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THE CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION: PERCEPTIONS OF SUPERINTENDENTS,

PRINCIPALS, AND TEACHERS IN MISSISSIPPI ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

by

Gary Lynn Tune

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2013

ABSTRACT

THE CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION: PERCEPTIONS OF SUPERINTENDENTS,

PRINCIPALS, AND TEACHERS IN MISSISSIPPI ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

by Gary Lynn Tune

December 2013

Alternative schools serve a population of students who have come in conflict with the codes of conduct of their home school district. Students with disabilities are subject to the same codes of conduct and occasionally are referred to alternative schools. These referrals constitute a change in placement mandating alternative schools to provide academic and educational services and supports commensurate to the home school. This includes educating students with disabilities in regular classes. This research sought to ascertain perceptions of superintendents, alternative school principals, and regular and special education teachers regarding how well alternative schools in Mississippi meet the challenges of implementation of inclusion. This study indicated no significant difference in perceptions among respondent groups; the results yielded positive responses with the majority echoing unanimity of support regarding inclusion. They agreed students with mild disabilities belonged in regular classrooms, that both students with special needs and regular students benefited socially and academically from inclusion, and that inclusions should prevail even over parental objections. They disagreed that students should be excluded from regular classes due to severe physical disabilities, increased instructional time requirements, using assistive communication devices, or being unable to read normal size print. All four respondent groups unanimously expressed support or strong support for the implementation of inclusion.

The University of Southern Mississippi

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Gary Lynn Tune

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 2013

DEDICATION

This adventure has not only tested my endurance and resolve, but it has significantly impacted my support group, especially those who call me Pappi, daddy, son and baby. I will forever be in debt to my wife, Karen Elaine Leach Tune; my parents, Jim and Carolyn Tune; my children, Noelle, Lyndsey, Melissa, Marche, and Lydia and especially my grandchildren; Grant, Easton, Chandlar, Brinkley, Kasen, Dylan, Paisley, Anniston, Kylie, Emily, Kelby, and Gates who have allowed me to chase my dream while they sacrificed their opportunities to my companionship, support, counsel, and "Pappi" time.

I hope my example of never getting too old enough to pursue your goals resonates with my children and grandchildren as they continue to travel their individual roads of life.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Raywid (1994) noted that alternative schools, since the time of their inception, appear to be divisible into three types. Type I alternatives are schools of choice and are usually popular. Type II alternatives are programs to which students are sentenced— usually as one last chance prior to expulsion. Type III programs focus on behavior modification, and little attention is paid to modifying curriculum or pedagogy. Melissa Roderick of the University of Chicago proposed an additional promising typology. Rather than focusing on a student's demographic characteristic (or 'risk factor') or even a program characteristic, put students' educational needs front and center (Aron, 2006). One group of students, Roderick suggested, have erred—academically, socially or behaviorally—and need short-term intervention to experience success (Aron, 2006). Another even larger group of students, Aron (2006) stated, have fallen substantially behind their peers educationally. These students have very low reading levels, are often way over age for grade, and are often students with disabilities (p. 6). Aron (2006) also emphasized that "many of these children have been retained repeatedly, and a number of them have come out of special education. They include 17 to 18 year-olds with third and fourth grade reading levels who have never graduated from eighth grade" (p. 6). Aron's imagery clearly defines two distinct groups of students populating Mississippi alternative schools and is very representative of reality.

There was a marginal presence of students with disabilities in the late 1980s and early 1990s enrolled in alternative schools. During this era, applying strict school

removal policies to students with disabilities was restricted by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's (IDEA) fundamental requirement for the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) (Yell & Cline, 1995). Increasingly during the decade of the 1990s, school administrators and teachers viewed this disparity in school district authority to discipline students with and without disabilities as a significant threat to school safety (Yell & Cline, 1995). To balance the rights of the IDEA-protected child with the rights of the greater majority of students, Congress inserted language into the 1997 reauthorization allowing for placement into an Interim Alternative Educational Setting (IAES). IAES's were not initially synonymous with alternative schools. Telzrow (1999) reported however, that alternative schools were quickly identified as a potential mechanism and a logical choice for accommodating students with disabilities for long term (45 day) placements.

Alternative schools have existed within the educational landscape for several decades, teaching the most vulnerable educational population. However, few research findings can document their effectiveness or pinpoint the actual number of students being served through these schools and programs. Results from a national survey by Kleiner, Porch, and Farris, (2002) indicated, "Overall 12 percent of all students in alternative schools and programs for at-risk students were receiving special education services and had individualized education programs (IEPs)" (p. 10). Lehr and Lange's (2002) ground-breaking national study on perceptions of State Directors of Special Education yielded numerous concerns regarding students with disabilities enrolled in alternative schools: lack of monitoring and compliance of the alternative programs, lack of data on the number of students with disabilities being served in alternative schools, disability

categories of those students, and clarity in documenting measures of effectiveness and student success.

