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ABSTRACT

This mixed method study used survey and interview data to examine the leadership behaviors of principals who administer special education programs relative to inclusion. Data gathered from principals and special education teachers were compared to determine similarities in perceptions of principals’ leadership behaviors. Principals rated themselves higher than special education teachers on their engagement in leadership behaviors for nine of eleven constructs included in the survey. Principals and special education teachers differ on the perceptions of the principal’s performance of numerous leadership tasks including communication, IEP development, curriculum and instructional assistance, inclusion opportunities, behavior management plans, monitoring students’ progress, staff development, and staff involvement. Agreement among participants was found on two constructs. Both groups gave low ratings to principals for providing meaningful opportunities for the involvement of stakeholders, and encouraging collaboration among school staff.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Howard Coleman, Dr. Michele Parker, and Dr. Carol Chase Thomas, who gave so much of their time and effort while providing guidance and encouragement throughout this journey. This dissertation would not have been possible without the unyielding support of my husband, John; my two children, Dane and Chase; and my parents, Dad and Weeze. I am grateful to many friends and colleagues who provided words of comfort and encouragement along the way.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderfully supportive family. John, my fabulous husband, your patience and support during this trying time can never be repaid. Thank you to my wonderful children who grew up while I was working my way through this endeavor. Your words of encouragement always came at the most necessary times. Words can not express my deeply felt sense of gratitude to my parents, Dad and Weeze, who provided support and encouragement at every turn in this journey. To my school staff, you will never know the comfort I took in knowing you were carrying on the awesome task of educating our children in joyful and meaningful ways when I could not be there. To my dear friends Dawn and Debbie, your friendship and support were immeasurable throughout this process. Debbie, I am so glad I was able to take this journey with you. Finally, this study is dedicated to the passionately committed principals, general education and special education teachers who seek to provide every child, every chance, every day.

As stated so prophetically by James Baldwin,

“For these are ALL our children, we shall profit from or pay for whatever they become.”
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Problem

Principals nationwide are keenly aware of the demands placed upon them for ensuring high student achievement among all students. The mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) hold school principals accountable for the academic success of all students as measured by Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), including students with disabilities. NCLB supports the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms by mandating states to develop academic achievement standards for all students to perform at grade level by the year 2014 (NCLB, 2001).

The advent of NCLB along with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) and its predecessor, the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA, have created an unprecedented era of accountability for the educational performance of all students (Lashley, 2007). Standards-based reforms like NCLB (2001) apply the same high standards to all students including students with disabilities. Inclusion programs aligned with NCLB forces schools to make honest attempts to provide students with disabilities access to general education settings (Rich, 2008). The emphasis on student placement in general education classrooms and grade level proficiency has created challenges for school principals (Praisner, 2003). School principals will be the key to successful academic achievement for students in this assessment-driven environment (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Fullan, 2001).
There is consensus among education leaders across the United States that meeting the needs of students with disabilities is challenging (School Board News, 2003). McLaughlin and Thurlow (2003) state that the mandates of NCLB, specifically the inclusion of all students’ test scores, was a positive step towards holding schools accountable for the academic success of students with disabilities. However, in a review of the effects of NCLB on special education, Rich (2008) cites the need for changes in the way special education programs are supervised given the numerous roles and responsibilities of today’s educational leaders.

Adequate supervision of special education programs requires skills, competencies and knowledge that are wide ranging. Although changes in state policies regarding special education since 1999 have shown a positive trend toward a better understanding of the needs of special education students (Thurlow, Lazarus, Thompson, & Morse, 2005), and policy changes with respect to participation, accommodations and accessibility have become more specific; school leaders are charged with supervising special education programs as well as interpreting, implementing and supporting state and local policies with little formal training (Klofenstine, 2002). In addition, research from the past decade indicates principals are challenged with promoting collaboration between general and special education teachers and administrators to assure that high quality educational programs are accessible to all students (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003).

Providing opportunities for collaboration, resources to support instruction, staff development to increase professional knowledge and the attitude of the principal toward inclusion are integral elements for creating an inclusive setting where all students can be successful (Nanus, 1992). An inclusive school environment relative to students with disabilities is an educational setting which involves membership in general education classrooms with age
appropriate classmates, having individualized and relevant learning objectives, and being provided with the support necessary to learn (Moore, 2005).

The National Center on Education Restructuring and Inclusion National Study (1995) identified eight factors related to the success of inclusion in a learning organization. They include visionary leadership at all levels, educator collaboration, refocused use of assessment, support for students and staff, effective parental involvement, general education best practices, and funding (Villa & Chapple, 2007). The school principal is best positioned to ensure these factors become reality in the school setting. As the instructional leader, the principal has influence over every facet and each participant of the learning environment (Cox, 2008). A review of the literature found that effective leadership is second only to the quality of the classroom teacher in terms of student learning, and that this type of leadership is most influential in schools where students’ learning deficiencies are most acute (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The success of an inclusive school depends largely on the beliefs and values held by the school administrator (Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993).

The principal’s attitude toward special education is a key predictor to the success of the inclusion model (Goor, Schwenn, & Boyer, 1997) and has a direct influence on the perceived working conditions of special education teachers (Billingsley, 2003). Goor (1997) found that principals that value student diversity provide numerous opportunities for teachers and students to learn important skills necessary for living and working in a diverse world. Positive attitudes toward special education influence leadership behaviors which help create positive working conditions for teachers.

Numerous studies (e.g., Boe Bobbitt, Cook, Barkanic, & Maislin, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999) report that the level of administrative support strongly
influences the attrition rate of special education teachers. In a study by Schnorr (1995) 88% of special education teachers cited a supportive administrator as the primary reason for remaining in their respective position. Studies have shown that successful innovation and change in schools is related to the leadership behavior of the principal (Avery, 2003). The opportunities for teaching and learning afforded by strong instructional leadership should improve special education programs and achievement for students with disabilities (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran & Walther-Thomas, 2004).

These numerous responsibilities, along with the accountability demands of NCLB for the measureable success of all students, make it critical that attention to issues of leadership as they relate to the education of students with disabilities be addressed. These challenges and mandates emphasize the need for principals to possess strong leadership skills and in-depth knowledge of special education (Klofenstine, 2002).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to identify the specific leadership behaviors reportedly engaged in by public school elementary principals in southeastern North Carolina related to inclusion. Secondly, this study compared principals’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors to special education teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s leadership behaviors. I employed a sequential explanatory, mixed methods research design. In phase one, quantitative data were collected using a parallel survey to determine principals’ and special education teachers’ perceptions of leadership behaviors related to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Several studies on this topic have used qualitative data collection to investigate subjects’ responses to questions and to corroborate quantitative findings (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Lasky & Karge,
2006; Rich, 2008). In phase two, qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interview questions to assist in the interpretation of the quantitative data.

1. What leadership behaviors do elementary principals report they engage in when administering special education programs relative to inclusion?

2. How similar are principals’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors in the administration of special education programs to special education teachers’ perceptions of principals’ leadership behaviors?

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions apply:

*Adequate yearly progress (AYP)* is primarily a measure of year-to-year student achievement on state mandated tests in reading and mathematics. Each year the state must increase achievement expectations in gradual increments so that by 2013-2014, all (100%) students will achieve proficiency in each subject area.

*Administrators* are elementary school principals serving as the leader in schools with students in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade.

*Free and Appropriate Public Education* is education at no cost to a student with a disability designed to meet the student’s individual needs to the maximum extent possible.

*Inclusion* is a philosophy which embraces diversity and the placement of students with disabilities in the regular classroom to the greatest extent possible with necessary resources and supports to meet the student’s individual needs.

*Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)* is the primary law governing the treatment of students with disabilities in the K-12 education system.
Leadership behaviors are the actions taken by school principals to fully integrate and maximize school resources for positive impact on student achievement.

For the purposes of this study, eleven specific leadership behaviors are defined as follows (Billingsley, Farley & Rude, 1993):

- *Develops and communicates a shared vision* - a coordinated effort by leadership to involve stakeholders in sharing responsibility for educating students with disabilities.

- *Involves stakeholders* - the promotion of collaboration between school staff members and parents, families, and community agencies in the education of students with disabilities.

- *Facilitates IEP development* - the encouragement of all IEP participants to be actively involved in planning the individualized education plan.

- *Assists with curriculum and instructional programs* - the provision of a curriculum framework, resources, materials, and technology that teachers can use to implement curricula in order to best educate students with disabilities.

- *Ensures appropriate inclusion opportunities* - the provision of support systems for general and special education teachers in order to increase opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated in the general education classroom to the greatest extent possible.

- *Designs positive behavior management programs* - the maintenance of a school environment that is conducive to student growth and learning.
• Monitors student progress and program effectiveness - the collection and review of student data in the acquisition of curriculum-based objectives in order to determine student growth and program effectiveness.

• Ensures appropriate staff development activities - the provision of opportunities for staff growth through professional development activities.

• Supports and involves staff members - the use of shared decision-making where teachers have input in decisions that impact them along with administrative support for the efforts teachers make in educating students with disabilities.

• Encourages collaboration among school staff - the provision of opportunities for all staff to learn, solve problems, and interact in small groups or teams.

• Evaluates staff using systematic procedures - the process used to provide assistance to teachers in the application and refinement of instruction.

*Least Restrictive Environment* is the setting most similar to a regular classroom in which a student with disabilities is educated based on the student’s individual needs.

*Principals/Administrators* are public school leaders. Principal participants for this study lead schools serving students in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade.

*Regular Education Initiative (REI)* is a federal reform movement designed to restructure general, compensatory, and special education service delivery systems.

*Response to Intervention (RtI)* is a system used at each school to screen, assess, identify, plan for, and provide interventions to any student at risk of school failure due to academic or behavior needs.

*Special education* is specially designed instruction based upon the individual needs of a student with disabilities including related services necessary to appropriately educate the student.
Systems thinking model is a way of thinking about the strategic environment, and how to develop processes in organizations that achieve strategic goals.

Transformational leadership model is finding a way to be successful in collaboratively defining the essential purpose of teaching and learning and then empowering the entire school community to become energized and focused.

Significance of the Study

Legislation passed in recent years has brought about the need for significant changes to the way students with disabilities are educated in public schools. Inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings is more critical than ever before. The principal has responsibility for the design, management and implementation and evaluation of instructional programs and opportunities for all students including students with disabilities (Sage & Burrello, 1994). The results of principals’ self-perceptions pertaining to their leadership behaviors for the administration of special education programs relative to inclusion will be reported.

John and Robins (2009) found that perception processes operate differently when the target of perception is the self and that psychologically healthy individuals perceive themselves accurately. Kilburg (2006) reports the ability to see one’s behaviors, thoughts, feelings and actions is essential to becoming an exceptional leader. Leaders who are self-aware understand their relationship to their environment and the effects they have on members of the organization. There is growing empirical literature on the significance of self-awareness, also referred to as self-perception. These studies have found that as leaders become more aware of their own capabilities and performance, other stakeholders are more likely to view them as effective leaders (Church, 1997; Goleman, Boyazis, & McKee, 2002; Yammarino & Atwater, 1993).
Although prior studies have documented principals’ self-perceived leadership competencies, attitudes, involvement and level of knowledge regarding the administration of special education (Avery, 2003; Bertrand & Bratberg, 2007; Dolar, 2008; Mauro, 2007), this study identified the leadership behaviors of a group of southeastern North Carolina elementary principals in the administration of special education programs for the inclusion of students with disabilities relative to inclusion, and determined whether special education teachers perceive those behaviors similarly. Prior studies have primarily examined only principals’ self-perceptions. Results of this study will add to the body of literature, and can inform principals, and principal preparation programs, as well as district and state staff development initiatives for school administrators.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Administrative leadership has been studied since the birth of public education in the United States (Bays & Crockett, 2007), but few studies have specifically addressed leadership behaviors for the administration of special education in general and specifically as related to inclusion (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Villa, Thousand, Stainback & Stainback, 1992). School leaders have been challenged for over 30 years to meet the requirements of federal laws regarding the education of students with disabilities beginning with Education for All Handicapped Children Act (DiPaola, et al., 2003). Recent special education legislation at the state and national levels has increased the level of responsibility of principals for educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Principals have more responsibility and are held more accountable than ever before for the education of all students (Lashley, 2007; Praisner, 2003). The principal is the person who oversees the distribution of resources, supervises programs, communicates legislation, provides instructional leadership, and encourages collaboration (O’Brien, 1998). The legislative mandates of NCLB (2001) and amendments to IDEA (2004) make it necessary for schools to provide one system of education to meet the needs of all students rather than a dual system of special
education and regular education. This change increases the need for general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators to work together. A principal committed to educating students in an inclusive environment is best suited to meet these challenges (Klofenstine, 2002).

This chapter is a review of the literature regarding special education, the leadership behaviors of school administrators as instructional leaders, and leadership behaviors for the administration of special education relative to inclusion. It contains five focus areas: (a) history of special education, (b) inclusion perspectives, (c) principal as instructional leader, (d) principal leadership in special education, and (e) perceptions of principals’ involvement in special education.

**History of Special Education**

Millions of students receive the educational services of special education due to the enactment of landmark legislation known as Public Law 94-142 Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Prior to the passage of PL 94-142 students with disabilities were typically excluded from public schools. For decades people who were blind, deaf, mentally retarded, or physically disabled were institutionalized in hospitals and asylums where their daily and educational needs were addressed for life. Following World War I, initiatives were begun to address the needs of returning war veterans. The need for training or re-training created the first federally funded program for people with disabilities known as the federal-state vocational rehabilitation system (Shreve, 1982).

Five social change movements of the 1960s brought about new changes to services for persons with disabilities in an effort to increase opportunities for independent living. Gerben DeJong (as cited in Shreve, 1982) called these movements:
Changes brought about by these movements were the foundation to the Disability Rights movement. Advocates began to examine the availability of services, and community-based organizations were started to address the needs of the disabled. New programs, technologies, and attitudes began to make differences for this population.

Like African-Americans and other minorities, persons with disabilities during the 1960s were denied rights to basic human services such as housing, employment and education. Shreve (1982) reports “African-American women like Rosa Parks were not allowed to sit at the front of the bus, but people with disabilities just wanted to ride on the bus” (p. 3). Persons with disabilities and their advocates sought equal rights as well as respect for their contributions as consumers to society.

During the Consumerism movement advocates and persons with disabilities began to express their contributions to society as consumers first and not just as “patients” (Shreve, 1982, p. 3). Historically, persons with disabilities were not given choices over the types of products and services they would like to use. For the first time, people with disabilities expressed their rights to educate themselves and choose for themselves products and services to purchase. During this same time period, advocates for the disability rights movement began establishing self-help groups. These groups sprang from the beginnings of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Like organizers of AA, advocates for persons with disabilities felt people living under similar
circumstances with similar limiting abilities could best counsel and help one another (Shreve, 1982).

The removal of medical professionals in the daily lives of individuals with disabilities defines the de-medicalization movement. Advocates of the movement believed individuals with disabilities should be seen as “disabled” instead of as “sick.” As a result, individuals with disabilities and their family members sought personal assistants. These assistants could be hired, managed, trained and fired by persons with disabilities or their family members if needed.

Early attempts at deinstitutionalization were begun by advocacy groups who cited the need for individuals with disabilities to be seen as disabled persons not patients (Shreve, 1982). Substantial progress for the rights of individuals to live and be educated in their communities has only recently been made. Beginning in the 1930s, small groups of parents began to organize in an effort to advocate for the rights of their children. These parents mostly had children in state-run institutions. Opportunities for these and other parents to have their children with disabilities educated in their communities necessitated changes in the way public schools were organized in order to accommodate students with disabilities. Significant increases in the numbers of students with disabilities entering public schools made it necessary for schools to create additional special education programs. Rather than modify educational settings and practices for this population, the vast majority of districts established separate classrooms or entire schools essentially starting “special” education (Crossley, 1994).

By 1960 over 30,000 special education teachers and educational specialists were employed in public schools. President Kennedy in 1963 signed the Mental Retardation Facilities Construction Act/Communities Mental Health Centers Act (PL 88-164). This legislation broadened the definition of disabled to include not only the mentally retarded. Public schools
became responsible for deaf, visually impaired, speech impaired, severe psychological and behavioral disorders, and children with other health impairments. As a result, more students with disabilities sought an education from public schools (Moore, 2005). School districts made efforts to meet these mandates; however, students with disabilities continued to be segregated from the general education population. Special education classrooms and separate school settings for educating students with disabilities increased (Winzer, 2003).

