school tried to contact the parent via telephone, notes home and invitations to meetings through the U.S. Postal Service. Dad never came to any of the meetings the school tried to set up. What do you do? *

Mark only one oval.

The team can proceed with the initial placement as they have demonstrated that they have taken reasonable measures to obtain consent and the child's parent has failed to respond. The team must send all paperwork from the placement meeting home via certified mail.

The team cannot proceed with the initial placement as they must have parental consent for placement. They may use mediation or due process hearing procedures in order to obtain agreement or a ruling that special education and related services may be provided without the parent's consent.

The team cannot proceed with the initial placement as they must have parental consent for placement. They may not use mediation or due process hearing procedures in order to obtain agreement or a ruling that special education and related services may be provided without the parent's consent.

I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

28. **Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Nondiscriminatory Evaluation. Please mark only one. *** ***Mark only one oval.***

- academic coursework
- district in--services
- self taught
- on the job
- I never learned this

Least Restrictive Environment

2 Questions

29. **Julie is currently receiving Hospital Homebound services due to her severe anxiety and subsequent inability to be successful on a large school campus. Her mother, Mrs. Jacobs, brings in a doctor's note which states that Julie can attend school for 2 hours a day. Mrs. Jacobs asks you to enroll Julie for the 2 hours daily and continue the hospital homebound placement for the remainder of the day. What do you do? *** ***Mark only one oval.***

- Enroll Julie and arrange for an IEP meeting to reflect the services and supports she will need for her new school--based two hour schedule. Explain to Mrs. Jacobs that Julie can receive either school-- based instruction or hospital homebound instruction, but not both. Discontinue the hospital homebound services as the doctor has stated she can now attend school for a period of time.

- Enroll Julie and arrange for an IEP meeting to discuss the services and supports she will need for her to be successful. Discuss mom's desire for a school and homebound blended program. Explain mom's opinion and the Dr's opinion that a two hour school schedule would fit her needs. If the school IEP team agrees with mom, Initiate the 2--hour school schedule and continue the homebound services as well.

- Do not enroll Julie for the two hour time frame. Explain to Mrs. Jacobs that if Julie is to enroll in school, she will have to physically be in school for the entire day, due to federal funding and FTE. Continue the hospital homebound services until the doctor agrees she can come back full--time.

- I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

30. **Jeremy Franks, a 10th grader at your school, was previously placed into the behavior unit/transition room for 2 periods daily (for credit recovery via the computer). At his recent IEP meeting, the team determined that Jeremy was no longer demonstrating a need for the intensive behavioral supports of the behavior unit/transition room. It was determined that this placement would end, and Jeremy would return to the general education setting for his computer based credit recovery classes. The IEP was finalized and written as such. However, after the meeting and upon review of his schedule, it was determined there were no seats available in the computer lab and rearranging his schedule would not solve the problem either. What do you do? ***
Mark only one oval.

◯ Find Jeremy a seat in the credit recovery lab, even if it involves reviewing the schedules of other students and rearranging them accordingly to ensure that Jeremy has a seat. Visit with the team about the importance of checking on options before writing it into an IEP.

◯ Tell the IEP team that due to the lack of space in the computer lab, Jeremy will need to continue taking the classes in the behavior unit/transition room and his IEP will need to be revised to reflect these services.

◯ Place Jeremy into elective classes at that time and recommend he finishes his credit recovery classes after school in the lab or by attending adult education classes.

◯ I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

31. **Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Least Restrictive Environment. Please mark only one. ***
Mark only one oval.

◯ academic coursework
◯ district in--services
◯ self taught
◯ on the job
◯ I never learned this

Individualized Free Appropriate Public Education
2 Questions

32. After successfully completing four years of study in a special education high school program working towards a special diploma, Karen, an 18 year old student was recommended for graduation and subsequent termination of special education services. Karen had met all graduation requirements for a diploma and made progress towards her IEP goals. The following August, Karen shows up for school on the first day and tells the teacher she wants to come back to school. What do you do? *
Mark only one oval.

◯ Re--enroll Karen in school. Set up an IEP meeting to determine what supports she needs at this time and continue providing services through the special education program.

◯ Explain to Karen that she has already graduated from high school and any continuation of special education services was terminated at that time. However, remind Karen that she can volunteer at the school if she would like and visit with her about other post--secondary options.

◯ Explain to Karen that since she has already met graduation requirements, the only way she will be allowed to return is if she is working towards a diploma with modifications to the curriculum. If she agrees, enroll her and hold an IEP meeting to determine the services and supports she will need to graduate with courses that are on the college track.