Ahearn (2004) noted few studies exist documenting the experiences of students with disabilities within these educational settings (p. 1). It is exactly this disconnect between available data indicating how well alternative schools serve students with disabilities and the current and future path of accountability by NCLB and IDEA legislation that has to be recognized and addressed by regular and special education practitioners working in alternative schools. Currently, under NCLB slightly less than 95% of students with disabilities are assessed based on state level assessments or alternate assessments. Common Core State Standards (CCSS), set to be implemented in 2014, raises the ante. CCSS communicates the expectation that the progress of over 99% of students with disabilities will be assessed with new, more comprehensive national standards. Are alternative schools prepared? That is the question this study seeks to answer.

<center>Literature</center>

Raywid (1994) identified three categories of alternative education programs. Type I programs refer to schools of choice such as magnet schools that may have a programmatic theme for content. Type II programs are for students who have been identified as disruptive to the traditional school. These programs may represent one "last chance" before being expelled from school. The emphasis is on behavior modification without regard for modifications of curriculum or pedagogy. The third program type, Type III, has a rehabilitation/remediation emphasis with the ultimate goal of students returning to their traditional school. Lange and Sletten proposed in 2002 that a

fourth type, basically a hybrid, combining the primary strengths of Raywid's original descriptions of alternative programs yet encourages return to the regular educational system following some problems of failure (p. 6). The hybrid characteristics listed previously were closely modeled in structuring Mississippi Alternative Schools.

Aron (2006) defines alternative education as a

Public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education. (p. 3)

Descriptions of alternative schools and programs have suggested that such programs exhibit specific structural and programming characteristics. Lehr and Lange (2002) emphasized the aspects of small size (e.g., class size, overall enrollment, or student/teacher ratio) and flexibility in terms of varied schedules, varied hours of operation, and individualized programming as positive benefits to alternative school enrollment. Lange and Sletten (2002) identified individualized instruction that meets students' unique academic and social-emotional needs as being critical for success. Alternative school environments were viewed by Franklin (1992) as supportive environments that strengthen relationships among peers and between teachers and students. Close examination of alternative school data highlights positive characteristics. Lange and Sletten (2002) affirmed that alternative schools facilitate successful school completion for those at risk of dropping out by including benefits such as extra support/counseling for students, smaller and more personal settings, positive relationships

with adults, meaningful educational and transition goals, and emphasis on living and vocational skills.

Foley and Pang (2006) emphasized that youth attending alternative education programs appear to have diverse educational backgrounds and needs. Often times, youth are referred to such programs for a variety of reasons including experiencing behavioral difficulties in school, being suspended or expelled from school, being a pregnant or parenting teen, experiencing academic failure, or having a disability.

Lehr and Lange (2002) noted that respondents to the national survey of state special education directors voiced concern about whether alternative schools met the requirement to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive setting, as some alternative schools tend to be somewhat isolated and serve an at-risk population. Because alternative schools have operated with a relatively high degree of autonomy, Lehr and Lange (2002) stated that little is known about their governance or the consistency of program policies across various states or regions. Further complicating these issues, responded Unruh, Bullis, Todis, Waintrup, and Atkins (2007), is the wide variety of curricula, instructional models, and service delivery offered by these schools and programs, precipitating the need for multiple measures of student achievement and success. Lehr and Lange (2002) expressed concerns about whether alternative schools are equipped to meet the needs of students with disabilities in terms of staffing, curriculum, and resources. Lehr (2004) later voiced several concerns including the lack of data and oversight, the potential lack of special services (including appropriate staffing and resources), and the lack of knowledge about quality of instruction and student outcomes on the part of program staff and leadership. Gilson (2006) stated that, "despite

the accelerated growth of alternative schools, research and evaluation of these schools and the effect they have on student retention and academic achievement levels is very limited" (pp. 48-49). Montecel (1999) reported that, "Successes were reported through collections of anecdotes, with little or no 'hard data' collected, tabulated or analyzed" (p. 6). Aron (2006) concluded in his national research of alternative education that the research base for understanding what works and for whom in alternative education is still evolving. Gilson (2006) surmised that, "Many schools do not keep accurate records with regards to attendance, discipline referrals, academic grades, and school completion" (pp. 48-49). Foley and Pang (2006) echoed other researchers' concerns, stating that despite the history of alternative programs, few data are available describing the governance, funding, and physical facilities supporting alternative educational programs.

The presence of students with disabilities in alternative schools was minimal due to disciplinary exclusionary protections provided by IDEA prior to 1997. Due to "zero tolerance," as well as mounting pressure from administrators, teachers, unions, communities, and parents, the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 opened the doors to allow students with disabilities to be placed in "appropriate interim alternative settings for not more than 45 days" (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999, p. 79). In 2006, Etscheidt summarized the discipline provisions permitting a school district to place a student with disabilities in an Interim Alternative Education Setting (IAES). The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 gave school officials the authority to immediately remove a child with disabilities from an educational setting to an IAES if the child is in possession of a weapon, knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance, or if a

child has inflicted serious bodily injury upon another person while at school, on school premises, or at a school function (IDEA, 1997, 20 U.S.C. § 1415(k)(1)(G)(iii)).