This disparity was the focus of legislation entitled The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-12). By this act, schools receiving federal funds could not discriminate against students with disabilities. School districts across the nation quickly began to make changes. Section 504 of this legislation provided parents due process and procedural safeguards enabling parents to challenge educational placement decisions on behalf of their children (Wright, 2004).

The impetus for widespread changes to public schools began with the passage of historical legislation known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) (Moore, 2005). The law assured access to public education and required schools to fit the needs and abilities of children as opposed to children fitting the needs of schools. Children were granted the rights to a free public education, due process, nondiscriminatory assessment, and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Keogh, 2007). The overarching goal of the law was to secure a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for children ages 5-21 with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) in order to prepare them for life in mainstream society (PL 94-142, 1975). Initial changes brought about by the passage of PL 94-142 meant that students with disabilities began to be taught in more suitable environments; however, separate and unequal education systems existed (Winzer, 2003).
In 1986, PL 94-142 was amended by Congress to make FAPE inclusive of children ages 3-21, to establish Early Intervention Programs (EIP) for babies and toddlers ages 0-2, and to develop Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) for each family with an infant or toddler with disabilities. These changes by Congress made clear the rights of children and their parents under this federal law (Peterson, 2007). Educators and researchers had advocated for the integration of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms, it was not until a federal politician wrote about her vision for the education of students with disabilities that real progress began (Bartlett, Etscheidt, & Weisenstein, 2007).

It was during this period that Madeline Will, then the Assistant United States Education Secretary and parent of a child with disabilities, called upon building level administrators to share the responsibility of educating students with disabilities. This initial mention of inclusion was first referred to as the “regular education initiative” (REI) (Bartlett, et al., 2007). Will questioned the establishment of special education as a separate system from general education.

The primary purpose of the REI was to form partnerships between special and regular education programs in order to serve students with mild and moderate learning disabilities in the regular classroom setting. Since that time, support for programs to serve all students with disabilities, including those with severe and profound disabilities, has grown. This support movement includes educating students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers in the school they would attend if they were not disabled. Will’s vision began the mainstreaming and the inclusion initiatives (Klofenstine, 2002).

The inclusion movement began to expand from 1989 to 1994. Court rulings provided clarification of the term “least restrictive environment.” A legislative change that had an important impact was the renaming of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1986.
The reauthorized act was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and was reauthorized by Congress in 1990 (Boyle & Weishaar, 2001). Significant amendments were made in 1990 including: (a) change in terminology from *handicapped student* to *student with a disability*, (b) the renaming of the law to IDEA, (c) autism and traumatic brain injury were added to the categories of disabilities, (d) assistive technology and rehabilitative services were added as related services with clarifying descriptions, and (e) transition plans were mandated for students with disabilities ages 16 and older (Broyles, 2004). Section 612 of IDEA states:

> To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (Driscoll & Nagel, 2008, p. 1)

Further amendments of IDEA were authorized in 1997 which placed emphasis on the quality of public education programs, improvement in student achievement, and the evaluation of student performance (Bartlett, et al., 2007). The most significant changes brought about included the mandate for inclusion of students with disabilities in district and statewide assessments as well as the inclusion of a regular education teacher on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team (Peterson, 2007). One other noticeable change was the requirement that states ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, and, if a student would not be participating in the general education program and extracurricular activities, an explanation in the student's IEP was required. Each year the Office of Special Education
Programs (OSEP) collects data from states on the numbers of students with disabilities served in each of the six educational environments that must be made available. These six environments and their descriptions follow:

- **Regular class** includes students who receive special education and related services outside the regular classroom for less than 21 percent of the school day.

- **Resource room** includes students who receive special education and related services outside the regular classroom for at least 21 percent but not more than 60 percent of the school day.

- **Separate class** includes students who receive special education and related services outside the regular classroom for more than 60 percent of the school day.

- **Separate school** includes students who receive special education and related services in separate day schools for more than 50 percent of the school day.

- **Residential facility** includes students who receive education in a public or private residential facility, at public expense, for more than 50 percent of the school day.

- **Homebound/hospital environment** includes students placed in and receiving special education in hospital or homebound program.

Continued mandates for students to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) coupled with the Regular Education Initiative (REI) had significant influence on the establishment of the general education classroom as the standard for least restrictive environment and the growth of inclusion (Broyles, 2004).
The impact of IDEA was strengthened with the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law in January 2002. This law mandates the inclusion of all students in district, state and federal testing. In addition, the law states that all students must be proficient in reading and math by 2014 (Peterson, 2007). Each year schools are provided target goals of proficiency for all students as well as subgroups of 40 or more students. The four targeted subgroups according to NCLB (2001) include (a) children with disabilities, (b) children with limited English proficiency, (c) children of racial minority status, and (d) children at economic disadvantage. Proficiency is defined as performing “on grade level.” Schools with 40 or more students with disabilities who are tested by state assessments must meet these target goals for this subgroup.

NCLB raised the academic bar for all students. Merely accessing regular education curriculum is not sufficient to achieve the goals of NCLB. A cohesive effort and meaningful collaboration of special education and general education programs and stakeholders is required (DiPaola et al., 2004). In essence, NCLB highlighted the need for schools serving students with disabilities to establish inclusive environments where all students are the responsibility of every staff member.

Jones (2006) cited the difficulty schools have and the frustration felt by principals in meeting AYP requirements for students with disabilities. In addition, principals are facing corrective action including the withholding of funding, state takeover, and removal of staff if these requirements are not met. In fact, principals in schools where subgroups of students do not make AYP for four consecutive years may be removed from their positions. The AYP target goal percentages increase periodically as determined by each state. Principals’ concerns for meeting these benchmarks are palpable. The challenges of meeting AYP goals rest with the building
principal who is ultimately responsible for the successes and failures within a school (Bays & Crockett, 2007).

IDEA was last reauthorized in 2004. The most significant changes included increased accountability at the state and district levels as more data are collected on students in general, as well as on racial subgroups. An outcome of this latest reauthorization that impacts every school, building administrator, and teacher is the impetus to keep students out of special education. IDEA requires schools to provide instruction and intervention for the prevention of learning difficulties and at-risk learners (Peterson, 2007).

Regular education interventions used by the teachers must be scientifically proven methods, strategies, and practices that have been recommended by a school-based multi-disciplinary team. These interventions are to be used to assist students who are not successful in the regular classroom. Once these interventions have been identified and implemented, the multi-disciplinary team must assess and monitor the student’s responses to the interventions (RtI). The design, implementation, assessment and monitoring of the student’s progress must continue for a determined amount of time. If the interventions do not produce positive results, the team may refer the student for further evaluation to determine the need for special education services (Bartlett, et al., 2007).

Additional requirements of IDEA (2004) mandate that states collect and publicly report disability categories assigned to students; restrictiveness of class and school placements; and the amount of access students have to instruction in the general education classroom (National Education Association, 2007). As evidenced by Table 1, the amount of access students with disabilities have to instruction in the general education setting has progressively increased in recent years. In Fall 2007, 95 percent of students aged 6-21 were being educated in regular
schools. More than half of these same students (56.8%) were being taught for 79 percent or more of their school day in a general education classroom (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010).

Trends in special education support a continued increase in the placement of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms. Implementation of RtI models and legislative mandates ensure that consideration be made for the placement of all students in general education classrooms. Given the changes in the way students at-risk and students with disabilities must now be viewed for purposes of academic success and placement, principals need to be knowledgeable of leadership practices and behaviors which will best facilitate and support this movement toward more inclusive school settings (Florian, 2008).

The progression towards educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom began almost 40 years ago. Over the past two decades, advocates for the rights of all children have paved the way toward a more comprehensive understanding and implementation of inclusion through increased legislation, public awareness, and research studies (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Crossley, 1994). The success of students with disabilities in the regular education setting can be enhanced when stakeholders possess a clear understanding of inclusion. As Fuchs and Fuchs (1994) noted, “Increasingly, special education reform is symbolized by the term ‘inclusive schools’” (p.299).
Table 1

Percentage of students 6 to 21 years old served under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and amount of time spent outside of the general education classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Less than 21 percent</th>
<th>21-60 percent</th>
<th>More than 60 percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. From National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010

Inclusion Perspectives

The term “inclusion” is not specifically used in the wording of IDEA 2004; however, it is most often associated with the determination of placement for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1994) developed the following working definition:

Providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary
aids and support services, in age appropriate classrooms in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society. (p. 15)

Klofenstine (2002) defines inclusion as it relates to special education as a philosophy which embraces diversity and the placement of students with disabilities in the regular classroom to the greatest extent possible with necessary resources and supports to meet the student’s individual needs. Inclusion is founded on the belief that every child has the right to be educated in a general education classroom (Crossley, 1994; Moore, 2005). Values, beliefs and practices which promote successful inclusion relative to students with disabilities should be carefully planned, intentionally implemented and continually assessed for measuring results and making adjustments. Research by the National Institute for Urban School Renewal (2000) lists nine practices for successful inclusion. Inclusive schools:

- embrace diversity;
- provide access to knowledge, skills, and information to all students;
- tailor learning to meet individual needs;
- encourage co-teaching and collaboration among general and special educators;
- collaborate with families and community members,
- think outside the box in terms of school structure and finance;
- maintain high expectations of all students;
- engage in continuous improvement; and
- promote and support inclusive communities.

The concept of inclusion has resulted from a long history of educational legislation and reforms concerned with the appropriate education of all students. Advocates of inclusion propose
that all students are unique and have the need for individualized attention; therefore, instructional practices for students with disabilities can benefit all children (Moore, 2005). In studies conducted on the effects of inclusion for students with and without disabilities, researchers found students without disabilities made gains in social awareness and understanding. In addition, the academic performance of students without disabilities did not suffer (Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005). Hobbs and Westling (1998) cite studies that found students with disabilities made better academic gains in regular classrooms compared to students in special education classes and students without disabilities did not regress in their academic skills when taught beside peers with disabilities. The authors contend that successful inclusion depends on effective collaboration between all school stakeholders. Stanovich (1996) lists six characteristics of collaboration. Collaboration:

- is voluntary;
- requires parity among participants;
- is based on mutual goals;
- depends on shared responsibility for participation;
- involves individuals who share their resources and decision-making;
- involves individuals who share accountability for outcomes.

Inclusion calls for a more complete merger of regular and special education (Hines & Johnston, 1996; Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997). Collaboration between general and special education teachers is vital to the success of students with disabilities taught in the regular education classroom. General education teachers, special education teachers, and related support staff who work collaboratively are most likely to develop and implement strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners and develop solutions that enhance the learning experiences of all
learners (Salend, Johansen, Mumper, Chase, Pike, & Dorney 1997). This collaboration serves to support and help ensure academic and social successes for students with disabilities in an inclusive setting (Stanley, Christiano, & Eastwood, 2008). According to the National Study of Inclusive Education (1994), students were found to be on-task more often, received more one-on-one instruction, and were more likely to successfully complete individual work assignments in classrooms where general and special education teachers worked collaboratively and took responsibility for the education of all students (National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion, 1994).

Collaboration and communication between regular and special education teachers is vital to the success of students with disabilities in inclusive settings and is a common element across all models for inclusion (Moore, 2005). Establishing trust between special and regular educators who work together in inclusive classrooms is the first step that must be undertaken. Studies have shown that “successful implementation of inclusion presumes that no one staff member has the knowledge and experience to meet the needs of all students” (Bartlett, et al., 2007, p.235). Therefore, it is crucial that educators think of themselves as members of a team and act in that regard (Villa & Thousand, 2003).

In 2002, the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education recommended that general education teachers learn more about special education. In addition, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) advocates for a unified system of education. The organization places emphasis on the infusion of quality teaching by general and special education teachers. The NASDSE states, “the success of all children is dependent on the quality of both special education and general education…and that special education is not a place apart, but an integral part of education” (Sharpe & Hawes, 2003, p. 3).
Traditionally special education teachers’ roles have focused on remediation and skill acquisition for their students, most commonly in separate settings. Special education teachers now find themselves jointly responsible for the general education curriculum. As a result, special education teachers now collaborate with general educators and related staff members to create materials, share teaching strategies, formulate authentic assessments, and design instructional interventions for all students in general classroom settings (Bartlett, et al., 2007).

Changes in the roles of the general education teacher have also occurred in schools that have adopted the philosophy of inclusion. General education teachers must have broad knowledge of their obligations under the law and disabilities in children. In addition, general education teachers must possess an understanding of the need to provide accommodations for students with disabilities including the skills to adapt instruction and curricula (Bartlett, et al., 2007). A challenge to all educators is to maintain high expectations of all students while meeting their individual unique needs. Advocates of inclusion see the application of standards based education to the achievement of students with disabilities as a move in a positive direction. Discussions of IEP can now focus on instructional practices and interventions for students with disabilities rather than their deficits (Thompson, Thurlow, & Whetstone, 2001). The use of varying teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students has become known as differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001).

Teachers who differentiate instruction in their heterogeneous classrooms recognize variances in their students’ needs and abilities. Tomlinson (2001) identifies four classroom elements that teachers can differentiate based on students’ abilities, interests, and learning styles:

- **content** – what the student needs to learn
- **process** – activities the student will engage in to make sense of content
• *products* – culminating artifacts that require application of what has been learned
• *learning environment* – classroom routines and climate

Teachers who differentiate these four elements maximize the individual potential of students.

General and special education teachers who collaborate and communicate to meet the needs of their students are better equipped to create differentiated classrooms (Dettmer, et al., 2005; Tomlinson, 2000; Villa & Thousand, 2003).

There are numerous ideas and strategies for promoting collaboration between general and special education teachers (Villa & Chapple, 2007; Villa & Thousand, 2003; Voltz, Elliot, & Cobb, 1994; Sharp & Hawes, 2003). Most necessary is the opportunity for general and special education teachers to apply newly learned collaborative and instructional strategies in the classroom (Sharp & Hawes, 2003). Collaboration has been the generally accepted model.

Researchers at the Institute on Community Integration (ICI) along with the University of Minnesota, and staff of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, Division of Special Education (DSE), designed a training model that provides general and special education teachers with the skills necessary to meet the needs of all students in an inclusive classroom within the context of educational standards and reform.

The Applied Collaboration model brings teams of general and special education teachers together to identify mutual goals and to learn and use negotiation skills. Content for the model focuses on (a) collaborative strategies to increase communication and cooperation and (b) instructional strategies to increase teachers’ knowledge of teaching practices including differentiated instruction and shared classroom management. Training is presented by teams consisting of both general and special education teachers. Any efforts to improve communication
and collaboration between general and special education teachers require the active involvement and support of the school administration (Sharp & Hawes, 2003).

In a mixed methods study of the impact of collaboration between general and special education teachers on the academic and social growth of students with and without disabilities, all students showed improved academic and social standing. Students were more engaged in classroom activities, and more likely to initiate interactions with their peers. Teachers in this study reported a higher level of confidence in educating students in an inclusive setting. Reasons cited for increased confidence included shared expertise, knowledge, and responsibility of all team members (Hunt, Soto, Maier, & Doering, 2003). Opportunities for collaboration are most likely to occur with the support of the principal.

The school administrator is in a position to ensure opportunities for the success of inclusion. It is essential that the building principal undertake the necessary measures to ensure appropriate training for teachers and frequent opportunities for communication and collaboration to occur between staff members who work together to educate all students in an inclusive environment. Instructional prevention of academic failure and placement accountability for students with disabilities is mandated by IDEA (2004). These factors create added responsibilities for school principals in their role as instructional leaders and as advocates for all students (Gersten, Yavanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Lashley, 2007; Moore, 2005).

**Instructional Leadership Models.** Leadership is regarded as a key factor in accounting for differences in the academic success of students. Effective leadership is viewed as the catalyst for school change, student growth, teacher attrition, and the health of the school as an organization. There is
growing evidence that the influences and impacts of the behaviors of the school principal on school climate, and school effectiveness are substantial (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002).

A variety of instructional leadership models have been discussed in the literature including terms such as democratic, systems, moral, participatory, managerial and transformational to name a few (National Middle School Association, 2008). In the early 1990s researchers began to formulate leadership models aligned with the trends in education at the time such as shared leadership, site-based management and empowerment. The models and theories developed focus on leadership principles for the refinement of organizational norms (Hallinger, 2003). The focus on teamwork and collaboration found in these models, as opposed to top-down hierarchies, encourages school leaders to think more about the nature of the educational process and less about who is in charge (Liontos, 1992). Two well known models for leadership with a focus on teamwork and collaboration are the Systems Thinking model and the Transformational Leadership model (McAdams, 1997; Hallinger, 2003).