◯ I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

33. Amanda, a student with spina bifida, just moved into your school district. When she enrolled in school her mother explained that she needed catheterized every three or four hours to avoid injury to her kidneys. In accordance with accepted medical practice, clean intermittent catheterization (CIC), a procedure involving the insertion of a catheter into the urethra to drain the bladder, has been prescribed and is a related service on her IEP. You do not have a full-- time nurse on campus. What do you do? *
Mark only one oval.

◯ Enroll Amanda in school and explain her mother the school does not have a full--time nurse on campus to perform the CIC procedure and therefore, she will need to make arrangements to be at the school when a nurse is not available.

CIC is considered a medical service. Schools do not have an obligation to perform these tasks. Enroll Amanda after Medicaid has provided a private--duty nursing assistant to be available for the CIC procedure.

Enroll Amanda in school and train people at the school to perform the CIC procedure. Add this as a related service to Amanda's IEP and ensure that provisions are made to guarantee the procedure is completed every 3--4 hours.

I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

34. Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Individualized Free Appropriate Public Education. Please mark only one. *
Mark only one oval.

- academic coursework
- district in--services
- self taught
- on the job
- I never learned this

Due Process Procedures

2 Questions

35. During Maggie's most recent IEP meeting, it was recommended that she be put into a more restrictive classroom setting. She was failing all of her courses and started demonstrating inappropriate behaviors in the classroom. After conducting a functional behavioral assessment, it was determined that the function of the behavior was to escape the academic demands/tasks. A review of Maggie's academic scores (as measured by the Brigance) shows her to be two or more grade levels behind her peers. The school feels Maggie would be more successful and have a better chance of increasing her academic ability if she were in the resource room for reading, writing and math. Maggie's parents disagree and want her to stay in the general education classes all day. The parents have stated their intent to go to due process and have initiated the proceedings. You have not heard from the State about a complaint or from the resolution center. What do you do? *
Mark only one oval.

Per the “stay--put” clause, Maggie should be put into the resource room placement, as that was the recommendation of the team, until due process proceedings can take place.

Per the “stay--put” clause, Maggie should be left in the general education classroom until due process proceedings can take place.

Explain to the parent that the student’s placement is an IEP team decision, and although the parents are part of the team, they cannot unilaterally decide appropriate placement. The majority of the team has recommended a more restrictive placement; therefore the student will be placed accordingly. Give parent a copy of parent rights that explain the steps to file a due process.

I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

36. It is three months into the school year and Erica has reached 10 days of out of school suspension with the recommendation of expulsion. Erica receives special education services under the Other Health Impaired category for her ADD. Upon review of her records, Erica has had numerous disciplinary referrals for non--compliance, aggression, and disrespect of authority. At her manifestation meeting, Erica was recommended for alternative placement as the behavior in question was determined not to be a manifestation of her disability. Erica’s mother agreed with the team but later took the appropriate actions and filed a due process hearing request. What do you do? *
Mark only one oval.

Erica should be left in your school (her former setting) until due process proceedings (resolution meeting) can take place.

Continue Erica’s suspension until the due process proceedings (resolution meeting) can take place, as they must be held within 15 calendar days.

Erica should be placed in the interim alternative educational setting until due process proceedings (resolution meeting) can take place.

I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

37. Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Due Process Procedures. Please mark only one. *
Mark only one oval.

- academic coursework
- district in--services
- self taught
- on the job
- I never learned this

Parent Participation

2 Questions

38. Sally, a student in your school, was evaluated and found to have a disability. Sally received services under IDEA for a couple of years. The teachers have expressed continuous concerns about the Sally's lack of progress and they have recommended placing her in a more restrictive setting. A meeting is called and Sally's mom comes in and hands you a letter stating that consent for special education and related services has been revoked. What do you do? *
Mark only one oval.

- At the meeting, explain that Sally is not being successful in the less restrictive setting and the team feels it would be in her best interest to be in a more restrictive setting. If her mother still wishes to revoke consent, explain to the mother that she does not have that right. Tell the mother it is an IEP team decision and at this time, the team is recommending a more restrictive placement, to meet the needs of the child. Place Sally in the more restrictive setting.

- At the meeting, explain that Sally is not being successful in the less restrictive setting and the team feels it would be in her best interest to be in a more restrictive setting. If her mother still wishes to revoke consent, explain to the mother that she does not have that right. Tell the mother it is an IEP decision, but keep Sally in the less restrictive environment (stay--put) until a due process hearing can take place.

- At the meeting, explain that Sally is not being successful in the less restrictive setting and the team feels it would be in her best interest to be in a more restrictive setting. If the mother still wishes to revoke consent, then fill out the paperwork to reflect the parent revoked consent and the child no longer will be considered a student receiving special education services.