These new regulations provided disciplinary relief for school districts and increased placements of students with disabilities in unprepared alternative schools. In a study completed in a Midwestern state in 2007, Wasburn-Moses (2011) highlighted findings representing potential areas of concern nationwide: 82 % of participants reported having students with disabilities in their schools; however, only 60% reported having licensed special education teachers. Secondly, by law, all placement decisions (including change of placements) must be made by the IEP team; however, only 36% of respondents indicated that the IEP team decision is used as a means of placement to a large extent. Finally, less than 9% of respondents mentioned the use of general education standards or curriculum when commenting on the quality of instruction in their schools. These revelations with no mention of collaboration or inclusive practices raise questions and concerns about whether alternative schools may be out of compliance with state and federal regulations. In 2000, Crockett emphasized:

> In the flux of restructuring schools toward higher student outcomes, the challenge is tremendous for educators to provide, with confidence and integrity, a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as required by law for their students with disabilities. Placements of students with disabilities in alternative schools create many challenges for school leaders and teachers. (p. 43)

NCLB aims to take public education to higher levels for all students, raising the academic bar for students with disabilities (DiPaola, Tschannen-Morgan, & Walther-

Thomas, 2004). On the second front, DiPaola et al. (2004) added that IDEA, mandates students with disabilities receive instruction in the general curriculum while in the regular education classroom (p. 2). According to Ahearn (2004), the NCLB requirements include measurement of progress by subgroups of students, one of which is students with disabilities. There are implications for students with disabilities who attend alternative schools. Crockett, Myers, Griffin, and Hollandsworth (2007) discussed that NCLB, from its unique perspective, requires most students with disabilities to learn the same academic content as their grade-level classmates and to be taught by educators highly qualified to teach in their academic disciplines. Common Core State Standards promises even more accountability for a larger percentage of students with disabilities, ratcheting up the pressure on administrators and educators in the future.

From the perspective of students with disabilities, there are many components to successful inclusion. The foundational component is collaboration. Friend (2006) stressed, "Collaboration does not occur because of positive intent; it requires that you learn the skills to make it a reality" (p. 123). "In an inclusive school, general education does not relinquish responsibility for students with special needs, but instead, works cooperatively with special education to provide a quality program for all students" (Praisner, 2003, p. 135). Schmoker (2006) noted that professional learning communities have emerged as arguably the best collaborative method for improving instruction and student performance. Friend (2006) stated that collaboration mandates in NCLB and IDEA include participation of parents in their children's education, access to the general education curriculum, participation of all students in high stakes testing, and regular educator participation in creation of the IEP.

Professional learning communities generally assume a composition of school-based personnel. With students with disabilities in alternative schools, the professional learning communities include other stakeholders. Parents of students with disabilities assume an equal share role with educational professionals. Referring school staff and alternative school behavioral specialist and counselors are included team members. Outside community agency support personnel also collaborate with the professional learning community—public mental health specialists and counselors, youth court judges and court officers, advocacy personnel, and churches.

Praisner (2003) specified that "to ensure the success of inclusion, it is imperative that principals exhibit behaviors that advance the integration, acceptance, and success of students with disabilities in general education" (p. 136). As schools become more inclusive, they are also becoming more collaborative (Boyer & Lee, 2001). If leadership is to be inclusive, then the principal must be supportive. DiPaola et al. (2004) stated:

> The job of an effective principal is multifaceted, and two key areas must receive high leadership attention and support: Principals must develop, enhance, and monitor the professional skills and knowledge of their faculty, and principals must work with their communities to create a common cluster of expectations promoting implementation of those skills and knowledge. (p. 3)

If students and their teachers are to be successful in today's schools, principals must be their champions. As the instructional leaders in their building, principals are responsible for developing a school culture that embraces high academic standards and expectations for all students (Boyer & Lee, 2001). Principals must promote the development of dynamic learning communities based on common student achievement

goals that guide all school efforts. In sum, according to DiPaola et al. (2004) "Good principals are the best hope that students with disabilities and others at risk for school failure have for academic success in this NCLB era" (p. 7).

Looking at collaboration through the prism of educator opinions, one could reflect on Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon's (2010) description of a collegial school—as being "characterized by purposeful adult interactions about improving school-wide teaching and learning" (p. 6). Glickman et al. (2010) stressed that collaborative educator practices mirror collegial school characteristics by supporting a commitment of being lifelong learners, seeking common goals for student success, and assessing all practices affecting student learning (p. 6). Carpenter and Dyal in 2007 emphasized that the reauthorization of IDEA, in conjunction with NCLB, redefined the secondary special education teacher's role in collaborative instruction in the regular classroom (p. 344).

Administrative mandates for implementation of inclusion require some conceptual changes in educational philosophy; however, the paradigm shift for principals is the investment of influence to invoke the necessary changes for successful implementation. On the other hand, the reality is that collaborative practices, especially involving inclusion, require re-programming of educator opinions. Co-existence of regular and special educators within the same classroom often results in normal lines of responsibility becoming blurred. Van Reusen, Shoho, and Barker (2000) stated that "under the umbrella of inclusive education, high school teachers are expected to assume new roles in serving students with disabilities and others with special instructional needs" (p. 2). Washburn-Moses (2005) retorted that special education teachers in general education classrooms co-teach, assist, or consult with regular education teachers (p. 151). Van

Reusen et al. in 2000 concluded that effective and equitable inclusive education depends on teacher attitudes regarding inclusion, teacher confidence in their abilities to teach students with disabilities, and a compelling belief that all children can learn (p. 2).