A principal focused on systemic organizational change must engage in “systems thinking” as described by Peter Senge. Instructional leaders practicing the Systems Thinking model create a highly integrated network of subsystems within the organization to accomplish the overarching goal. Senge (1990) describes four disciplines that are precursors to leadership positioned to implement systemic change. These include personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, and team learning. The fifth discipline, systems thinking, integrates the other four disciplines (McAdams, 1997).

Using this model, a school administrator attempting to establish a learning organization committed to the successful education of students must first possess personal mastery of his or her core belief and values system as it relates to teaching and learning. This personal ethic
creates trust and respect from all stakeholders which facilitates the establishment of a culture of teamwork and collaboration. Senge (1990) describes personal mastery as "continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively" (p. 7).

Mastery of one’s personal vision can then lead to the establishment of a shared vision. Building on the trust and culture of collaboration, a principal is able to create a shared vision which fosters commitment rather than compliance. The commitment of all stakeholders to the philosophical and situational realities of educating students is crucial to the success of students and the organization (Weir & Hobbs, 1999). In creating the shared vision, the principal has the opportunity to engage others in self-reflection and discussion of deeply held convictions or a review of mental models as described by Senge (1990).

These personally held generalizations and images can be influenced through honest thoughtful discussion and the development of a shared vision for the education of students. These processes are all part of the discipline known as team learning. In-depth discussions among stakeholders who are able to suspend personally held beliefs in an attempt to reach truth in understanding and commitment create synergy and focus. This focus and commitment is a necessary component in a principal’s quest to create a healthy organization for all stakeholders (McNamara, 1997).

Like the Systems Thinking model, the Transformational Leadership Model focuses on the organization’s capacity to gather commitment from stakeholders in order to establish its vision and purpose. This model has been shown to increase stakeholder performance, improve the perceptions of subordinates’ views of organizational leaders, and improve job satisfaction for members of the organization. Chin (2007) reviewed 45 studies on transformational leadership in
school settings across Asia and the United States. Statistical results of the meta-analysis indicated there were direct effects on job satisfaction, school outcomes, and student achievement.

This model for leadership focuses on participation from the bottom up. As a result, leadership is distributed throughout the organization. This approach has proven to be both applicable and useful in educational settings (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Walstrom, 2004). A principal engaging in this model builds leadership capacity in others in order to effect positive change in the organization (Hallinger, 2003). Empowering stakeholders across the educational organization creates shared ownership for the education of students and can be transformative for everyone (Liontos, 1992).

According to Liontos (1992), transformational leaders work toward three goals. First, the leader works with staff to develop and maintain a collaborative culture. There are norms of shared responsibility and continuous improvement. Transformational school leaders include staff in goal setting, provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate, distribute leadership to others, and continually state the school’s values and beliefs. Second, the leader supports the growth and development of staff from custodians to classroom teachers. Research has shown that teachers are more likely to seek growth and development when they are supported in their efforts. This investment in staff development is enhanced by the alignment of growth opportunities to the school’s clearly delineated goals. Finally, the transformational leader relies on the commitment and aptitude of others to develop new activities and solutions for the attainment of school wide goals. School leaders engaged in transformational leadership communicate to their staffs the value of staff input and the belief that goals are best established together. (Leithwood et al., 2004).
In reality effective principals use aspects of several models to perform leadership responsibilities. A review of the literature by the National Middle School Association (2008), found two common qualities among all models that epitomize the essentials of leadership: helping the organization to establish appropriate and defensible goals, and influencing members to accomplish these goals. Further review of related research and literature provides specificity to these overarching qualities.

Leadership Studies. The fundamental goal of education is to promote learning; since principals are second only to the classroom teacher for impacting student learning, they need to be effective instructional leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004). Research has repeatedly shown school leaders are the catalyst for instructional changes in schools and their level of involvement can determine the success of these changes (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Cooner, Tochterman, & Garrison-Wade, 2004; Cox, 2008; Fullan, 1993; Riordin, 2003). In the last two decades researchers have attempted to identify the knowledge and skills required of effective education leaders. The results have indicated a need to better understand how leaders can best manage and direct instruction (Hoachlander, Alt, & Beltranena, 2001). While no one set of strategies for improving the academic achievement of students through effective school leadership will suffice, school leaders who are knowledgeable of research study results are better equipped to increase student achievement (Waters, McNulty, & Marzano, 2003).

In an extensive review of more than 5,000 school leadership studies by Waters, et al., (2003), the authors identified 21 leadership responsibilities and sixty-six associated practices of effective school leaders that positively impact student achievement. Results of their research indicate an effective principal can have as much as a ten percentile point gain influence on norm-
referenced tests. Of these 21 leadership responsibilities, the four found to have the highest effect size for their impact on student achievement were the extent to which the principal:

- ensures staff is aware of the most current theories and practices and embeds discussion of these into the school’s culture;
- is aware of the what is happening in the day to day activities of the school and uses this information to lead proactively;
- is willing to and actively challenges the status quo; and
- involves teachers in important decisions that impact the school.

The authors conclude that just knowing what to do to improve students’ achievement is not sufficient. More importantly, schools must have people positioned and capable of performing these necessary tasks.

Additional researchers have examined specific principal practices associated with effective school leadership and student achievement. Hoachlander, et al., (2001) reported best practices for improved student achievement and their connections to educational leadership in their literature review. The authors list six categories of leadership strategies for increased student achievement. The six topics include:

- increasing academic rigor and eliminating tracking;
- increasing student engagement by adopting research-based pedagogy and providing support services;
- providing sustainable quality staff development including building leadership capacity among teachers;
- managing the organization including scheduling;
- forming relationships with teachers, families, and the community; and
- implementing assessment tools and monitoring for accountability purposes.
The authors also noted that merely identifying leadership strategies for improved student achievement is not enough. Their review focused on strategies designed to strengthen administrative skills through training and professional development.

Leithwood, et al., (2004) reviewed three kinds of research studies to determine the effects of school leadership on student achievement. These studies included qualitative case studies in exceptional school settings (i.e., settings where students achieve significantly above or below expectations), large-scale quantitative studies of direct and indirect effects of school leadership on pupil outcomes, and large-scale quantitative studies examining specific leadership practices. The authors found evidence that suggests successful leadership can play an important role in improving student learning. The authors make two claims based on their findings. First, leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school. Second, leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed the most.

Leithwood et al. (2004) identified three basic core practices for successful leadership. First, effective leaders set direction. Establishing a sense of purpose or vision (Hallinger & Heck, 2002) is accomplished by developing shared understandings about the organization, its procedures and goals. The principal uses the school improvement plan as a means to develop this shared understanding of the school’s mission and a means for identifying the steps to accomplish identified goals. Establishing and communicating the goals of the organization helps people develop a sense of identity and their place within the work environment. Effective principals inherently understand the motivational power of open honest communication with stakeholders who will then be more likely to follow the path established by the principal (Leithwood et al., 2004).
The second core practice identified by Leithwood et al. is *developing people*. A large amount of the literature reviewed by these authors emphasized the principal’s role in instructional leadership, which frequently cited a relatively new look at the leader’s emotional intelligence. An effective principal is attuned to his/her own beliefs and values. Equally important, the principal is aware of staff needs and shows this awareness by using employees’ capacities to promote the goals of the organization. Specific behaviors that help develop people include the ability to intellectually stimulate them, provide them with individualized support, and serve as an appropriate role model. Professional development opportunities aligned with the needs of teachers and full participation by the principal in such staff development are two ways effective principals develop their staff (Leithwood et al., 2004).

The third core practice of effective leaders identified by Leithwood, et al. (2004) for the improvement of student achievement is the *redesigning of the organization*. The successful principal resists the pressures of conformity when they are in opposition to best practices. For example, the authors cite reliance on drill-and-practice instruction in light of the accountability standards and high-stakes testing instead of trusting teachers to more deeply develop understanding of curriculum in their students. Ultimately, redesigning the organization requires leaders to rely on the competence of others, hold high expectations for all students and staff, and to both model and require collaboration. Glickman (2003) provides summary of this third practice in the statement: “In successful schools, principals aren’t threatened by the wisdom of others; instead, they cherish it by distributing leadership” (p. 56).

The roles and responsibilities of the school leader have garnered great attention over several decades; however, awareness of the impact of school leadership on the administration of special education programs is recent. Studies reporting on principal leadership in effective
schools generally do not specifically refer to students with disabilities and special education teachers (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). The next section provides a summary of available research on leadership roles for the administration of special education.

**Principal Leadership in Special Education**

The role of the principal has changed noticeably in recent years due to imposed state and federal mandates, the advancement of special interest group agendas, increased parental involvement, and measures of accountability (Lashway, 2002). For these same reasons, the amount of time devoted to special education and related issues by principals has increased. Principals must adapt to these changes in their role as the building leader in order to create an aligned learning organization that functions with a unity of purpose for the inclusion of students with disabilities in schools and classrooms (McAdams, 1997). There are several characteristics associated with principals who lead inclusive schools (see Table 2) (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Villa, et al., 1992).

In a study by Bays and Crockett (2007), the authors studied principals in elementary settings to determine explanatory theories for how instructional leadership for special education actually occurs (see Figure 1). The grounded theory developed from the study found principals must negotiate among competing priorities and contextual factors to fulfill their roles. The results of the negotiations require the sharing of responsibility for special education among personnel. According to this theoretical framework, principals must possess strong communication skills and adequate knowledge of special education to manage these negotiations, and distribute responsibility for the education of students with disabilities.
Table 2

*Characteristics of principals who lead inclusive schools and examples of practices in which they are engaged*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Examples of Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk takers</td>
<td>▪ Push for innovative solutions&lt;br&gt;▪ Advocate for inclusive practices within their schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invested in relationships</td>
<td>▪ Work with stakeholders to resolve differences and find workable solutions&lt;br&gt;▪ Work to build trust&lt;br&gt;▪ Promote changes through honest dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>▪ Routinely involved with all stakeholders to address school issues&lt;br&gt;▪ Understand issues first-hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>▪ Gather information from a variety of sources to form reasonable approaches for action&lt;br&gt;▪ Include teams of stakeholders in decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative</td>
<td>▪ Share leadership with staff at all levels of the organization&lt;br&gt;▪ Create time for teams to meet, plan, and teach together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional</td>
<td>▪ Have a strong sense of direction&lt;br&gt;▪ Infuse their core values, beliefs, and attitudes into the inclusive school culture&lt;br&gt;▪ Recognize the need for the delivery of changes at an acceptable pace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is ample literature that supports the key roles principals play in leading effective schools (Cooner, et al., 2004; Cox, 2008; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Fullan 1993; Glickman, 2003; Leithwood, 2003). One role that has gained attention in recent years is the role of the principal for the administration of special education. Recent federal policies such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) have highlighted the responsibility of the principal to ensure high academic achievement for all students including students with disabilities (Bays & Crockett,
To ensure the success of inclusion, it is important that principals exhibit behaviors that advance the integration, acceptance, and success of students with disabilities in general education classes.

Figure 1. Theoretical model illustrating the patterns of practice used by principals for the instructional leadership of special education. Adapted from Bays, D. A. & Crockett, J. B. (2007). Investigating instructional leadership for special education. Exceptionality, 15(3), 143-161.

The principal’s roles for the establishment of school wide inclusion include budgeting, communicating legislative mandates, building capacity for research-based instructional
strategies, establishing a data-based program for intervention and identification, and developing a comprehensive collaboration process for all stakeholders. As the building leader, the principal is best situated to establish the tone, commitment, and climate for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities (Hooper, Pankake, & Schroth, 1999).

A total of four literature reviews related to the significant role of leadership in administering special education programs were located. All four of the reviews identified specific skills, behaviors, and/or beliefs necessary for the successful administration of special education programs.

Lillie and Lesane (1992) summarized the research literature on effective leadership abilities and skills needed to support successful instructional practices for students with disabilities. The two main types of leadership skills and abilities cited were (a) leadership process skills and abilities associated with improving student outcomes, and (b) leadership that reflects knowledge about instructional content, strategies and methods that lead to increased achievement for students with disabilities. Several studies noted the principal’s knowledge of effective instruction included the ability to define and communicate the school’s mission and goals; identifying, supervising and coordinating curriculum; promoting a positive school climate; providing incentives for teachers; and evaluating student progress (Avery, 2003; Bertrand & Bratberg, 2007; Stevenson, 2002; Webb, 1997). Effective principals also have knowledge of instructional issues, best research-based practices, characteristics of disabilities, and laws that protect students’ rights including IDEA and NCLB. Lillie and Lesane (1992) found the principal’s attitude towards a program is the biggest predictor of the program’s success.

Principals who have a strong grasp of the knowledge base of special education are better situated to engage in behaviors which support special education and regular education teachers.
Behaviors cited by Lillie and Lesane (1992) include support for teachers by providing (a) time for collaboration, (b) staff development opportunities, (c) resources, (d) manageable case loads, and (e) shared leadership opportunities. The support of the building principal is critical to retaining special education teachers. As many as half of all new special educators leave the field within the first three years as a result of poor administrative support among other reasons (Lillie & Lesane, 1992). Further, a study by Gersten et al. (2001) found the support from administration had a strong impact on all aspects of the special education teachers’ working conditions.

A plethora of research underscores the principal’s role in the special education process (Billingsley & Cross, 1991; Billingsley, Farley and Rude, 1993; DiPaola, et al., 2004; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Housman, 2007; O’Brien, 1998; Webb, 1997). In a review of studies of effective schools DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2004) examined key issues of leadership and principals’ roles related to effective special education services. The principal’s commitment and leadership provide support and reassurance for teachers, students, specialists, and others about the value of their efforts. Five instructional leadership roles of principals were identified: (a) defining and communicating the school’s mission, (b) managing curriculum and instruction, (c) supporting and supervising teachers, (d) monitoring student progress, and (e) promoting a learning climate. In regards to special education, the authors found that principals who focus on instruction, show support for special education, and provide quality staff development for teachers increase achievement outcomes for students with disabilities. Essentially, principals who understand the needs of students with disabilities, IDEA, and research based instructional practices are most able to provide support to students, teachers and families.

In this review of studies by DiPaola and colleagues (2003), the level of support offered by principals to teachers was found to have great impact over the extent to which teachers plan
and implement strategies and interventions designed to improve the performance of students with disabilities. The level of support offered to teachers impacts their willingness to remain in the profession (Billingsley & Cross, 1991). The increase in student achievement expectations, lack of administrative support, poor preparation, job complexity, and large amounts of required paperwork have been cited as reasons for high attrition rates of special education teachers within the first three years of teaching (Gersten et al., 2001; Miller, et al., 1999).

A literature review by DiPaola and colleagues (2004), focused on the role principals play in the retention and instructional effectiveness of special education teachers. The authors found that principal leadership influenced all aspects of special education teachers’ working conditions. The values and supportive actions of the principals had significant sway on the special education teachers’ sense of support and confidence in their own ability to make a difference for students. As a result, teachers who felt supported were more likely to use research-based practices and remain in their respective position for longer periods of time.

DiPaola et al. (2004) describe five dimensions of effective leadership for the administration of special education. Effective leadership is the principal’s ability to (a) promote an inclusive school culture; (b) provide instructional leadership; (c) model collaborative leadership; (d) manage and administer organizational processes; and (e) build and maintain positive relations with teachers, families, and the community. Principals able to perform tasks in all five dimensions know best practices, special education law, and understand characteristics of various disabilities. They are able to provide resources and support to staff and teachers including productive professional development. Effective principals are able to schedule students without overloading teachers, evaluate the progress and performance of teachers and students,
and analyze data from which to form evaluative conclusions. Essentially, effective principals are able to create cohesive cultures which create synergy for the commitment to educate all students.

In order to promote an inclusive school culture effective leaders understand the total school context necessary for the academic success of all students, including students with disabilities (DiPaola et al. 2004). In fact, effective leaders consider themselves as stewards of inclusion (Burrello & Lashley, 1992; DiPaola, et al., 2004). As such, effective leaders communicate this belief as the school’s mission. Success over time in the academic achievement of all students is due in large measure to the vision held among all stakeholders based on common values and beliefs (Dolar, 2008; Jones, 2006; Moore, 2005).