I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction. (This is an okay answer).

39. Your District has chosen to be a RTI District for the purpose of evaluating. Steven has had difficulties in reading throughout his school years. His grades are poor as a result of his inability to read. Steven's teachers have just started the RtI process with him. They are in the middle of their second Tier 2 intervention, as the first intervention did not even start to close the learning gap. Steven's father has come in for a conference with his teachers. During the conference he requests an evaluation for Steven, and hands the teacher the request in writing. The teacher brings you the letter and asks you to speak with the father. What do you tell the father? *
Mark only one oval.

Explain the RtI process to Steven's dad and let him know Steven is currently in the intervention stage. Assure him that you will keep him updated on Steven's progress. Tell him that the school will concurrently initiate an evaluation, but will continue with the RtI process at the same time.

Explain the RtI process to Steven's dad and let him know Steven is currently in the intervention stage. Assure him that you will keep him updated on Steven's progress. Tell him that the school no longer evaluates using batteries of tests with the school psychologist as a means for determining if a child needs special education and related services.

Explain the RtI process to Steven's dad and let him know Steven is currently in the intervention stage. Assure him that you will keep him updated in Steven's progress. If he is adamant about testing, then discontinue the RtI process and initiate a psychoeducational evaluation with the school psychologist.

I did not learn this. I would call the special education department in my school or district for further instruction.

40. Please mark where you received the majority of your information for the principle of Parent Participation. Please mark only one. *
Mark only one oval.

academic coursework

district in--services

self taught

on the job

I never learned this

Thank you for taking the survey. I appreciate it!!!

Skip to "Thank You."

Thank You

Stop filling out this form.

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this survey. However, one parameter of the study was that you had to be a building principal for at least 3 consecutive years. You indicated you had less than three years in the same building which prohibits you from being a part of this study. I would like to thank you again for your willingness to fill out the survey. Thank you!

Request for Permission to Use Survey (copy of email)

Appendix B Request Permission to Use Survey

December 3, 2013

Dr. Jesteadt:

I am a doctoral student from University of Oklahoma. I am writing my dissertation tentatively titled "The Purposeful Principal-- Closing the Achievement Gap Between Regular Education and Special Education Students under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Kathrine Gutierrez. I would like your permission to reproduce and use your survey instrument in my research study. I would like to use and print your survey under the following conditions:

- I will use this survey only for my research study and will not sell or use it with any compensated or curriculum development activities.
- If any changes are made to the survey, I will send it you for your approval before using it.

I appreciate your consideration in allowing me to use the Survey. It will be very beneficial to my study when investigating to see if principal's knowledge of special education has an impact on the gap between regular and special education students test scores.
Please let me know if I have your permission to use the survey as a part of my study.

Sincerely,
Lynette Thompson
Doctoral Candidate

Permission to Use Survey—Copy of Email Received

Appendix C Permission to Use Survey

Good Afternoon Lynette,

You have my permission to reproduce and use the survey instrument for your research study as long as it is cited appropriately (Jesteadt, 2012) and you follow the conditions already stated in your email. I am very interested in seeing your results once you have finished and would love to read your completed dissertation.

Let me know if there is anything you need along the way. I know the dissertation process can be grueling, but it is worth it in the end. Please do not hesitate to ask for thoughts or just another set of eyes when you are writing/editing. Feedback makes the whole process easier.

Sincerely,
Lindsay Jesteadt, PhD

Permission to Conduct Study
Sample of email sent to all five school districts

Appendix D Permission to Conduct Study

September 8, 2016

Hello Dr. Mouse,

I hope this finds you doing well and having a great start to a new school year. I would like your permission to conduct a study utilizing Putnam City Principals. My research will consist of a survey going out to your principals. Principals with less than 3 years experience or less than 3 years at any one site will not be eligible to participate in the study. Qualifying Principals will fill out a survey with 22 questions about the principals' school demographics and about their educational background. The second part of the survey will be an 18 question test to survey their knowledge in special education.

The rest of the study will consist of gathering data on OCCT and EOI information from the State Department. My study will provide information on the relationship between principal's knowledge in special education and the gap between regular education and special education students' scores on the state test.