Carpenter and Dyal (2007) emphasized "that inclusion efforts are requiring that general education teachers provide content area instruction to all students" (p. 344), while special education teachers support students with disabilities based on their IEPs and other students in need of remediation. To educate diverse learners effectively in general education classrooms, stakeholders must work closely with one another to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive instructional programs. Through a process of ongoing collaboration, effective school teams reach an alignment between learning goals and instruction, effective progress monitoring, and appropriate student and teacher support (Crockett, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The history of the United States reflects a deep seated commitment to education. This commitment, unfortunately, has not always been inclusionary. "Rhode Island was the first state to pass compulsory education law in 1840; Massachusetts passed the second in 1852, with other states following suit" (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998, p. 220). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, most states had passed laws requiring schools to educate students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). "During the 1960s and early 1970s, no state served all its children with disabilities. Many states turned children away while other states placed children in inappropriate programs" (Martin & Terman, 1996, p. 27). Historically, the education of students with disabilities was legitimized in 1975 when the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) was enacted, mandating a

"free and appropriate education for all handicapped children" (Conner & Ferri, 2007, p. 63). Education law today contains core principles, defined through IDEA, including zero reject, free and appropriate education, least restrictive environment, nondiscriminatory evaluation, parent and family rights, and procedural safeguards (Friend, 2006). Further protections, according to Friend (2006), enacted by Congress were Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

"Traditionally, alternative programs have focused on the education of youth who have dropped out of public school or are at risk of dropping out" (Rutherford & Quinn, 1999, p. 79). In 2004, Ahearn asserted that there are four other major types of students who are admitted to, or placed into, alternative programs: those who have been suspended or expelled; those at risk of failure; those who have behavior problems; and those who have been academically unsuccessful and are in need of a non-traditional setting.

This has historically been the enrollment pattern for alternative schools. However, with the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, PL 105-17, 1997), the mission of alternative schools has expanded. Rutherford and Quinn (1999) emphasized: "The law now states that under certain circumstances, students with disabilities can be placed in an 'appropriate' interim alternative setting for not more than forty-five days" (p. 79). Lehr (2004) duly noted state special education directors concerns when they questioned the quality of services for students with disabilities within alternative school settings, qualifications and availability of staff

licensed in special education, relevant subject availability and curriculum content, and fears about being compliant with IDEA regulations (p. 4).

In the inclusive school, all students are educated in general education programs. Inclusion is when a student with special learning and/or behavioral needs is educated full time in the general education program. "Inclusion is when students with disabilities receive their entire academic curriculum in the general education program" (Idol, 2006, p. 78). Rozalski, Stewart, and Miller, in 2010, emphasize that IDEA has high expectations for implementation of FAPE and LRE, requires schools to identify students with disabilities, provide supplementary aids and services necessary for success, and educate students with disabilities in regular classrooms with their non-disabled peers (pp. 151-152).

The literature review revealed a gap in research. Aron (2006) offered the research base for understanding what works and for whom in alternative education is evolving and currently there are few rigorous studies (using random assignment, control groups, etc.) that examine student outcomes and program effectiveness of alternative education. Clearly, more research is needed in this area, especially given that accountability and outcome measures used in schools may not be sufficient for alternative education. Foley and Pang (2006) reiterated that "despite the history of alternative education programs, few data are available describing the governance, physical facilities, student population, educational programming, and supports being provided to students at risk for educational failure" (p. 11). Gable, Bullock, and Evans (2006) stated that few empirical studies exist that adequately address what constitutes quality alternative schooling (p. 8). Gilson (2006) emphasized that the quantity of literature regarding alternative high schools was

significant the depth of knowledge of operational parameters was scant (p. 61). Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) argued that limited data on the efficacy of alternative education at the state level and in the literature in general, however, makes it impossible to draw firm conclusions regarding the soundness of such educational practice.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the perceptions of Mississippi school superintendents, alternative school principals, and teachers across the State of Mississippi regarding how well their schools comply with inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classrooms. Not only are alternative schools required to take regular education students from elementary, middle, and high schools in their district or districts, they must also serve referred students with 504 Plans and Individualized Educational Programs.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The specific research questions to be addressed in this study are the following:

Research Question 1: Is there a difference in the perceptions of regular education teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes?

Research Question 2: How would regular education teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents categorize their perceptions about inclusion?

Research Question 3: What do regular education teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents perceive as the major benefits, greatest disadvantage, and absolutely essential elements for making inclusion work effectively for students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes?

Definition of Terms

504 Plan - the documentation specifying the protections for students whose disabilities are not eligible for services through IDEA.

Adhocratic School Organization – is an alternative school organization, proposed by Thomas Skrtic in 1991, which provides all students with schooling that is both excellent and equitable, stressing collaboration and active problem solving. This is diametrically opposed to the bureaucratic school organizational structure and specialized professional culture of the day which are inappropriate forms, according to Skrtic, to fulfill our social goals of educational excellence and equity (Skrtic, 1991).