Based on a review of the research literature and feedback from special education leaders nationwide, Billingsley, et al. (1993) created a conceptual framework for program leadership in special education. Citing the critical function of school leader to improve educational programs and student learning the authors cite twelve vital leadership tasks and provide an overview of each. These critical tasks are accomplished by principals who:

- develop and communicate a shared vision for educating students with disabilities;
- provide opportunities for family, community, and other agency involvement in special education;
- facilitate Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development and implementation;
- provide assistance with curriculum and instructional programs;
- ensure appropriate inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities;
- design positive behavior management programs;
- implement transition services for students with disabilities;
- monitor and evaluate student progress and effectiveness of special education programs;
- ensure appropriate staff development activities;
- support staff members and involve them in decision making;
- encourage collaboration among school staff; and
- evaluate staff using systematic procedures.

Billingsley, et al. (1993) point out that it is necessary for leaders to possess specific knowledge, understandings, and leadership skills in order to adequately perform these twelve leadership tasks. This framework for special education leadership illustrates the broad scope of responsibilities principals undertake to effectively administer special education programs relative to inclusion.

Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) adapted this framework to create a survey for principals of small rural schools in Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The authors found that principals spent large amounts of time in the administration of special education, and as a result, they were creating a unified educational system for all students. Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) recommended an extension of this research to corroborate principal perceptions with other stakeholders including special education teachers.

There is limited research concerning the perceptions of principals and other stakeholders on principals’ leadership performance for the administration of special education relative to inclusion. The following section summarizes the research on principal perceptions of their special education leadership behaviors and the perceptions of other stakeholders of principal leadership behaviors.

**Perceptions of Principals’ Roles in Special Education**

Principals recognize that successful administration of special education programs particularly with regards to successful inclusion depends largely on the personal and professional
commitment of themselves and their staff (Bank Street College of Education, 1982). The roles and duties of the principals for administering special education are influenced by laws, policies, and the expectations of various groups of people. These groups frequently have differing views of what constitutes effective leadership (O’Brien, 1998). In this era of accountability, it is important that leaders assess and when necessary adjust their leadership behaviors to meet the needs of all stakeholders (Housman, 2007). A review of the literature on perceptions of principals’ roles in special education by the researcher found studies primarily focus on the self-perceived competencies of principals (Bertrand & Bratberg, 2007; Broyles, 2004; Hyatt, 1987; Stevenson-Jacobson, et al., 2006). Limited studies include general educators’, special educators’, and/or special education directors’ perceptions of principals’ behaviors for the administration of special education (Avery, 2003; Dolar, 2008; Klofenstine, 2002; Mauro, 2007; Otto & Arnold, 2005).

Twelve research studies were located that address perceptions of leadership in special education (see Appendix A). Two of the twelve studies focus solely on the elementary level (Dolar, 2008; Hyatt, 1987) and four studies included both principals’ and special educators’ perceptions within the same study for an analysis of differences in perceptions (Klofenstine, 2002; Mauro, 2007; Webb, 1997; and Wigle & Wilcox, 1999). None of these four studies was solely focused on the elementary level. One study focused on the principal’s roles in special education service delivery (Webb, 1997) which is most closely associated to the topic of principal behaviors for the administration of special education relative to inclusion. The primary studies included met the following criteria:

- the studies were no older than thirteen years at the time of this research;
- the studies involved public school leadership;
the studies involved special education; and

- the studies involved at least one stakeholder sector of public schools and their perceptions.

In a descriptive study by Avery (2003), 126 special education teachers in Texas agreed with four constructs from the literature concerning leadership characteristics necessary for the effective administration of special education including communication, support, knowledge, and caring attitude (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Villa, et al., 1992). Specifically, effective principals communicate a vision and direction for the school that includes all students. They encourage collaboration among teachers and other staff members to increase the academic achievement for all students. Effective principals are knowledgeable of special education law, policies, and best instructional practices. In addition, the principal must be knowledgeable about all special education programs in order to ensure effective program implementation and program achievement. The principal establishes the overall climate and influences instructional practices. Teachers felt supported when these four characteristics were exhibited by the building level principal. The author cited the need for emphasis of these four constructs in coursework at the district and university level so that newly trained principals would be equipped to provide adequate support to teachers. Teacher support was investigated in three identified studies.

In a study of 228 experienced special educators’ perceptions regarding principal support on four dimensions (emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal), Otto and Arnold (2005) found that 69% of the respondents felt generally supported by their administrator. The authors examined the factors related to administrator support in an effort to identify the leadership areas needing improvement in order to retain special education teachers. Administrators who provide minimal support for special education services limit opportunities for collaboration and shared problem solving.
The findings of Otto and Arnold (2005) were similar to other studies where participants were experienced teachers (Billingsley, 2003; Gersten, et al., 2001; McIntire, 2001). However, this finding is contrary to findings of studies conducted with novice special educators who generally do not feel supported (Boe, et al., 1999; Ingersoll, 2001; Miller, et al., 1999). One reason for the differences in perceptions of experienced and novice teachers could be that experienced teachers may be more aware of administrative interactions with the delivery of special education programs (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009).

Dolar (2008) studied four specific dimensions of support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. Elementary (K-5) general and special educators across three districts in Northern California with varying degrees of experience were surveyed and interviewed to elicit information concerning principal support and job satisfaction. Thirty general education and 11 special education teachers responded. No significant differences between groups for extent or importance of principal support were indicated. However, general educators reported more support with classroom discipline, goals, and distribution of resources from administrators. General educators were more satisfied with working conditions and relationships with staff members. Special education teachers felt instrumental support (distribution of resources, student discipline, concern for their program, and help in collaboration with general education teachers) from administrators was most important. This was not the case for general education teachers who felt emotional support from the principal was most necessary.

Mauro (2007) surveyed principals, special educators and general educators in South Carolina to discern their perceptions of what makes a supportive and collaborative environment using the same four dimensions as Otto: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. Results were non-conclusive regarding perceptions of the collaborative nature of their schools
among the three groups. General education teachers cited emotional support as the most powerful type of support. Special educators described the instrumental dimension including equal distribution of resources, student discipline, concern for their program, and assistance in collaboration with general educators as most beneficial. Principals cited informational support as most critical to creating a collaborative and supportive environment. Two studies located focused on the level of special education knowledge or informational support of the principal.

Bertrand and Bratberg (2007) surveyed 116 principals from southeastern Missouri regarding their level of knowledge of special education. The frequency distribution of participants by years of experience as principals indicated that 83% had more than five years experience. The mean for respondents was 15.5 years of experience. Principals rated themselves as knowledgeable in the areas of safeguards, discipline, and facilitator of collaboration; however, they cited testing and evaluation to determine eligibility, data collection, and funding sources as areas in which they did not have sufficient knowledge. The survey asked for suggestions for improving leadership preparation. Many principals cited experiential learning or learning on the job as effective. In addition, these principals felt they benefited from attending meetings on IEP development where they had opportunities to interact with district special education leaders. Two specific suggestions for coursework improvement included embedding activities related to special education within the internship requirement as well as a course focused on special education laws and regulations.

Broyles (2004) also surveyed principals to determine their perceived level of knowledge with respect to special education. Principals from all regions of the United States participated with emphasis focused on differences in Texas principals as compared to the nation. Responses to a 35 question survey revealed Texas principals perceived themselves as more knowledgeable
in the areas of supervision and management/finance than the general population; however, principals from all regions desired more training in the areas of law and current special education issues. Participants cited a lack of appropriate training during their preparation program as well as a lack of ongoing training during their tenure as administrators. Citing legal mandates which impact the supervision and delivery of special education programs, the authors recommend university preparation programs, as well as district staff development departments, incorporate updated information into the delivery of training for future and current school administrators.

Georgia principals’ level of involvement in three specific service delivery areas for administering special education was investigated by Klofenstine (2002). The author compared principals’ self-perceptions and those of special education teachers to investigate differences in the perceptions of the two groups with regards to the principal’s involvement in curriculum, personnel, and program administration duties. Using a thirty-four item parallel survey, the author found that principals rated their involvement significantly higher across all items on the survey in regards to curriculum and personnel than did special education teachers. In the area of program administration duties, significant differences were found in ten of the twelve activities where principals again rated themselves higher. Roles in service delivery and overall competency to administer special education are topics addressed in the remaining five studies located.

Two studies focused on Illinois principals’ perception of competencies most needed to administer special education at the elementary and middle school levels (Stevenson, 2002; Stevenson-Jacobson, et al., 2006). In both studies the authors provided respondents a list of thirty competencies previously identified by Wilson (1996) and asked them to rank the ten most important competencies needed to administer special education. Eight competencies were selected by more than half of all respondents; those with and without special education
certification. Competencies found in both studies included: (a) managing the education of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment; (b) collaborative teaching strategies; (c) parents’ rights; (d) federal/state laws; and (e) consensus building.

Two studies on competence used an identical 35 item survey based on skills identified by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) as most needed for the administration of special education (Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wilcox & Wigle, 2001). Wigle and Wilcox (1999) surveyed the self-perceptions of principals, special educators, and special education directors in Nebraska, Tennessee, Kansas, and Texas regarding their own competence in managing special education. Principals reported a skilled level of competence in 26% of their responses, an adequate level of competence in 56% of their responses and an inadequate level in 18% of their responses.

In 2001, Wilcox and Wigle surveyed principals and special education directors regarding the principals’ level of competence for administering special education programs. Principals rated themselves higher on thirty-two of thirty-five competencies as compared to special education directors. In addition, special education directors rated the principals with higher percentages of inadequate than principals rated themselves. The three most commonly selected competencies that principals perceived themselves competent to perform included demonstrating a high standard of ethical practice; making decisions concerning students based on open communication, trust, mutual respect and dignity; and collaborating in shared decision making. Directors rated principals adequate on these three competencies.

Webb (1997) defines the term competency as “having sufficient ability; capable.” In his survey study of twenty principals and 100 special educators from the four largest districts in the United States, Webb specifically identified roles and competencies by three categories including knowledge, attitude, and performance. He defines knowledge as the “information or
understanding acquired through experience,” attitude as a “state of mind regarding some matter,” and performance as “any act, deed, or accomplishment” (p.54). Based on these definitions, Webb created a twenty item survey with questions for each category to determine relationships between principals’ perceptions and teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s role. Similar to previous findings in the literature, principals rated themselves higher on competencies than did special educators. The authors found that both groups agreed on low competencies demonstrated by the principals. These low competencies were from the performance (6 items) and knowledge (4 items) categories including performance in staff development and collaborative activities and knowledge of special education and instructional strategies.

Summary

This review of the literature revealed limited research and analysis of principals’ perceptions of their behaviors for the administration of special education programs as related to inclusion. Terms such as competence, characteristics, involvement and roles are often used interchangeably in the literature (Avery, 2003; Klofenstine, 2002; Stevenson, 2002; Webb, 1997; Wilcox & Wigle, 2001). A common thread among most studies located was the level of support for general and special education teachers provided by principals (Dolar, 2008; Gersten et al., 2001; Lillie & Lesane, 1992; Mauro, 2007; Otto & Arnold, 2005). However, specific delineation of behaviors deemed supportive varied across these studies. In addition, few studies specifically examined the role of the principal relative to inclusion (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Hines & Johnston, 1996; Hobbs & Westling, 1998; Moore, 2005). The majority of studies located focused on the implementation and supervision of special education in general (Hyatt, 1987; Stevenson, 2002; Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006; Web, 1997; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wilcox & Wigle, 2001).
In the limited studies on perceptions located, investigators frequently include the self-perceptions of principals; however, special educators are included to a much smaller degree. A review of study findings indicates principals frequently overestimate their competence for administering special education and report a need for additional training (Bertrand & Bratberg, 2007; Broyles, 2004; Hyatt, 1987; O’Brien, 1998; Stevenson-Jacobson et al., 2006). This study will add insight into the specific leadership behaviors engaged in by elementary principals in one district of southeastern North Carolina and determine differences in their perceptions with those of special education teachers.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

Knowledgeable principals ensure all educational programs and services, including special education programs, are managed effectively and have student learning as their primary goal (Collins & White, 2001; Davidson & Gooden, 2001; Greene-Bryant, 2002). In a study by Wilcox and Wigle (2001), principals tended to highly overestimate their competencies in the area of special education. Competency in the supervision of special education programs must include critical leadership tasks (Klofenstine, 2002). Identification of specific behaviors which positively influence achievement for students with disabilities is of great value (Cruziero & Morgan, 2006). The purpose of this study was to discern the current state of leadership behaviors for principals in southeastern North Carolina in the administration of programs for students with disabilities. This chapter describes the design of the study, the participants, the instruments used, and methods employed to collect the data and the manner in which the data were analyzed.

Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

1. What leadership behaviors do elementary principals report they engage in when administering special education programs relative to inclusion?

2. How similar are principals’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors in the administration of special education programs to special education teachers’ perceptions of principals’ leadership behaviors?
Research Design

Several studies on this topic (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Rich, 2008) have used qualitative data collection to investigate subjects’ responses to questions and to corroborate quantitative findings. A sequential explanatory design was used for this study (see Figure 2). In phase one, quantitative data were collected using a parallel survey to determine principals’ and special education teachers’ perceptions of leadership behaviors. In phase two qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interview questions. The qualitative results assisted in the interpretation of the quantitative data.

Figure 2. Sequential explanatory mixed methods design.

Setting

All participants in this study were employed in the same school district in southeastern North Carolina. Student enrollment in the district was 24,000 across 43 schools from Pre-Kindergarten to twelfth grade. At the time of the study, the district served 2700 students with disabilities or 11% of the total enrollment. Participants in this study worked at elementary schools (K-5). Principals and special education teachers at two of these schools were interviewed to gather qualitative data. Neither school included in Phase II had a students with disabilities
subgroup as defined by NCLB (40 or more students in grades 3-5). Demographics for each school were collected.

Sundale Elementary had 628 students of mostly White ethnicity (92%). There were 9 Asian, 11 Hispanic, 19 Multi-racial and 16 Black students in membership. There were 35 students with mild to moderate disabilities. Sundale had one principal, one assistant principal, and 42 certified staff members including five special education teachers. In 2009-2010, Sundale elementary made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). They met 13 out of 13 target goals.

Kendall Elementary was the second school included in the study. This school had a diverse population of 578 students. Demographics included 46% White, 35% Black, and 12% Hispanic students in the population of the school. In addition, Kendall Elementary had 8 Asian, 4 American Indian, and 20 Multi-racial students. There were 70 students with mild to moderate disabilities. Kendall Elementary had one principal, one assistant principal, and 34 certified staff members including five special education teachers. The school made Adequate Yearly Progress in 2009-2010, achieving 17 out of 17 target goals.

Participants

**Phase I.** Twenty-three principals and twenty-three special education teachers were surveyed for this study. The participants in this phase were chosen for inclusion based upon their willingness to participate and their accessibility. Demographic information includes age; race; gender; number of years in education, current position, and current school; special education professional development credits in the last five years; graduate level credits in special education; and licensure in special education.;

**Phase II.** The participants in the qualitative phase were selected using purposive sampling. This involved intentionally using a predefined group from the context of the
investigation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The sample included two special education teachers and their respective principals.

I was familiar with the selected principals’ credentials, years of experience in education, and years of experience as a school principal. I intended to gather perceptual data from a principal with and a principal without a degree in special education. Both principals interviewed were female and in their mid-forties. Each had degrees in Elementary Education, Educational Leadership, and Curriculum and Supervision. Principal Tucker reported 19 years experience in education (five as a school principal), while Principal Beck had eight years experience in education (two as a school principal).

The special education teachers interviewed were serving as the Resource special education teacher in their respective school. Ms. Simms was supervised by Principal Tucker and Ms. Pratt was supervised by Principal Beck. Demographic information for these two teachers was unknown to the researcher prior to the data collection.

Both teachers were white females in their late thirties. Ms. Simms taught general education for seven years before moving to this district. At the time of the study, she was completing her first year of teaching special education. Ms. Pratt taught general education for six years and was completing her fourth year of teaching special education. Ms. Pratt had been employed in the district for ten years and at her current school for five years. Both teachers were certified to teach special education.