I am asking 4 other suburban districts to participate as well. Once I finish my study I will share the results with you. Please let me know if I have permission to send my survey out to your principals. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Lynette Thompson, OU Graduate Student
Executive Director of Educational Service
Yukon Public Schools

Appendix E IRB Approval Letter

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: October 17, 2016 **IRB#:** 7349

Principal Investigator: Lynette Marie Thompson **Approval Date:** 10/14/2016 **Expiration Date: 09/30/2017**

Study Title: THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER IN CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN REGULAR EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION IN A SUBURBAN SETTING

Expedited Category: Category 5 & 7

Collection/Use of PHI: No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above- referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. Cordially,



Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix F Online Consent to Participate in Research

Online Consent to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?
I am **Lynette Thompson** from the EACS Department and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled *THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER IN CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN REGULAR EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION IN A SUBURBAN SETTING*. The research is being conducted at through an online survey. You were selected as a possible participant because you are or were a principal in a 6A suburban district for at least 3 years at the same site. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.
What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of this research is to investigate if the principal's knowledge of special education effects the achievement gap between regular education students and special education students as reported on the Oklahoma State test.

How many participants will be in this research? About 145 principals will be asked to take part in this research.

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked to fill out a survey. The 1st part of the survey will be a questionnaire about your professional career and the 2nd part is a survey to establish your knowledge base in special education.

How long will this take? Your participation will take from 15-45 minutes based on your ability level to fill out the survey.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate? There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.

Will I be compensated for participating? You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research

Who will see my information? In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you. I will only ask for the name the site in which you served as principal for more than 3 years. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

In addition, this is an academic not-for-profit research project. Data are collected via Google Survey, an online survey system that has its own privacy and security

policies for keeping your information confidential. Please note no assurance can be made as to the use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints? If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at

Lynette Thompson
199 N Banner Rd El Reno, OK 73036
Phone: 405-262-3898 or 405-350-1341; Email: lmthompson@ou.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jeffrey Maiden:
University of Oklahoma
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
820 Van Fleet Oval
Collings 337 Norman, OK 73019
Office 405.325.1524 Fax 405.325.2403 Email: maiden@ou.edu

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).
Please print this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

Click on Yes or No, if this doesn't forward you to another page hold done the CTRL key and click on the Yes or No. Thank You.
YES I agree to participate
NO I do not want to participate

This research has been approved by the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus IRB.
IRB Number: 7349 **Approval date: 09/30/16**

Appendix G IRB Approval of Study Modification

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Approval of Study Modification – Expedited Review – AP0

Date: January 30, 2017 **IRB#:** 7349

Principal Investigator: Lynette Marie Thompson **Reference No: 661635**

Study Title: THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER IN CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN REGULAR EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION IN A SUBURBAN SETTING

Approval Date: 01/30/2017

Modification Description:
The State Department of Education notified me they could not locate the data requested. I have reached out to the five districts in the study and they do have the information at their Districts. The information collected has not changed. I would simply go to each District and peruse individual years of API summary data and collect the number of regular students versus Special education that scored proficient on the state testing. As before the information will NOT have student names on it. This is the same information shared with stakeholders and is not confidential information.

I will collect information by site and link it to my survey to run my statistical analysis as explained in my original application. The ONLY change is not collecting the information from OSDE and collecting out of notebooks kept by school Districts. It will just add time to my data collection process by having to go to individual districts instead of retaining from the OSDE and going through documents at home.

The review and approval of this submission is based on the determination that the study, as amended, will continue to be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 46.

To view the approved documents for this submission, open this study from the My Studies option, go to Submission History, go to Completed Submissions tab and then click the Details icon.

If the consent form(s) were revised as a part of this modification, discontinue use of all previous versions of the consent form.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the HRPP office at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. The HRPP Administrator assigned for this submission: Nicole A Cunningham.
Cordially,



Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Permission to Collect Information from Sites
Sample of email sent to all five school districts

Appendix H Permission to Collect Information at Sites

January 30, 2017

Hello Dr. Mouse,

I hope this finds you doing well and having a great start to the new year. I have collected surveys from your principals that were willing to participate. I was supposed to gather data on OCCT and EOI information from the State Department. However, I was just informed by the State Department that they could not locate the data I had requested months ago. I would like to come to your District's administration office to collect the above data. Please let me know if you this will be possible. I have contacted the OU IRB and submitted a revision for my study indicating I will have to gather data from District Administration offices. I received an approval earlier today and I have attached this letter from IRB for your review.

I am asking 4 other districts to allow me to collect my data from them. Again please let me know if this possible. You can reach me on my cell phone or email whichever is easiest for you. My cell phone number is 405-227-3323.. Thank you in advance for your consideration and I don't foresee this being intrusive in anyway. I will be more than glad to gather data any time during work hours, before or after work hours or on the weekends.

Respectfully,

Lynette Thompson, OU Graduate Student
Executive Director of Educational Service
Yukon Public Schools