Alternative school - schools or programs set up by states, school districts, or other entities to serve young people who are not succeeding in a traditional public school environment. Alternative education programs offer students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities, behavioral problems, or poor attendance an opportunity to achieve in a different setting and use different and innovative learning methods. While there are many different kinds of alternative schools and programs, they are often characterized by their flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios, and modified curricula. (Aron, 2006, p. 6).

Annual Goals - a component of an Individualized Education Program that consists of statements of the major accomplishments expected for the student during the upcoming 12 months; must be able to be objectively measured (Friend, 2006).

Behavioral Intervention Plan - "a set of strategies designed to address the function of the behavior in order to change it" (Friend, 2006, p. 271).

Education of All Handicapped Children Act - P.L.94-142 is the set of amendments passed in 1975 funding Child Find (early identification and intervention of disabled children not yet in school) and mandated that states must adhere to the law to be eligible to receive appropriate federal dollars.

Free Appropriate Public Education - FAPE is the expectation that all students with disabilities are not only entitled to education but that education also must be appropriate to the individual and provided at no cost.

General Education Development - a group of five subject tests which, when passed, certify that the taker has American high school-level academic skills. The tests were developed to help WWII veterans return to civilian life. The GED enables students who were, for various reasons, unable to complete high school and earn the credentials allowing them to enter college or vocational schools.

Inclusion - "a belief system shared by every member of a school as a learning community—teachers, administrators, other staff members, students, and parents—about responsibility of educating all students so that they can reach their potential" (Friend, 2006, p. 22).

Individualized Education Program - the IEP is "a legally binding document that describes the educational program that has been designed to meet the unique needs of each child with a disability" (Mississippi Department of Education, Alternative Education Guidebook, 2010, p. 18).

Individual Instruction Plan - is "a required document, due at the time of placement, that describes the educational and behavioral analysis programs designed to

meet the unique needs of each student placed in an alternative school" (Mississippi Department of Education, 2010, p. 18).

Individuals with Disabilities Act - Public Law 94-142, Education of the Handicapped Act, was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) during the 1980 reauthorization. What is known as the federal special education law gives comprehensive guidelines to any institution receiving federal financing for public education.

Interim Alternative Educational Setting - "the setting or program other than the student's current placement that enables the student to continue to receive educational services according to his or her Individualized Educational Program" (Mississippi Department of Education, 2010, p. 19).

Least Restrictive Environment - the educational placement where a child with disabilities can experience success in a setting closely reflective of the environment of his non-handicapped and age-appropriate peer.

Mainstreaming - from the perspective of the student with disabilities, mainstreaming ensures "that education is as much like other people's as possible" (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000, p. 15).

Placement-neutral funding - provides fiscal incentives that will follow students with disabilities in full inclusion or separate placements as long as the unique educational needs of the child are met.

Present levels of performance - "accurate and current information about any domain in which a concern exists, including academic achievement, social functioning,

behavior, communication skills, physical skills, vocational skills, and others as appropriate" (Friend, 2006, p. 65).

Procedural safeguards - guidelines which guarantee and explain the rights of a student with disabilities.

Regular Education Initiative - a more inclusive form of mainstreaming possessing the goals of merging general and special education to create a more united system of education (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987).

Resource Room - *"*where students are pulled out of the regular education environment and served outside of the regular environment, usually in the special education classroom" (Obiakor, 2011, p. 11).

Special Education - "specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability" (Friend, 2006, p. 4).

Zero tolerance - policies enacted by school districts in response to situations that jeopardize the safety and well being of any student, teacher, staff member, or administrator. These policies specify the reason that students—both regular students and students with special needs—can be placed in interim alternative educational settings (IAES) or alternative schools.

<div align="center">Delimitations</div>

1. The study is delimited to focus on public alternative schools in Mississippi.

2. The population chosen for the study is delimited to school district superintendents, public alternative school principals, and regular and special education teachers in Mississippi's public alternative schools.

3. The study is delimited to school superintendents, alternative school principals,

and regular and special education teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of

students with disabilities in alternative schools. Survey instruments, specifically

designed for each surveyed group, are modifications of Dr. Jeff Bailey's (2004)

original instrument, *The Validation of A Scale To Measure School Principals'*

Attitudes Toward the Inclusion Of Students With Disabilities In Regular Schools.

4. The study is delimited to the sample of questionnaires returned within 4 weeks

of mail-out.

5. The study is delimited to the alternative school student data for the 2012-2013

academic school year.

<div align="center">Assumptions</div>

1. It is assumed that all school district superintendents, public alternative school

principals, and regular and special education teachers who chose to participate in

the study answered their questionnaires honestly and accurately.

2. It is assumed that all school district superintendents, public alternative school

principals, and regular education and special education teachers working in public

alternative schools were aware that alternative schools were required to comply

with all applicable federal statues mandated by Individuals with Disabilities

Education Improvement Act IDEIA (1997).