**Instrument**

A survey developed by Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) was modified to collect data. The survey questions are based on the work of Billingsley, et al. (1993) who conceptualized a framework for program leadership in the education of students with disabilities. Their
framework was based on an in-depth review of research literature and feedback from leaders in special education across the country. The survey instrument includes twelve behavioral tasks which serve as the independent variables for the study. These behavioral tasks include:

- communicating a shared vision;
- involving stakeholders;
- facilitating IEP development;
- assisting with curriculum and instructional programs;
- providing inclusion opportunities;
- designing positive behavior management programs;
- implementing transition services;
- monitoring student progress and program effectiveness;
- providing staff development activities;
- supporting staff members;
- encouraging collaboration; and
- evaluating staff.

The original survey included 12 behavioral constructs with two to seven behavioral indicators listed for each. The survey asks respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement to 42 total indicators of special education leadership roles. These 42 indicators are written as positive statements. Respondents are asked to rate each statement using a 5 point Likert-type scale. A response of “1” indicates strong agreement, “2” is agreement, “3” is neutral, “4” is disagreement and “5” is strong disagreement (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006).

Permission for use of the survey was received from Dr. Cruzeiro and Dr. Morgan. The Likert scale was reversed with “5” indicating strong agreement, “4” was agreement, “3” was
neutral, “2” was disagreement and “1” was strong disagreement. Modifications of the survey included the deletion of one behavioral construct and seventeen indicators in order to focus on statements most related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the elementary setting. Two or three indicators are included under each of the 11 constructs in this study. Average indicator ratings per construct were used in the analyses. A demographic section was included in the survey (see Appendices B and C for the survey for principals and teachers respectively).

In Phase II qualitative data collection included a semi-structured interview protocol to elicit further description of leadership behaviors for the administration of special education (see Appendix D for the interview protocol for principals and Appendix E the interview protocol for teachers). The protocol consisted of four questions developed by the researcher based on the literature review and the survey in Phase I. Respondents were asked to describe specific behaviors performed by principals in the administration of special education relative to inclusion. These descriptions of how phenomena were perceived by principals and special education teachers are provided, focusing on common themes (Slavin, 2007).

Pilot Study

The survey was piloted at an elementary school excluded from the study. One assistant principal, one administrative intern, and two special education teachers participated in the pilot study. I provided each participant a verbal explanation of the study’s purpose. These individuals were electronically mailed the survey which included a letter reiterating the purpose of the study. One week later, the researcher met with the participants to gather feedback regarding the survey. Participants stated that (1) the survey directions were clear, (2) the questions covered the leadership behaviors, and (3) the survey was understandable. The average time for completion of the survey was 12 minutes.
Validation of the instruments was established by a panel consisting of a special education district director, two special education teachers, and two elementary assistant principals. This group was asked to evaluate the survey and interview protocol and provide suggestions on comprehensiveness, clarity, and cohesiveness. The instruments and feedback were delivered via electronic mail. The participants indicated the instruments were comprehensive, clearly written, and interconnected by topic.

Reliability of the survey was established using internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha, which identifies the average inter-correlation among the survey items (Santos, 1999), was computed for the entire sample ($N = 46$) on each behavioral construct. A reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered acceptable (Santos, 1999; Nunnally, 1978) and was the threshold for this study. One construct, Designing Positive Behavior Management Programs, was lower than the established threshold ($a = .66$).

**Phase I: Quantitative**

**Data Collection.** The survey was used to investigate the research questions of this study. Each of the 23 elementary principals in the district and one special education teacher at each building was contacted by electronic mail to seek participation. The electronic survey was distributed using Zoomerang, a web based survey application found among reviews to be the easiest to navigate by consumers (Listio, 2009). I was able to customize the survey and monitor completion.

A cover letter stating that participation was voluntary and anonymous, the purpose and importance of the study and the use of the data was sent with the survey. Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey with a specified date provided in the cover letter. An email reminder was sent three days prior to the completion date. Since all responses on the survey were
anonymous, the electronic reminder was sent to all 46 participants. The principals and special education teachers responded to the electronic survey prior to the specified completion date.

**Data Analysis.** Descriptive statistics were used to describe participants in the study (Creighton, 2007). Frequencies and percentages were reported for demographic characteristics such as gender, race, age and professional development hours received in the last five years. The means and standard deviations for the leadership behaviors were provided in tables and text.

Then I examined the statistical differences between principals’ and special education teachers’ perceptions of the 11 leadership tasks using *t*-tests for independent samples. The use of *t* distributions provides better estimates of means and standard errors when comparing two groups and sample sizes are small (Rubin, 2010). There are four assumptions of independent *t*-tests: (a) data are measured at least at the interval level; (b) populations are normally distributed; (c) each case or value is independent; (d) variances in these populations are roughly equal (Field, 2009).

Levene’s Test for Equality of Variance was used to determine homogeneity of variance for the two groups. The *F* statistic, degrees of freedom (*df*), and probability of obtaining these results are reported. If the alpha level was above .05 then equal variance was assumed and the corresponding *t*-test was used. For each independent sample *t*-test the test statistic, degrees of freedom (*df*), and *p* value associated with obtaining the result was reported. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine statistical significant differences. The results were reported in text and tables.

**Phase II: Qualitative**

**Conceptual Framework.** The role of the principal has changed since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Principals now supervise specialized
personnel who work with students with disabilities, and are responsible for the administration of all programs associated with educating these students (Praisner, 2003). Numerous studies have found the principal’s leadership to be vital to the development of an inclusive school culture, high student achievement, and teacher satisfaction (Burrello & Lashley, 1992; DiPaola et al., 2003; Houseman, 2007; Laskey & Karge, 2006). Teachers work directly with students and have the largest impact on student achievement. True principal-leading use not only the authority they have but the relationships they have built, the credibility they have developed, and their communication skills to inspire teachers to work cooperatively and do their best (Houseman, 2007).

The concept of leadership involves both leaders and followers. These two groups often have different perceptions regarding leadership. In a survey of American teachers, MetLife (The Metropolitan Life Survey of American Teachers, 2003) found principals to be much more satisfied with the status of their school organization than teachers. The implication is that principals therefore may be less motivated to see a need for changes. In this same study, 78% of principals saw themselves as excellent school leaders while 36% of teachers felt the same way. These results clearly show a disconnect between the views of teachers and school principals. In order to understand and address the needs of stakeholders, principals must first possess personal mastery of his or her core belief and value system as it relates to teaching and learning.

The Systems Thinking model of leadership (Senge, 1990) prescribes that principals who have established core value systems are able to build trust and respect with stakeholders in the organization, and form a culture of teamwork and collaboration. Senge (1990) describes personal mastery as “seeing reality objectively.” Given the serious responsibility for the high achievement of all students and the vast number of roles principals must fulfill in today’s era of
accountability, it is important that school administrators understand their own behaviors for administering special education, and the perceptions of special education teachers so that they can adjust their behaviors to meet the needs of all stakeholders including students (Houseman, 2007).

Moore (2005), found teachers’ perceptions of principals were more influenced by what the principal does than by what he or she says. As a result, the differences between teachers’ and principals’ perceptions of the principal’s leadership behaviors can be reduced by actions taken by the principal. Principals can better align perceptions with teachers by modeling ideal behavior in the areas of trust, respect, credibility, concern for others, and open communication. The alignment of perceptions can help to create a more positive and caring school culture for improved working conditions for teachers and improved academic achievement of all students.

**Data Collection.** As a principal in the district included in this study, I was able to identify two principals and two special education teachers for participation in the qualitative interview once the surveys were returned. One of the principals had special education certification. I called each principal to ask for their participation in the follow-up interview and permission to contact one special education teacher from their staff. After receiving permission, I called the two special education teachers who were identified by their principal as the person serving as the special education resource teacher to seek participation in this phase of the study.

Rapport was established during phone conversations with participants. I agreed to send the interview protocol in advance since time can be a limiting factor (Noy, 2009). In addition, I explained that all documentation would be kept in a locked file cabinet; participants would be provided an identification number for transcripts of the data and pseudonyms during the interview for use in the written analysis. Participant consent forms were mailed with a request for
the signed consent form to be returned to me through inter-school mail. Once consent forms were received, an appointment was scheduled with each of the participants in their respective schools at a mutually agreed upon time. The length of each interview varied from 15 to 35 minutes. A digital recorder was used to document answers to the semi-structured interview questions.

**Researcher as Instrument.** According to Creswell (2003) the interpretive nature of qualitative research and personal involvement of the researcher can present strategic, ethical, and personal issues. Thus, researchers should describe their interests and biases about the topic by including statements about past experiences, and connections between the researcher and participants. I am a 48 year old white female and have been employed in public education for 25 years. I have a teaching certificate in special education, and administrative certificates in special and regular education.

I have first-hand experience as a principal and special education teacher. I am aware of the impact principal leadership has on a teacher’s job satisfaction and the many responsibilities principals have in leading inclusive schools. My experiences include seven years of teaching students with disabilities, three years evaluating teachers across the district, ten years as an assistant principal, and five years as an elementary principal in an inclusive setting. There are four special education teachers, three special education assistants, and 56 students with disabilities in my school. As a former special education teacher and current school leader, I am very interested in effective leadership practices and an advocate for inclusion.

I am currently employed in the district from which the data will be gathered; however, my school was not used in the research study. I have known the principals I interviewed for several years, and I am familiar with their leadership styles. We have had professional dialogue on several occasions during meetings. I monitored my biases during the collection and
interpretation of data (Patton, 2002). For example, one principal frequently referred to the roles of staff members in support of inclusion. I knew she could provide more specific answers relative to her own behaviors; therefore, I had to intentionally refrain from asking leading questions. I also made myself consciously aware of my body language in an attempt not to influence responses from interviewees. There were times when I wanted to affirm answers being given.

**Data Analysis.** Corroboration of the eleven leadership tasks included in the survey as well as discrepant information indicated by participants’ responses were explored. Verbatim transcription of the semi-structured interviews was conducted. I analyzed responses from interview transcripts in an effort to corroborate quantitative findings. As described by Miles and Huberman (1994), all interview data was sorted using predefined codes which came from the eleven behavior constructs analyzed in Phase I, then recoded for further analysis. Codes were organized into categories and themes were identified. Themes are reported using diagrams and narrative description.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized to other contexts (Trochim, 2006), therefore rich descriptions, direct quotes, and figures are provided. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that generalizations from qualitative studies are analytic. Generalizations are made case-to-case rather than sample-to-population. Credibility was strengthened by asking participants to review the themes and categories to confirm the accuracy of findings. This strategy is known as member-checking (Creswell, 2003). Consistency of interpretations across participants or “interpretive consistency” was investigated by asking participants to review the interview transcription for accuracy (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).
Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Data integration includes narrative description of how the qualitative findings helped to elaborate or extend the quantitative results as suggested by Creswell (2003). Quantitative results were compared to themes found in the qualitative analysis. In a review of mixed methods studies, Caracelli and Greene (1993) found the approach frequently leads to new insights or perspectives.
CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to identify the specific leadership behaviors reported by public school elementary principals in southeastern North Carolina related to inclusion. In addition, this study compared principals’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors to special education teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s leadership behaviors to identify similarities. The results for Phase I and Phase II are presented in this chapter. Results for each research question are presented in narrative, figures and tables. A summary of findings concludes the chapter.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following major research questions:

1. What leadership behaviors do elementary principals report they engage in when administering special education programs relative to inclusion?

2. How similar are principals’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors in the administration of special education programs to special education teachers’ perceptions of the principals’ leadership behaviors?

Participants

Phase I. Twenty-three K-5 principals and teachers in one southeastern North Carolina district were surveyed. Seventy-eight percent (n = 18) of the 23 principal participants and the entire 23 special education teacher participants were female. Participants’ ethnicity (Black, Hispanic, White, and Other) results indicated 61% (N = 14) of principals and 100% (N = 23) of
special education teachers were White. The remaining nine principals included 26% (N = 6) Black; 4% (N = 1) Hispanic, and 9% (N = 2) Other. Age ranges for the two groups are displayed in Table 3. Fifty-two percent (n = 12) of the principals were fifty years of age or older with no one below the age of twenty-nine. Most special education teachers were below the age of fifty (n = 15).

Table 3

*Age Ranges for Principals and Special Education Teachers*

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<th>Teachers</th>
<th>%</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Approximately half as many principals had licensure in special education (30.4%) as did special education teachers (63.6%). The number of participants having earned six or more graduate course hours in special education was the same for both groups (n = 8). Principals and special education teachers reported similar results for hours of professional development in special education within the past five years. The majority of both groups reported 0-15 hours (see Table 4).

Frequencies and percentages of responses for years experience in education are represented in Table 5. All principals had 10 or more years experience in education with 12
reporting 20 plus years of experience. In comparison, slightly more than half (54.5%, \( n = 12 \)) of special education teachers reported more than 10 years experience in education.

Table 4

*Professional Development Hours Received in the Past Five Years Relative to Special Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>( % )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-35</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( a n = 22. \)

Years of experience in the current school were similar for both groups (see Table 6).

Sixty percent (\( n = 14 \)) of principals and 55% (\( n = 12 \)) of special education teachers reported zero to three years experience in their current school. Seventeen percent (\( n = 4 \)) of principals and 18% (\( n = 4 \)) of special education teachers had more than 10 years experience in their current school.

Sixty-five percent (\( n = 15 \)) of both principals and special education teachers reported zero to six years experience in their current positions (see Table 6). Twenty-six percent of principals and 30% of special education teachers had 10 or more years experience in their current position.
Table 5

*Years Experience in Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*Years Experience in Current School and Current Position*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Current School Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Current Position Principals</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase II. The participants for Phase II included two elementary (K-5) principals and two special education teachers, one from each principal’s respective school. Pseudonyms were assigned to safeguard the anonymity of participants. Identifying school names were also replaced with pseudonyms (Scott, 2005).

Principals. Principal Tucker is the leader at Sundale Elementary School. She is a 46-year old white female who has been a public school educator for 19 years. Principal Tucker holds Bachelor’s degrees in regular education and special education. In addition, she has Master’s degrees in Educational Leadership and Curriculum and Supervision. Principal Tucker has held the title of principal for five years serving three of those years at her current school. Prior to entering administration as an assistant principal, Principal Tucker taught special education for 10 years in elementary schools (K-5). In her prior experiences as a special education teacher, she taught students with mild to moderate disabilities.

Principal Beck of Kendall Elementary School is a 47-year old white female. She has been a public school educator for eight years. Prior to entering public education, Principal Beck served as a preschool director in a private facility. Her credentials include a Bachelor’s degree in elementary education and master’s degrees in Educational Leadership, School Counseling, and Curriculum and Supervision. Before entering administration Principal Beck taught third grade students in the district included in this study. There were a few students with disabilities included in her heterogeneous classroom during her three year tenure as a general education teacher. Principal Beck has been in administration for five years serving as assistant principal for three years and principal for two years at her current school.

Teachers. Ms. Simms is a 37-year old white female in her first year of teaching special education at Sundale Elementary where she is the resource teacher. She has a Bachelor’s degree
in psychology and a Master’s degree in general and special education. She is also certified to teach academically gifted students. Prior to moving to the district, Ms. Simms taught third and fourth grade students as a general education teacher for seven years in a neighboring county. She taught students with disabilities such as Other Health Impaired, Learning Disabled and Autistic in her capacity as a general education teacher.

A veteran of the profession, Ms. Pratt is a 39-year old white female in her tenth year of teaching. She is the special education resource teacher at her school under the leadership of Principal Beck. Ms. Pratt has a Bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a Master’s degree in special education. She was a general education classroom teacher for six years where she taught students with various disabilities including Behaviorally/Emotionally Disturbed, Learning Disabled, and Cognitively Impaired. She has served as the special education resource teacher in her current school for four of her five years there.

**Phase I: Quantitative**

Bays and Crockett (2007) cite the need to determine perceptions of principals and teachers concerning leadership in order to develop leadership practices aligned with teachers’ needs. Section one of the survey was used to obtain data indicating principals’ perceptions of their demonstrated leadership behaviors relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities, and special education teachers’ perceptions of their respective principal’s leadership roles. Participants rated principals’ leadership behaviors on a five point Likert scale with “1” representing strongly disagree and “5” representing strongly agree.

As indicated in Table 7, the principals perceived themselves as being highly engaged in behaviors relating to the *evaluation of staff using systematic procedures* ($M = 4.57, SD = .54$). Two indicators for this construct included the tasks of observing teachers for instructional
improvement and conferencing with teachers following observations. Principals also rated themselves as highly engaged in the support and involvement of staff members ($M = 4.57, SD = .58$). The construct indicators included communicating confidence in staff members and including staff members in decision making.

Principals perceived themselves least engaged in behaviors related to encouraging collaboration among staff ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.02$) Indicators included collaboration with related services personnel and opportunities for general and special education teachers to observe students taught by one another. Principals also saw themselves less engaged in involving stakeholders including parents and community members ($M = 4.15, SD = .82$).

Special education teachers’ perceptions of their respective principal indicated they viewed the principal as most engaged in evaluation of staff using systematic procedures ($M = 4.16, SD = .82$) and monitoring of student progress and program effectiveness ($M = 4.12, SD = .87$) (see Table 6). The later construct focused on principals’ use of data to drive decision making. Principals were perceived as least engaged in assisting with curriculum and instructional programs ($M = 3.57, SD = 1.01$) and encouraging collaboration among school staff ($M = 3.67, SD = 1.12$). Assisting with curriculum and instructional programs includes involvement by the principal in modifying curriculum and offering teaching strategies to teachers. Involves stakeholders also had a mean of 3.67 ($SD = 1.03$).
Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Principals’ and Special Education Teachers’ Perceptions of Leadership Behaviors Relative to Inclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Principals M</th>
<th>Principals SD</th>
<th>Special Education Teachers M</th>
<th>Special Education Teachers SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicates a Shared Vision</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves Stakeholders</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates IEP Development</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assists with Curriculum and Instructional Programs</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures Appropriate Inclusion Opportunities</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops Positive Behavior Management Programs</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitors Student Progress and Program Effectiveness</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures Appropriate Staff Development Activities</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports and Involves Staff Members</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages Collaboration Among School Staff</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluates Staff Using Systematic Procedures</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To address the second research question seeking to determine similarities in principals’ and special education teachers’ perceptions, a series of *t*-tests for independent samples were used. Levene’s Test of Homogeneity of Variance revealed that the variance of the two groups were not statistically different in six of the 11 instances (see Table 8). A statistical difference was found in nine of the eleven constructs. The two groups were similar in their perceptions in two of
the eleven constructs; “involves stakeholders”, $t(39) = -1.84$, $p < .07$, and “encourages collaboration among school staff”, $t(40) = -1.08$, $p < .29$.

Table 8

*Comparison of Principals’ and Special Education Teachers’ Perceptions of Principals’ Leadership Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene’s Test</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>$p$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicates a Shared Vision</td>
<td>23.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involves Stakeholders</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates IEP Development</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assists with Curriculum and Instructional Programs</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures Appropriate Inclusion Opportunities</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops Positive Behavior Management Programs</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitors Student Progress and Program Effectiveness</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensures Appropriate Staff Development Activities</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports and Involves Staff Members</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages Collaboration Among School Staff</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluates Staff Using Systematic Procedures</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Statistical difference = *. 
Phase II: Qualitative

**Principals.** Two elementary principals were asked four questions from the semi-structured interview in an effort to gain additional insights related to behaviors demonstrated by principals relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities (see Figure 3). I analyzed responses from interview transcripts using predefined codes from the eleven behavior constructs analyzed in Phase I (see Appendix B). These codes were recoded twice and organized into 7 categories:

- collaboration;
- relationships;
- expectations;
- problem-solving;
- attendance at meetings;
- instruction; and
- student characteristics.

Based upon frequency of the examples and categories, three repeating themes emerged: *principal is supportive*, *principal is involved*, and *principal is knowledgeable* (see Table 9).

The categories collaboration, relationships, and expectations were found in the first theme *principal is supportive*. Both principals provided examples of ways they support students and staff when administering special education relative to inclusion. Collaborative supports for teachers and students relative to inclusion for students with disabilities was evidenced in statements made by both principals. For example, Principal Tucker frequently used the term “we” when talking about ways in which her school provides inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities.
Table 9

*Codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes in Principals’ Interview Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Examples</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We take a collaborative approach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Principal is supportive of teachers’ efforts to educate students with disabilities in an inclusive environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We all work together</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have team meetings</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let them know I care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take care of new teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State the expectation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingrained belief system</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model the expectation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help teachers solve problems</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>Principal is involved in activities to facilitate teachers’ efforts to educate students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the problem and help find solutions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find resources for teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend RtI, IEP, and EC meetings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>principal is knowledgeable of instructional strategies and special education students’ needs to increase student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend parent conferences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My presence is important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know instructional strategies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Principal is knowledgeable of instructional strategies and special education students’ needs to increase student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at data reports</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know students’ needs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have an awareness of who they are</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need specially designed instruction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Including teachers in decision-making, and dialoguing with staff were noted by both principals as supportive measures used to enhance the success of inclusion. Principal Tucker stated:

We appreciate the differences all students bring to a class. We use flexible grouping across the school. Students are constantly seeing children regrouped and being served by multiple teachers within the school. We feel there is a need for a collaborative approach to meeting their needs. We provide students additional staff supports as they need additional help.

Principal Beck and Principal Tucker indicated their belief in the importance of establishing positive relationships as means for supporting all stakeholders. Principal Tucker felt it “important to get to know your teachers just as you would your students.” Principal Beck cited the need to be particularly aware of the needs of beginning teachers. She stated:

You make sure your new teachers are protected from having a case that is far beyond their experience. You pair or buddy them with people who have had experiences they (the new teacher) might not have. The more time I spend getting to know and understand my teachers’ needs, strengths, and weaknesses, the better equipped I am to support them.

Support for inclusion was embedded in the climate and culture at each school according to both principals. Expectations were felt to be ingrained. Principal Tucker stated, “It is known that we are accepting and we are always trying to include them into the school in everything we do.” One principal described the need for leaders to model desired behaviors. Principal Beck stated:

Children feel accepted and valued and that is due to the thread, the belief system that runs through the school. It is not something that you can teach. You have to model the
expectation. You model by example, continual example. You continually state the expectation. If you see a non-example, you address it and address it quickly and move on watching for compliance.

Two categories, problem-solving and attendance at meetings, were found within the principal is involved theme. Both principals cited examples of ways in which they are involved in the administration of special education. They cited specific problem-solving behaviors engaged in for promoting inclusion in their schools. Problems cited in the interviews included the need to find additional resources, to reach out to families of students, to schedule students, and to determine behavioral interventions for students with significant behavioral problems. Determining student placement and scheduling was cited by both principals in this study as tasks in which they worked with general and special education teachers. Personal involvement in determining methods to solve child specific issues was noted by Principal Tucker, who said, I believe it is my responsibility to help teachers find ways to solve problems when they are feeling frustrated. For instance if a child is not making the progress we would like to see based on the data we’ve collected; I might offer suggestions or try to find resources not currently available. My teachers know I am always here to help.

Behaviors cited by principals as evidence of their involvement included attendance at Individualized Education (IEP) meetings, Exceptional Children (EC) department meetings, decision-making teams, and parent conferences. The principals indicated they are in attendance at every Level 3 and entitlement meeting where discussions for meeting the needs of at-risk students and special education placement are held. Principal Beck described an example of the level of involvement by stating, “If it is a case where a student has a lot of specialized needs, then one administrator will assign themselves to that child perhaps for several years.”
Instruction and student characteristics were categories that formed the third theme, principal is knowledgeable. Both principals felt their level of knowledge concerning instruction was vital to the success of their special education programs including teaching practices, IEP and Response to Intervention (RtI) processes, and data monitoring processes. In addition, they expressed having knowledge of students’ needs was important to the level of success of students with disabilities both academically and with respect to inclusion. The principals felt the availability of data greatly enhanced their level of knowledge. Principal Tucker stated:

**Due to technology, we have everything right at our finger tips. I can pull it right up in mCLASS Direct, My Access, ClassScapes [pause] I have that right here, so when I’m talking to a parent on the phone or a teacher in person, I can type in a password, look at the data, and know where those children are. Even with NCWise, looking at grades; we can see data at our finger tips.**

Principal Beck felt the “number one thing that administrators have to do is have an awareness of what your EC population is, who they are, and what their specific needs are.” Both principals felt that an understanding of students’ needs helped the instructional team (general education teachers and special education teachers) determine teaching practices most appropriate to support academic achievement. With knowledge of students’ needs, “we determine who serves which children based on specific skills and teaching styles that a particular teacher may possess,” stated Principal Beck.
Figure 3. Principals’ Interview Data.
Teachers. Two teachers were interviewed to discern their perceptions of their respective principal’s demonstrated leadership behaviors relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities (see Figure 4). Their responses to the semi-structured interview questions revealed 22 codes, four categories and two distinct themes, principal is supportive and principal is involved (see Table 10).

Communication and shared decision-making were categories found within the first theme, principal is supportive. Ms. Simms and Ms. Pratt both noted the principal’s on-going support of special education teachers in their efforts to educate students with disabilities. The ability to have honest and open discussions was noted by both special education teachers. Various types of supportive behaviors were noted as evidence of their principal’s strengths. Ms. Pratt stated, “The EC team is always consulted on issues related to our program.” Ms. Simms noted:

She is supportive of us. When we make decisions, she fully supports us and gives us freedom to make decisions we feel comfortable with in terms of our instructional style and how we carry that out. It makes us feel like we can talk to her about things that maybe aren’t working. She doesn’t see that as a bad thing. She just offers her help.

Demonstrated listening skills and the inclusion of staff in discussions were viewed by both teachers to be strengths in the principals’ leadership behaviors relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Ms. Simms stated, “She listens to the staff in terms of their needs and the direction they would like to go.” Ms. Pratt similarly noted the principal “makes decisions with us not for us.” Both principals were viewed as collaborative in their support of inclusion
Figure 4. Special Education Teachers’ Interview Responses.
efforts. Ms. Simms and Ms. Pratt felt their respective principal’s were able to distinguish between rudimentary decisions that the principal should make on her own and decisions related to issues which directly impacted teaching and learning.

The second theme found in the teachers’ interview data was principal involvement. Provision of resources and active involvement were categories found within the theme. Specific demonstrated behaviors noted by the two teachers included active participation in a variety of meetings, providing staff development based on teacher input, and providing resources and programs based on feedback from teachers. Ms. Simms said, “She listens to what our needs are, and then follows through.” Both teachers felt it was important for the principal to demonstrate follow through with tasks. Ms. Simms indicated such behavior by the principal helped to build and strengthen trust between the staff and administration.

Ms. Pratt noted:

She’s involved in every minute piece. Some examples would be her guidance on the School Improvement Team; she tries to make rounds to attend everybody’s grade level meetings. That’s helpful. She helps in meeting professional development. Being the LEA rep instead of designating other people to attend the IEP meetings when she can is great [pause] just being present throughout the campus all the time.

As a result of leadership in the building, both teachers agreed their respective schools were a “welcoming place” and provided specific examples. Ms. Pratt noted, “That is seen in staff members and their interactions with students. It is the expectation.” Ms. Simms said, “There is something magical about our school. We make children feel safe, and secure, and it’s a happy place.” It was noted during the interviews that unless clarified by the interviewer, these two teachers’ references to “students” included students with and without disabilities.
Table 10

*Codes, Categories, and Emerging Themes in Special Education Teachers’ Interview Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Examples</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She’s open for discussion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Principal is supportive of teachers’ efforts to educate students with disabilities in an inclusive environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She listens to staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can talk to her about things</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She give us freedom to make decisions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shared Decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She pulls other people in on discussions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She makes decisions with us</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She helps in meeting our professional development needs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provision of Resources</td>
<td>Principal participates in activities to facilitate teachers’ efforts to educate students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She brings in programs we say we need</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She provides resources we ask for</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She’s an active participant in our meetings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Active Involvement</td>
<td>Principal participates in activities to facilitate teachers’ efforts to educate students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She’s involved in everything</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She provides guidance on the Student Support Team</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

The data gathered in this study were analyzed to examine perceptions of principals’ and special education teachers concerning demonstrated leadership behaviors of principals relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities. A survey and semi-structured interview were used to gather data. The researcher examined the leadership behaviors identified by principals, and the similarities between principals and special education teachers’ perceptions. A discussion of the findings of this study is included in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Study Overview

Changes in legislation and policy mandates have provided opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated in general education classrooms with their nondisabled peers (Lashley, 2007; NCLB, 2001). These opportunities have created additional responsibilities for school principals as they administer special education programs relative to inclusion (Praisner, 2003). Inclusion is defined as a philosophy which embraces diversity and the placement of students with disabilities in the regular classroom to the greatest extent possible with necessary resources and supports to meet the student’s individual needs (Klofenstine, 2002). Principals who possess a broad scope of knowledge, strong communication skills, and value inclusion are most likely to positively impact the academic, social and emotional growth of students with disabilities (Hooper, 1999; McAdams, 1998).

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the specific leadership behaviors demonstrated by public school elementary principals (K-5) in southeastern North Carolina related to inclusion. Secondly, this study compared principals’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors to special education teachers’ perceptions of the principal’s leadership behaviors.

As I reviewed the literature I found limited research and analysis of principals’ self-perceptions of their leadership behaviors relative to inclusion and less research which included special education teachers’ perceptions of their principals’ leadership behaviors. The studies I located identified skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for the administration of special education relative to inclusion. The primary purpose of this study was to identify the specific leadership behaviors demonstrated by public school elementary principals (K-5) in southeastern
North Carolina related to inclusion. Secondly, this study compared principals’ perceptions of their leadership behaviors to special education teachers’ perceptions of the principals’ leadership behaviors.

A sequential explanatory design was used for this study (Creswell, 2003). The purpose of this design was to use qualitative results to assist in explaining and interpreting findings of a primarily quantitative study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 227). Principals and special education teachers were asked in Phase I to respond to a parallel electronic survey on principals leadership behaviors in the administration of special education as related to inclusion. In Phase II two principals and two special education teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interview questions. Descriptive statistics were used to depict participants in the study (Creighton, 2007).

Inferential statistics for both groups’ perceptions of leadership behaviors for the administration of special education were analyzed. Principals and special education teachers were in agreement on two of the leadership tasks where no statistical differences were found. These tasks were encourages collaboration among school staff and involves all stakeholders. These two tasks were also given the lowest average rating by both principals and special education teachers. Statistically significant differences were noted on the remaining nine leadership tasks.

Findings

**Research Question 1.** The first research question sought to determine the leadership behaviors perceived by elementary principals in administering special education programs relative to inclusion. Survey participants included 5 male and 18 female principals ranging from 30 to over 60 years of age. The age range for the 23 female special education teachers was from
less than 29 years of age to 60 plus years old. Most principals were over the age of 40 while 10 of 23 special education teachers were under the age of 40. This is likely due to the fact that most principals were teachers before becoming administrators. All principals had 10 or more years of experience in education while almost half of special education teachers had less than 10 years of experience. The majority of both groups (N = 15) were new to their current positions reporting six or less years of experience. Battle and Gruber (2010) found that 18% of public school principals with 10 or more years experience in 2008 did not return to the same position in 2009. In addition, 45% of those that did not return retired from the profession completely. This could be one reason for the number of principals with 6 or less years of experience as administrators.

The lack of long-term shared experiences and level of collaborative interactions between the principals and their teachers in this study could have had an impact on the perceptions of special education teachers and their ratings on the survey questions (Newton, et al., 1999). In their study of how teachers’ perceptions of principal leadership emerges, Newton, et al. (1999) found the level of collaborative work between teachers and principals held more influence on teachers’ perceptions than the length of time teachers spend under the supervision of the principal. Veteran teachers reported minimal awareness of the principal’s leadership roles prior to engaging in collaborative work with the principal.

The most notable difference between the two principals interviewed was that Principal Tucker held a degree in special education and had previously taught special education for 10 years. Principal Beck did not have teaching experience or credentials in special education. Her responses to the interview questions were more specifically related to her own behaviors for the administration of special education, while Principal Tucker tended to describe her own behaviors
in relation to the collaborative work of herself and others including the behaviors of staff, students, and parents.

One theoretical explanation for these differences in responses may be due to Principal Tucker’s prior experiences in special education and more years experience as a school principal. The Competence Theory described by Straker (2008) suggests that individuals in Level 4, Unconscious Competence, possess new skills that have become habits, and perform tasks with automatic ease. Useem (2006) found people in the Unconscious Competence level had difficulty explaining their performance behaviors to others. Using the Competence Theory, Principal Beck’s responses are most aligned with Level 3 behaviors, Conscious Competence, where the individual is learning new skills and knowledge and gaining more confidence with practice and use of these skills and knowledge. Useem (2006) describes Level 3 as using the conscious mind to deconstruct personal performance. Persons in this level can verbally explain their behaviors in detail to others.