<div align="center">Justifications</div>

The purpose of this study is to assess Mississippi school district superintendents,

alternative school principals, and regular and special education teachers' perceptions of

compliance to full implementation of inclusion for students with disabilities in regular

classrooms in Mississippi public alternative schools. While the body of literature

containing information about alternative high schools is quite extensive, the information

regarding current practices and effective methodologies is lacking. Few empirical studies

have been conducted that squarely address the question of what constitutes quality

alternative schooling (Foley & Pang, 2006; Gable et al, 2006; Gilson, 2006; Katsiyannis

& Williams, 1998). Nearly half of the state directors of special education voiced concern

about whether alternative schools met the requirement to educate students with

disabilities in the least restrictive environment pursuant to the IDEA (Lehr, 2004).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks

Inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education environment is a very young idea in the overarching history of teaching and learning. Lev Vygotsky's works and contributions read like a primer for inclusion, even though they were written before special education was a reality in education. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, according to Clabaugh (2010), is "the area between what a child can do without guidance and what they could do with help" (p. 7). Clabaugh (2010) noted that this is one of the basic assumptions of inclusion: "exposure to tested material in the regular classroom being taught by the teacher and reinforced by collaboration with a teacher or more qualified peer tutor" (pp. 9-10). Clabaugh (2010) stressed this:

> Learning situation also exposes students with disabilities to more formal social interactions with a more competent learner. One of the most striking benefits of inclusion is the social interactions with nondisabled peers. These interactions also build the self-efficacy of the nondisabled peer. (pp. 9-10)

In Vygotsky's mind, the curriculum should challenge and stretch a learner's competence. Exposure to the regular education curriculum does this for students with disabilities. They receive a level of academic instruction not commonly encountered in special education classrooms.

Perhaps Vygotsky's most forward-thinking revelations involved his feelings that children with disabilities should be educated in a regular classroom environment. He felt that educating students with disabilities separately from normal children would impede

their development. In this study, the researcher will seek to discover the current

perceptions of teachers and principals in alternative schools and explore to what level

inclusive practices are implemented in the alternative school environments across the

state.

History of Special Education

During the early 1800s, formal educational opportunities in rural areas were

limited. Rural schools of this period were seasonal in nature. The agrarian lifestyle of the

majority of the citizenry was labor intensive, requiring every family member to work to

sustain the family. Children with disabilities took their place alongside family members

with everyone given responsibilities, regardless of their abilities. When their help was

not required in the fields, the children of the community could attend the one-room

schoolhouses of sparsely populated areas. Their disabled siblings remained behind not

believed to be capable of assimilation into the educational fabric of the day.

The mid 1800s revealed the beginning of the evolution from an agrarian to an

industrial society. This period witnessed an exodus of the rural populations to the urban

areas of the country where the industrial revolution promised steady income and a more

stable existence for families. This internal population shift, with the addition of surging

numbers of immigrants, provided ample workers to fuel the burgeoning industrial growth

of the nation.

According to Osgood (2008), "these drastic transformations had profound

implications for the lives and futures of children in the United States. Traditions such as

apprenticeship and working in home or on the family farm slowly but surely

disappeared" (p. 4). Children's seasonal agrarian labor, in industrialized urban sprawl,

became daily labor in dangerous industrial settings. Osgood (2008) noted that "one vitally important and sweeping response to the problems of urbanization, industrialization, and immigration came in the Progressive Era" (p. 5). The Progressive Era ushered in a heightened awareness on the part of governmental leadership in the realm of education. Osgood (2008) noted that the diversification of the nation's population and the mass concentration of immigrant populations into the larger cities gave credence to the importance of the school role in social and cultural acclimation of the nation's youth (p. 6). Beneficial educational gains during the Progressive era for children with disabilities were negligible. The vast majority "were kept at home, tolerated and even supported by communities, or expelled, prosecuted, and even condemned" (Osgood, 2008, p. 7). Through the middle decades of the 19th century, institutions such as the colonial mental hospital in Williams, VA, and Asylum for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut became the only resources available to parents for children with substantial disabilities (Osgood, 2008, p. 7). The early 20th century ushered in opportunities for students with disabilities to gain entrance into public schools. However, Osgood in 2008 documented that further discriminations were perpetuated by stating:

> The growth of the number of schools and students, especially in urban areas, demanded increased structure, stratification, and standardization in classrooms and among schools within school districts. As schools became more rigid, abnormal student performance and behavior stood out. Teachers and administrators now saw conditions among children that previously went unnoticed or that had been managed with greater flexibility. (p. 7)

These problems were exacerbated with the expansion of compulsory education laws. The founding fathers rejected the idea of supplanting the will of the federal government over the people when it came to education of children. Dictating that all children must attend school was a requirement that states imposed on their citizenry incrementally. The first state to enact compulsory attendance laws were Rhode Island in 1840, followed by Massachusetts in 1852 (Yell et al., 1998, p. 220). Even though seldom enforced by states or local school districts, all state legislatures had approved compulsory education laws by 1918. The enactment of compulsory education laws imposed hardships on families living in both rural and urban areas. The importance of children's efforts in the rural agrarian communities cannot be overstated. Families relied on all family members for their contributions to planting, cultivating, and harvesting of crops. These crops sustained the viability of both farm and family. They were essential for cash flow, livestock food, and sustenance for the farm families. Compulsory attendance also increased the presence of children with disabilities in schools. Osgood (2008) noted that the increased presence of children with disabilities created trepidation in the early urban classrooms and schools (p. 8). Yell et al. (1998) acknowledged that children with disabilities remained ostracized from public education despite compulsory education laws (p. 220). The primary reason that children with disabilities were not allowed to participate in public education was direct legal challenges from public schools.

The rationale of the judicial branch is reflected in the following rulings: In 1893 the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, in Watson v. City of Cambridge (1893), ruled that a child who was "weak in mind" and could not benefit from instruction, was trouble-some to other children, and was unable to take "ordinary, decent, physical care of

himself," could be expelled from public school (Yell et al., 1998, p. 220). In a very apt description of the refusal for substantial change in acceptance of students with disabilities, Yell et al. (1998) reported the Wisconsin Supreme Court, in Beattie v. Board of Education (1919), ruled that school officials could expel a student because he drooled, had facial contortions, and a related speech problem. The court reasoned because the student required too much teacher time, was disgusting to peers and staff, and negatively affected school discipline and progress that he should attend a day school for students who were deaf (p. 221).

This type of ruling and further vacillation by the courts illustrates the frustrations of advocates and parents of students with disabilities. Yell et al. (1998) offered that the courts duly noted student rights to attend school and importance of education set forth in compulsory attendance laws but frequently failed to interject legal opinions that resolved the conflict between parents and schools (p. 221).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, most states had passed laws requiring schools to educate students with disabilities (Yell et al., 1998). Schools that complied with attendance policies during that era frequently segregated students with disabilities. Small classes with limited resources and even more scarce instructional materials often resembled the one room school house of pioneer days, a single teacher with multiple ages and grades of students in a solitary environment.

It has to be argued that in issuing these rulings, the courts totally ignored the protections granted to citizens by the Fourteenth Amendment. Smith and Kozeski, in 2005, valiantly make the point that the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ensures equal protection for every U.S. citizen. The concept of equal protection under

the law guarantees citizens many rights. From the perspective of education, students with disabilities rights were often trampled on especially by the courts in the early twentieth century. The violation of the guaranteed right to equal access to schools became the foundational cornerstone of early educational reform for students with disabilities. Regarding students' with disabilities right to public education institutions, progress was slow and often stymied. Yell et al. (1998) suggested litigation often ensued, but the judicial branch retrenched to uphold racial segregation across the nation in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision (p. 271).

Segregation was given the Supreme Court's stamp of approval in *Plessy v. Ferguson* under the "separate but equal" doctrine. On May 17, 1954, a unanimous Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* invalidating state laws requiring or permitting racial segregation in public primary and secondary schools. Chief Justice Earl Warren read aloud the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that racial segregation violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, stating, "We conclude that in the field of public education, the doctrine of separate but equal has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Smith & Kozeski, 2005, p. 271). Yell et al. (1998) punctuates the magnitude of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954; hereafter *Brown*), calling it "a major victory for the Civil Rights Movement and has been the major underpinning for further civil rights action" (p. 222). This ruling reversed the flow of judicial tides. Yell et al. reports in 1998 that central to *Brown* was the equal access clause found in the Fourteenth Amendment. This amendment compels any state that chooses to provide an education to its citizenry to do so in a nondiscriminatory fashion (p. 222).

One of the most significant outcomes of *Brown* was the emphasis of the rights of parents to be involved in the planning of their children's education. To this day, one of the centerpieces of IDEA is the composition of the Individualized Educational Program team, of which parents are key members. With parental advocacy as its impetus, legal challenges began to make substantial gains for students with disabilities. Friend (2006, p. 10) underscored the magnitude of the *Brown* decision in four subsequently filed federal district court cases:

In *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PARC)* (1972), parents won the guarantee that education did not mean only traditional academic instruction, and the children with mental retardation could benefit from education tailored to their needs. Further, they could not be denied access to public schools, and they were entitled to a free public education (Friend, 2006).

In *Mills v. Board of Education (Mills)* (1971), a class action lawsuit was filed on behalf of the 18,000 children with an entire range of disabilities in the Washington, D. C., schools. The court ordered the district to educate all students with disabilities. It also clarified that special procedures had to be followed to determine whether a student should receive special services and to resolve disagreements between parents and school personnel (Friend, 2006).

In *Diana v. State Board of Education of California (Diana)* (1970), a Spanish-speaking child was placed in a class for students with mild mental retardation. She had scored low on an intelligence quotient (IQ) test because it was administered in English. The public school was ordered to test Spanish-speaking children in their native language (Friend, 2006). Yell et al. (1998) added that Diana, among other cases of that era,

highlighted the insufficiencies and abuses of field at that time which subsequently led to the more substantial insights into special education as we know it today.

Larry P. v. Riles (Larry P.) (1972) concerned an African American student and discrimination in assessment. The court ruled that schools had to ensure that tests administered to students did not discriminate based on race (Friend, 2006).