A review of the literature revealed the role of the principal in administering special education relative to inclusion is multifaceted and therefore the behaviors needed are numerous (Avery, 2003; Bertrand & Bratberg, 2007; Hooper, et al., 1999; Stevenson, 2002; Webb, 1997). Survey results indicated principals felt they were highly engaged in the use of systematic procedures to evaluate staff ($M = 4.57$). This appraisal behavior was not cited as a strength by principals in prior studies (Mauro, 2007; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006). One possible reason for principals’ strong rating of the use of evaluation systems in this study could be the fact that the current system has been in use for the past 10 years and is a revision of a system begun in 1985 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2010). The Excellent Schools Act of 1997 established new standards for the evaluation of teachers which emphasized increasing student
achievement, employee skills and employee knowledge. Changes to the system begun in 1985; however, they were minimal (NCDPI, 2010).

Principals also highly rated themselves on the **supports and involves staff members** construct which is defined by communicating confidence in staff abilities and providing shared decision-making opportunities. In a study by Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) principals cited communicating confidence as a strength. Strong communication skills develop confidence and trust in teachers (Billingsley, et al., 1993; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Leslie & Lesane; 1992). DiPaola et al. (2004) found positive relationships between principals and special education teachers to be integral to special education teachers’ level of confidence. Positive relationships result in retention of special education teachers as well (Lillie & Lesane 1992). Leithwood, et al. (2004) found leaders communicate confidence in teachers’ abilities by relying on the competence of their staff. Reliance on staff is conducted by providing opportunities for shared decision-making. This behavior was cited as a characteristic of principals who lead inclusive schools (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Villa et al., 1992).

Principals’ interview responses supported the survey results in these two areas. The theme **principal is supportive** included opportunities for collaborative decision-making and establishing positive relationships. Principal Tucker referenced the importance of positive relationships with staff members. Principal Beck stated, “‘We’ is everyone. We all work together to serve the needs of all students. Decisions are made collaboratively.”

Teachers’ interview responses provided examples of ways principals provide collaborative decision-making opportunities and communicate in a positive manner. Ms. Pratt indicated Principal Beck “makes decisions with us.” Both teachers felt comfortable
communicating their needs to their respective principal. Ms. Simms stated that Principal Tucker “listens to what our needs are, and then she follows through.”

Gersten and colleagues (2001) found the level of the principal’s support for special education teachers impacted “virtually all critical aspects of (special education) teachers’ working conditions” (p. 557). A study by Avery (2003) found teachers’ viewed the principal as an effective leader when support was afforded through collaborative efforts. Results of a study by DiPaola, et al. (2004) reported the supportive behaviors of the principal had positive influence on special education teachers’ level of confidence in their own ability to educate their students.

Similar to these findings, a study by Wigle and Wilcox (2001) found principals perceived themselves as strong in communication, trust building, and collaborating in shared decision-making. Building and establishing positive relationships was one of five dimensions found in the literature for effective leadership (DiPaola, et al., 2004). This collaboration was defined by interactions between general education teachers, special education teachers and principals. Several studies defined one element of collaboration as “shared responsibility” for participation (Bays & Crocket, 2007; Leslie & Lesane, 1992; Liotos 1992; and Stanovich 1996).

Survey results indicate principals believe they ensure appropriate inclusion opportunities by supporting inclusion efforts and encouraging students with disabilities to participate in school activities. Responses to the interview questions supported this survey finding. Principals and special education teachers described behaviors to promote an inclusion philosophy. Principal Beck referred to this philosophy as the “belief system that runs through the school.” Principal Tucker spoke of efforts undertaken to include students with disabilities “in everything we do.” Similarly, when describing the climate in the school, Ms. Pratt stated, “I do feel that it is a place where all children feel accepted, welcomed and valued.”
The need for principals to provide opportunities for inclusion was supported by the literature. A common belief in support of inclusion efforts was cited as significant to the success of inclusion for students with disabilities and supported by studies (DiPaola et al., 2003; DiPaola, et al., 2004; and Lillie & Lesane, 1992). Goor (1997) found that principals that value student diversity provide numerous opportunities for teachers and students to learn important skills necessary for living and working in a diverse world. Salisbury and McGregor (2002) found effective leaders for inclusion advocate for inclusive practices within their schools. Other authors (DiPaola, et al., 2004) found effective leaders of inclusion efforts understand the total school context and promote an inclusive school culture. Billingsley, et al. (1993) cited the ability to ensure inclusion opportunities for students as necessary to the success of students with disabilities. In two studies, principals were asked to rank 35 leadership competencies necessary for inclusion. Over half of all principals indicated that managing the education of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment was one of the top eight competencies needed (Stevenson, 2002; Stevenson-Jacobson, et al., 2006).

Principals indicated they were engaged in monitoring student progress and program effectiveness. This includes helping teachers interpret data, monitoring students’ progress, and evaluating program results. Principals’ roles have shifted toward emphasizing instructional leadership, monitoring the achievement of all students, and using data to make decisions (Lashley & Boscardin, 2003). DiPaola and colleagues (2003) found leaders who monitor students’ progress and analyze data to evaluate programs can positively impact achievement outcomes for students with disabilities.

Principals interviewed indicated their analysis of data to monitor students’ progress was important to the academic success of all students. Improved technological methods for accessing
and analyzing student data have increased principals’ awareness of students’ academic standing in real time. Knowledge of student characteristics helps to support inclusion efforts (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Lillie & Lesane, 1992). Principal Beck emphasized the importance of knowing students and their needs in order to make instructional and scheduling decisions. Principal Tucker stated, “We can see data at our finger tips.”

Based on the mean for the eleven leadership tasks, principals rated themselves as less engaged in encourages collaboration among staff (Cruziero & Morgan, 2006) as defined by the survey instrument (see Appendix B). Collaboration or interactions between the general and special education teachers and/or principals to achieve mutually agreed upon goals was commonly cited in research studies (Avery, 2003; Hobbs & Westling, 1998; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Liontos, 1992; Sharp & Hawes, 2003). The provision of opportunities to collaborate was viewed by general and special education teachers as a desirable strength in school leaders.

The first statement within this construct indicates the principal provides “opportunities for teachers and related services personnel to learn, solve problems and interact in small groups or teams” (Cruziero & Morgan, 2006). One possible explanation for principals’ perceptions could be the way in which each statement within this construct was worded. Trochim (2006) explains that when writing survey questions, it is important that the author does not make assumptions about the respondent’s point of view and that terminology is clearly defined.

In this southeastern district, the term “related services” generally refers to itinerant staff such as speech pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists rather than general and special educators. Principals did not mention collaboration of related services personnel when discussing collaborative interactions among staff members during the semi-structured interviews. Principal Beck was asked as a follow-up question about her role in
facilitating interactions between special education teachers and related services personnel. Principal Beck indicated that these types of interactions occurred on a “somewhat regular basis because of students’ IEPs”. Principal Beck did not see the need for her intervention in scheduling these interactions.

The second statement in the collaboration construct indicates the principal “provides opportunities for regular and special education teachers to observe students taught by each other” (Cruziero & Morgan, 2006). Principals might interpret the wording of this statement in the construct as a formal and separate opportunity as opposed to in-class observations during team-teaching instruction by both the special and general education teacher. In addition, teachers at the K-5 elementary setting in this district typically have 40 minutes of unencumbered time during their day. As a result, there are minimal opportunities for the regular education teacher to observe students taught directly by the special education teacher in a separate setting. Further, special education teachers in this study all served as the resource teacher in their respective buildings. As such, these teachers instruct students in regular and special education settings with caseloads that may not permit adequate time for observations of students aside from the scheduled times of the instructional day.

Voltz, et al. (1994) surveyed special education and general education teachers to determine the roles engaged in by both groups for the purposes of collaboration. When asked the degree to which special education teachers “observe special education students in the general education setting,” 81% of special education teachers reported they seldom or never perform this role. Asked the same question, 87.3% of general education teachers reported they seldom or never “observe special education students in the special education setting.”
Research Question 2. The second research question investigated similarities between principals’ and special education teachers’ perceptions of principals’ leadership behaviors in the administration of special education programs. O’Brien (1998) found teachers and principals frequently have differing views of what constitutes effective leadership. In the review of the literature several studies found that principals’ rate themselves higher on level of involvement, degree of knowledge, and engagement in tasks for the administration of special education (Klofenstine, 2002; Mauro, 2007; Moore, 2008; Webb, 1997; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wilcox & Wigle, 2001).

Similar to principals’ self-perceptions, special education teachers highly rated principals in the use of systematic procedures for evaluating staff in order to improve instruction. Specific evaluation processes and procedures are a requirement of the district and the state (NCDPI, 2010). The regularity of conducting systematic evaluations is prescribed. Participants’ familiarity with the evaluation process, instrument, and standards may be reasons for the high rating among special education teachers.

At the time of this study, principals and teachers in this southeastern district were using a traditional evaluation tool based on classroom observations. Halverson, Kelly, and Kimball (2004) define traditional practices of teacher evaluation as those focused on perfunctory tasks using predesigned checklists and well defined processes. The agreement in this study between special education teachers and principals for the use of systematic evaluation should not be interpreted as a positive influence on student achievement for students with disabilities. Observation-based assessments of teachers have not been linked to student achievement (Markley, 2004).
Teacher evaluation instruments used across the nation, including North Carolina, were found to be less than adequate for the purposes of aligning teacher behaviors with student achievement (Markley, 2004). While principals and special education teachers in the current study agreed that principals “evaluate staff using systematic procedures” (Cruziero & Morgan, 2006); the instrument used does not guarantee students taught by highly rated teachers will result in high academic achievement. In fact, beginning in 2008, North Carolina began piloting an entirely new evaluation system. In August 2010, the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process and new teaching standards were implemented in the southeastern district included in this study.

Principals’ engagement in monitoring students’ progress and program effectiveness received the second highest mean score from special education teachers on the survey. For principals, this construct received the fourth highest mean score. Hoachlander, et al. (2001) listed use of assessment tools and monitoring for accountability purposes as one of six categories of leadership strategies for increased student achievement. Establishing a database for student progress was cited as one role principals should engage in for the establishment of school wide inclusion (Hooper, et al., 1999). One reason for this high rating by teachers may be the recent implementation of several formative assessment tools that teachers are required to use. Principals in the district have access to electronic summary reports of teachers’ usage and students’ academic performance. These assessment tools include mCLASS, ClassScape, and MyAccess, and are used for measuring reading, writing and math achievement. Principal Tucker described the impact of readily accessible student data stating, “I look at the data and know where those children are. I can pull it right up.”

Descriptive statistics revealed similar perceptions of principal behaviors on two of the eleven leadership tasks between principals and special education teachers. Both groups gave low
ratings to principals for providing meaningful opportunities for the involvement of stakeholders including families and community members, and encouraging collaboration among school staff (related services personnel and observations between regular and special education teachers). Principals interviewed cited numerous opportunities for collaboration between special education, general education and/or principals. Using the term “we” to describe problem-solving efforts, Principal Tucker stated, “We feel there is a need for a collaborative approach to meeting their (students with disabilities) needs.”

Hunt, et al. (2003), found academic and social gains for all students in inclusive classrooms when general education and special education teachers worked collaboratively. In a literature review, DiPaola et al. (2004) included “involvement of stakeholders” and “collaboration” as 2 of the 5 dimensions needed for effective administration of special education programs. This involvement and collaboration was primarily viewed as occurring between special education teachers, regular education teachers, and administrators.

Statistical differences were found on nine of the eleven constructs in the current study:

- develops and communicates a shared vision;
- facilitates IEP development;
- assists with curriculum and instructional programs;
- ensures appropriate inclusion opportunities;
- develops positive behaviors management programs;
- monitors student progress and program effectiveness;
- ensures appropriate staff development activities;
- supports and involves all staff members; and
- evaluates staff using systematic procedures.
Principals rated themselves higher on these nine constructs than special education teachers rated principals on these nine constructs. This finding is aligned with several other studies where principals consistently over estimated their competencies and involvement when compared to the perceptions of special education teachers (Klofenstine, 2002; Mauro, 2007; Web, 1997; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; Wigle & Wilcox, 2001). Specifically, these authors cited studies where principals rated themselves higher than special education teachers in administrative roles relative to inclusion including curriculum, support, personnel, knowledge, and collaboration.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the small sample of principals and special educators. The findings lacked generalizability to other North Carolina districts or to districts in other states. Secondly, the study was limited to leadership focused upon one philosophical belief and organizational structure - inclusion – related to a population of students with special needs. As a result, the findings may not apply to all principals’ leadership behaviors. Finally, the study was perceptual in nature, and complete objectivity was therefore unlikely. I recognized the potential of socially desirable bias in survey research (Boardman & Sundquist, 2009). However, the purpose of the phenomenological interviews was to describe the participants’ experiences as well as support and extend the quantitative findings (Slavin, 2007).

Implications

Principals. The results of this study indicate that principals continue to overestimate their performance of leadership tasks relative to inclusion of students with disabilities. Principals and special education teachers differ on the perceptions of the principal’s performance of numerous leadership tasks including communication, IEP development, curriculum and instructional
assistance, inclusion opportunities, behavior management plans, monitoring students’ progress, staff development, and staff involvement. Most of these tasks have been elements of research studies focused on administrative supports afforded to special education teachers relative to inclusion (Avery, 2003; Bertrand & Bratberg, 2007; Billingsley, 2003; DiPaola, et al., 2003; Dolar, 2008; Housman, 2007; Mauro, 2007; Moore, 2005; O’Brien, 1998; Otto & Arnold, 2005; Stevenson, 2002; Webb, 1997). In a study by Moore (2005), special education teachers were asked to prioritize organizational supports and principal behavior needed for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities. Principal Support and Understanding was most commonly reported by special education teachers.

As demonstrated in the current study, the supports that educators deem critical to the success of students with disabilities relative to inclusion have not been sufficiently defined. Clear identification of these necessary supports may increase the effectiveness of teachers for instructing students in inclusive classrooms. Principals should consider the use of surveys, personal conferences, and needs assessment data collection measures to help identify specific support mechanisms necessary for successful inclusion to occur within their respective buildings.

Clearly communicated procedures for systematic evaluations were rated high by both groups in this study. With the changes in standards and procedures currently occurring across the state of North Carolina, principals should be well trained and knowledgeable of these changes in order to communicate these changes to teachers. As cited in the literature review and confirmed by this study, strong communication skills are characteristics of effective leaders (Dolar, 2008; Hooper, et al., 1999, Jones, 2006).

Both groups of respondents in this study gave low ratings to principals for providing meaningful opportunities for the involvement of stakeholders, and for encouraging collaboration
among school staff. The findings on these two constructs were not statistically different.

Collaboration was cited in numerous studies as important to effective leadership (Bays & Crockett, 2007; DiPaola, et al., 2004; Lillie & Lesane, 1992; Riordin, 2003). Principals should take steps to assess the current status of collaborative opportunities in their respective settings and make efforts to increase these opportunities across stakeholders including related services personnel.

Principals should take steps to align their self-perceptions with those of the special education teachers in their buildings. The most effective way to positively impact this alignment is through modeling the ideal behavior in the areas of trust, respect, credibility, concern for others, and open communication (Moore, 2005). Aligned perceptions create positive school cultures, improved working conditions, and improved academic achievement of students (Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993; Goor, Schwen, & Boyer, 1997).

Professional development departments at the district and state level should make efforts to clearly identify specific leadership supports necessary for the success of students with disabilities relative to inclusion. Once identified, these departments should design, implement and evaluate professional development opportunities for school principals. District and state staff development departments in North Carolina should assess the level of understanding of current principals and teachers with regards to the new state evaluation instrument and processes. A systematic evaluation tool was felt by participants in this study to be a behavior highly engaged in by principals. Changes in state requirements will necessitate on-going assessment of the implementation of this new tool.

**Future Research**
Researchers who desire to replicate this study using a similar survey instrument should consider rewording statements within the construct *encourages collaboration among school staff* to include interactions between general education teachers, special education teachers, and administration. This change might provide better clarity of the construct and alignment with interview responses as well as studies from the literature.

Additional research is necessary to enhance our understanding of principals’ support for the administration of special education in regards to the support of general education teachers, special education teachers, related services staff members, parents, and community members. Expansion of the sample size should also be considered. Studies including a larger group of aforementioned stakeholders might provide a more comprehensive analysis of leadership behaviors necessary for the success of inclusion.

Further research which focuses on principals leading inclusive schools and demonstrating high academic achievement for students with disabilities should be pursued through quantitative and qualitative collection methods. Results from these types of studies could expand upon this perceptual study to inform university preparation programs and district professional development training.

Research which clearly defines *support* for general education and special education teachers in inclusive settings would increase principals’ knowledge of specific structures necessary for the success of inclusion. Behaviors engaged in by principals to implement these supports should be identified with rich description for replication.

**Final Remarks**

According to the existing literature and the results of this study, principals consistently overestimate their competency and engagement in leadership behaviors necessary for the
administration of special education programs relative to inclusion (Klofenstine, 2002; Mauro, 2007; Moore, 2005; O’Brien, 1998; Webb, 1997; Wigle & Wilcox, 1999; and Wilcox & Wigle, 2001). As a result, principals are less likely to understand the need for changes in the organization and teachers are more likely to be dissatisfied with their working conditions. It is essential for principals to understand their own leadership behavior and the perceptions of their special education teachers in order to effect positive changes and increase student achievement for all students.
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Klofenstine, M.P. (2002). The level of involvement of Georgia’s principals in providing inclusive special education services (Doctoral dissertation, Georgia Southern Uni-


Moore, B. (2005). *Perceptions of teachers and administrators of the organizational supports for


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## Appendix A
### Review of Perceptual Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) and Year</th>
<th>Grade level employed</th>
<th>Sample group and size</th>
<th>Study focus</th>
<th>Study setting</th>
<th>Data collection tools</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avery, R. D. (2003)</td>
<td>Elementary, Jr. High, High School Special Education Teachers</td>
<td>N=126</td>
<td>Leadership characteristics of principals to establish roles</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Questionnaire, 19 questions</td>
<td>Agreed with four constructs: communication, support, knowledge, and caring attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertrand, L. A., Bratberg, W. D. 2007</td>
<td>Elementary, Middle, High School Principals</td>
<td>N=116</td>
<td>Level of knowledge of principals to inform college prep classes</td>
<td>Southeast Missouri</td>
<td>Self-rating survey, 17 questions, Likert scale</td>
<td>Knowledgeable in: safeguards, discipline, facilitator of collaboration between general and special education teachers. Less knowledgeable: testing and evaluation to determine eligibility, data collection, and funding sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
<th>Number of Principals</th>
<th>Number of Special Education Teachers</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Region or Sample Size</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broyles, E. (2004)</td>
<td>Elementary, Middle,</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
<td>Principals’ perception of knowledge held about special education</td>
<td>All regions of U.S. w/ emphasis on Texas</td>
<td>35 question survey with open ended also; Texas principals perceived selves more competent than general but desired more training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolar, J. (2008)</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>30 general ed.</td>
<td>11 special ed.</td>
<td>Perception of principal support for teachers of students w/ disabilities</td>
<td>Northern California</td>
<td>Survey and semi-structured questions; No significant difference for extent or importance of support; general ed teachers reported greater support with discipline, goals, &amp; resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyatt, N. E.</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived competence in administering special education programs</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Original survey using Likert scale; No significant differences seen; all perceive selves competent; desire more training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klofenstine, M. P.</td>
<td>Elementary, Middle,</td>
<td>133 Principals</td>
<td>96 Special education teachers</td>
<td>Level of involvement of principal in special education</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Parallel survey 34 items; Principals cited involvement significantly higher than special education teachers did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauro, T. D.</td>
<td>Elementary, Middle,</td>
<td>10 Principals</td>
<td>22 Spec. Ed.</td>
<td>Perceptions of what makes a</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Survey &amp; questionnaire; Non-conclusive on collaborative;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Sample Description</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2007)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>159 Gen. Ed. teachers</td>
<td>Supportive &amp; collaborative environment</td>
<td>Teachers w/ most experience most aligned w/ principal perceptions, teachers w/ leadership training less agreement w/ principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otto, S. J. &amp; Arnold, M. (2005)</td>
<td>Elementary, Middle, High</td>
<td>228 Experienced special education teachers</td>
<td>Level of administrative support perceived by special educators with experience</td>
<td>South Texas Survey; Likert scale</td>
<td>29% “Strongly Agreed” they had administrative supportive; 40% “Agreed “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevenson, R. A. (2002)</td>
<td>Elementary, Middle</td>
<td>150 Principals with and without special education training</td>
<td>Principals’ perceptions of competencies most needed for administration of special education</td>
<td>Illinois Rank top ten competencies from list of 30</td>
<td>Ten competencies needed; need for background in special education; need for more training of principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevenson-Jacobson, R. &amp;</td>
<td>Elementary, Middle</td>
<td>150 Principals</td>
<td>Principals’ perceptions of competencies most needed</td>
<td>Illinois Rank top ten competencies from list of 30</td>
<td>Eight competencies agreed upon by over half of each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Findings</td>
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<td>Hilton, A. (2006)</td>
<td>for administration of special education</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Webb, C. G. (1997)</td>
<td>Principal &amp; Spec. Ed. Teachers perceptions of principal’s roles in service delivery</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>20 item survey, Likert scale</td>
<td>Both perceived knowledge, attitude &amp; performance as low; principals &amp; teachers indicated need for additional training for leaders and teachers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wigle, S. E. &amp; Wilcox, D. (1999)</td>
<td>Perceptions of own competence to manage special education</td>
<td>Nebraska, Tennessee, Kansas, Texas</td>
<td>35 item survey based on skills identified by CEC; Likert Scale</td>
<td>Statistically significant relationships between 24 of 35 items; directors rated selves higher in competency; special educators rated selves higher on 14 skills than principals</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
| Wilcox, D. & Wigle, S. E. (2001) | Elementary, Middle, High | 68 Principals 78 Special Education Directors | Principals and Special Education Directors perceptions of the principal’s competencies to manage special education programs | Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin | 35 item survey based on skills identified by CEC; Likert Scale | Principals overestimate their competencies in 33 of 35 skills compared to directors’ rating of principals |
Appendix B. Principal Survey Instrument

**Leadership Behaviors in the Administration of Special Education as Related to Inclusion**

The following statements reflect leadership behaviors in the administration of special education programs as related to inclusion. Rate your degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement according to the following scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree   2 = Disagree   3 = Neutral   4 = Agree   5 = Strongly Agree

**Section I. Principals**

**Develops and Communicates a Shared Vision**

1. I communicate to building level staff that the education of students with disabilities is a shared responsibility. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I provide clear direction and support to faculty and staff regarding the philosophy, goals, and expectations for providing instruction and services to learners with disabilities. 1 2 3 4 5

**Involves Stakeholders**

3. I provide opportunities for meaningful family involvement in the education of students with disabilities. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I provide opportunities for meaningful community involvement in the education of students with disabilities. 1 2 3 4 5

**Facilitates IEP Development**

5. I encourage all who are involved with the student with disabilities to actively participate in the IEP process. 1 2 3 4 5

6. I provide assistance in IEP development and/or modification. 1 2 3 4 5

**Assists with Curriculum and Instructional Programs**

7. I assist with curriculum development and/or modification. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I assist with identifying appropriate instructional strategies and resources. 1 2 3 4 5

9. I provide ongoing support for and assistance with inclusion efforts. 1 2 3 4 5
Ensures Appropriate Inclusion Opportunities
10. I encourage students with disabilities to participate in school activities.

11. I assist with developing and implementing classroom interventions to help at-risk students.

Develops Positive Behavior Management Programs
12. I assess the existing behavior management system and make changes based on needs and current educational programs.

13. I guide school personnel in implementing behavior management strategies to produce supportive, instructional, and preventable behavior management programs.

Monitors Student Progress and Program Effectiveness

15. I frequently monitor students’ progress.

16. I use evaluation results to make informed program decisions.

Ensures Appropriate Staff Development Activities
17. I provide opportunities for collaborative planning of staff development activities.

18. I encourage teacher involvement in activities for professional growth.

19. I provide opportunities to practice and reflect on skills learned at staff development sessions.
Supports and Involves Staff Members
20. I demonstrate support for all teachers and staff by communicating my confidence in their abilities and being respectful of them.

21. I encourage shared decision making in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs for students with disabilities.

Encourages Collaboration Among School Staff
22. I provide opportunities for teachers and related services personnel to learn, solve problems, and interact in small groups or teams.

23. I provide opportunities for regular and special education teachers to observe students taught by each other.

Evaluates Staff Using Systematic Procedures
24. I frequently observe instruction for improving effectiveness.

25. I conference with teachers following observations to analyze and discuss instruction.
Section II. Principals

Circle one answer for each item.

1. What is your gender? A. Male B. Female

2. Please indicate your race.
   A. Asian
   B. Black
   C. Hispanic
   D. White
   E. Other

3. In what age group do you fall?
   A. 29 and under
   B. 30-39
   C. 40-49
   D. 50-59
   E. 60 and over

4. How many years have you been an educator?
   A. 0-3 years
   B. 4-6 years
   C. 7-9 years
   D. 10-12 years
   E. 13-15 years
   F. 16-19 years
   G. 20+ year

5. How many years have you worked at your current school?
   A. 0-3 years
   B. 4-6 years
   C. 7-9 years
   D. 10-12 years
   E. 13-15 years
   F. 16-19 years
   G. 20+ year
6. How many years have you worked in your current position?
   A. 0-3 years
   B. 4-6 years
   C. 7-9 years
   D. 10-12 years
   E. 13-15 years
   F. 16-19 years
   G. 20+ years

7. How many years have you been a principal?
   A. 0-3 years
   B. 4-6 years
   C. 7-9 years
   D. 10-12 years
   E. 13-15 years
   F. 16-19 years
   G. 20+ years

8. Do you have current licensure in an area of special education?
   _____ Yes   _____ No

9. Have you earned six or more graduate course hours in special education?
   _____ Yes   _____ No

10. How many professional development hours have you accrued with respect to special education topics in the last 5 years? (Please circle).
    0-15 16-35 36+
Appendix C. Special Education Teacher Survey Instrument

**Leadership Behaviors in the Administration of Special Education as Related to Inclusion**

The following statements reflect leadership behaviors in the administration of special education programs as related to inclusion. Rate your degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement according to the following scale:

1= Strongly Disagree    2=Disagree    3 = Neutral    4 = Agree    5 = Strongly Agree

**Section I. Teachers**

**Develops and Communicates a Shared Vision**

1. My principal communicates to building level staff that the education of students with disabilities is a shared responsibility.  
   SD D N A SA
   1 2 3 4 5

2. My principal provides clear direction and support to faculty and staff regarding the philosophy, goals, and expectations for providing instruction and services to learners with disabilities.  
   1 2 3 4 5

**Involves Stakeholders**

3. My principal provides opportunities for meaningful family involvement in the education of students with disabilities.  
   1 2 3 4 5

4. My principal provides opportunities for meaningful community involvement in the education of students with disabilities.  
   1 2 3 4 5

**Facilitates IEP Development**

5. My principal encourages all who are involved with the student with disabilities to actively participate in the IEP in the process.  
   1 2 3 4 5

6. My principal provides assistance in IEP development and/or modification.  
   1 2 3 4 5

**Assists with Curriculum and Instructional Programs**

7. My principal assists with curriculum development and/or modification.  
   1 2 3 4 5

8. My principal assists with identifying appropriate instructional strategies and resources.  
   1 2 3 4 5
**Ensures Appropriate Inclusion Opportunities**

9. My principal provides ongoing support for and assistance with inclusion efforts.  

10. My principal encourages students with disabilities to participate in school activities.  

11. My principal assists with developing and implementing classroom interventions to help at-risk students.  

**Develops Positive Behavior Management Programs**

12. My principal assesses the existing behavior management system and make changes based on student needs and current educational programs.  

13. My principal guides school personnel in implementing behavior management strategies to produce supportive, instructional, and preventable behavior management programs.  

**Monitors Student Progress and Program Effectiveness**

14. My principal helps teachers interpret and use assessment data that measure progress toward curricular goals and objectives (curriculum-based assessment).  

15. My principal frequently monitors students’ progress.  

16. My principal uses evaluation results to make informed program decisions.  

**Ensures Appropriate Staff Development Activities**

17. My principal provides opportunities for collaborative planning of staff development activities.  

18. My principal encourages teacher involvement in activities for professional growth.  

19. My principal provides opportunities to practice and reflect on skills learned at staff development sessions.
Supports and Involves Staff Members

20. My principal demonstrates support for all teachers and staff by communicating confidence in our abilities.

21. My principal encourages shared decision making in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs for students with disabilities.

Encourages Collaboration Among School Staff

22. My principal provides opportunities for teachers and related services personnel to learn, solve problems, and interact in small groups or teams.

23. My principal provides opportunities for regular and special education teachers to observe students taught by each other.

Evaluates Staff Using Systematic Procedures


25. My principal conferences with teachers following observations to analyze and discuss instruction.
Section II. Teachers

Circle one answer for each item.

1. Please indicate your gender. A. Male B. Female

2. Please indicate your race.

   A. Asian
   B. Black
   C. Hispanic
   D. White
   E. Other

3. Please select your age group.

   A. 29 and under
   B. 30-39
   C. 40-49
   D. 50-59
   E. 60 and over

4. How many years have you been an educator?

   A. 0-3 years
   B. 4-6 years
   C. 7-9 years
   D. 10-12 years
   E. 13-15 years
   F. 16-19 years
   G. 20+ years

5. How many years have you worked at your current school?

   A. 0-3 years
   B. 4-6 years
   C. 7-9 years
   D. 10-12 years
   E. 13-15 years
   F. 16-19 years
   G. 20+ years
6. How many years have you worked in your current position?

   A. 0-3 years
   B. 4-6 years
   C. 7-9 years
   D. 10-12 years
   E. 13-15 years
   F. 16-19 years
   G. 20+ years

7. How many years have you worked with your current principal?

   A. 0-3 years
   B. 4-6 years
   C. 7-9 years
   D. 10-12 years
   E. 13-15 years
   F. 16-19 years
   G. 20+ years

8. Do you have current licensure in an area of special education?

   _____ Yes  _____ No

9. Have you earned six or more graduate course hours in special education?

   _____ Yes  _____ No

10. How many professional development hours have you accrued with respect to special education topics in the last 5 years? (Please circle).

       0-15       16-35       36+
Appendix D

Principals’ Interview Instrument

Leadership Behaviors in the Administration of Special Education

Structured Interview: Principals

My name is Lynn Fulton. I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. I am currently researching leadership behaviors relative to inclusion of students with disabilities at the elementary school level. I appreciate your time. This interview should take about 15 to 20 minutes.

I will now read a statement which summarizes research literature on effective leadership of inclusive schools:

*Effective leadership of inclusive schools occurs to the extent that principals possess special education knowledge necessary to communicate an appreciation, respect, and responsiveness toward educating all students which is clearly reflected within the environmental structures of their buildings, their own leadership behaviors, and the attitudes and performance of their students and staff members.*

Please answer the following questions as completely as possible. I may ask follow-up questions to your answers.

1. How is your knowledge of students with disabilities and special education reflected in your leadership?

2. How would you describe your school in terms of environment, staff, and students relative to inclusion of students with disabilities?

3. Describe your level of involvement in meeting the needs of all students.

4. Do you consider your school to be a place where all children feel welcome, accepted and valued? If yes, why? If no, why not?
Appendix E
Special Education Teachers’ Interview Instrument

Leadership Behaviors in the Administration of Special Education

Structured Interview: Teachers

My name is Lynn Fulton. I am a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. I am currently researching leadership behaviors relative to inclusion of students with disabilities at the elementary school level. I appreciate your time. This interview should take about 15 to 20 minutes.

I will now read a statement which summarizes research literature on effective leadership of inclusive schools:

*Effective leadership of inclusive schools occurs to the extent that principals possess special education knowledge necessary to communicate an appreciation, respect, and responsiveness toward educating all students which is clearly reflected within the environmental structures of their buildings, their own leadership behaviors, and the attitudes and performance of their students and staff members.*

Please answer the following questions as completely as possible. I may ask follow-up questions to your answers.

1. How is the principal’s knowledge of students with disabilities and special education reflected in his/her leadership?

2. How would you describe your school in terms of environment, staff, and students relative to inclusion of students with disabilities?

3. Describe the principal’s level of involvement in meeting the needs of all students.

4. Do you consider your school to be a place where all children feel welcome, accepted, and valued? If yes, why? If no, why not?