As has been the plight of educational opportunities of students with disabilities, even the legal precedents advanced by the courts resulted in few substantial gains. Martin and Terman (1996) offered that even with a substantial advocacy effort and a growing public awareness, open acceptance and the inclusion of students with disabilities in public schools only saw tepid acceptance during the next two decades. "During the 1960s and early 1970s, no state served all its children with disabilities. Many states turned children away; still other states placed children in inappropriate programs" (Martin & Terman, 1996, p. 27). Historically, the education of students with disabilities was legitimized when, potentially the most important legislation from the standpoint of creating opportunities for the disabled, was enacted. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975 mandated a "free and appropriate education for all handicapped children" (Conner & Ferri, 2007). This landmark legislation, by Marilyn Friend's estimate (as cited in Conner & Ferri, 2007, p. 63), opened the school house doors of public education to 4,000,000 children with disabilities in the United States of America not receiving necessary support in school before 1975, with an additional 1,000,000 receiving no schooling whatsoever. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act, through subsequent reauthorizations, became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The law mandated that placements, selected

from a continuum of options, be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

The LRE is defined by federal law as the setting in which students with disabilities,

adequately supported by appropriate supports and services are given opportunities for

educational success commensurate with their peers. The broader concept of inclusion

allows students with disabilities the opportunity to experience individual successes in the

regular curriculum while learning with their nondisabled peers.

Success is a fluid concept which, in theory, is over-shadowed by the belief that

students with disabilities have inalienable rights as participants capable of making

valuable contributions and not being viewed or treated merely as spectators or

nonparticipants in learning. The concept of inclusion and its educational predecessors,

the practices of mainstreaming, utilizing resource rooms, and the Regular Education

Initiative (REI), created contention and dissent in academia—especially in an era

when teachers' and administrators' efforts are closely scrutinized under the microscope

of accountability and broader educational reform. "*The Individuals with Disabilities*

Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) simultaneously requires administrators to

ensure that highly qualified special education teachers address students' disability related

needs" (Crockett et al., 2007, p. 155). Crockett et al. (2007) clarified that

> the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) required most students with
>
> disabilities, except those with Significant Cognitive Delays, to learn the same
>
> academic content as their grade-level classmates, and to be taught by educators
>
> highly qualified to teach in their academic disciplines. (p. 155)

NCLB, IDEA, and students' IEPs provide legal and legislative protections. The

reality is that students' educational opportunities are still in the hands of individual

school districts and schools. Decisions are made by IEP committees that momentarily project unanimity of spirit about what is best for the student. Implementation of those consensus decisions rarely reflects the spirit of those decisions in practice. They are suddenly influenced by a shortage of resources, central office commitment, and administrative perceptions of special education students as a subgroup versus the imperative of assessment results of the larger regular student population and classroom teacher attitudes and practices.

History of Alternative Schools

Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke (2008) stated, "Alternative education is not a new concept, and it has been an active player in the American public school system for more than 40 years" (p. 19). In 1993-1994, 2,606 alternative schools operated separately from traditional schools. A 47% (3,850) increase in the number of alternative education schools was observed by the 1997-1998 school year (Kleiner et al., 2002). In the academic year 2007-2008, the National Center on Educational Statistics reported a total of 10,300 district-administered alternative schools and programs for at-risk students (Carver & Tice, 2010).

Lange and Sletten (2002) expressed educator optimism about the importance of alternative schools despite little credible evidence supporting their effectiveness or even a good overall understanding of their characteristics (p. 2).   Lehr, Lanners, and Lange (2003) reported in their synthesis of data from Minnesota alternative schools that alternative education has the potential to meet the needs of a growing segment of the school population finding themselves at odds with the curricular rigor, assessment structure, and disciplinary policies of traditional education (p. 3). Raywid identified three

categories of alternative education programs in 1994 and elaborated on their potential impact on students at risk of failure. Raywid referred to Type I programs as schools of choice, Type II programs as "last chance" opportunities before expulsion, and Type III programs offering a rehabilitation/remediation structure designed to enhance student success upon return to the traditional school (p. 27).

Furthermore, Raywid contends that "alternative schools are usually identifiable as one of these three types, but particular programs can be a mix" (Lange, 1998, p. 184). Lange (1998) suggested that "sometimes this 'mix' of definitions results in a school choice option such as second chance programs: Offering school choice, remediation, and innovation to address the needs of at-risk students" (p. 184). As a result of extensive research on alternative programs in Minnesota, Lange and Sletten (1995), as cited in Lange and Sletten (2002), proposed a fourth type of alternative education program. "This program, a hybrid, exist that combines school choice, remediation, and innovation to form 'a second chance' program that provides another opportunity for success within the educational system following some problem or failure" (p. 6). In their review of legislation, Lehr et al. (2003) suggested that more and more alternative schools are serving students who have been disruptive in their previous school, or are being used for students who have been suspended or expelled. Current practice for Mississippi school districts is a hybrid blend of Type II and Type III, which seems to reflect the national trend.

The Common Core of Data, the U.S. Department of Education's primary database on public elementary and secondary education, defines an alternative education school as:

A public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that

typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education,

serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular,

special education or vocational education. (Aron, 2006, p. 3)

The National Center for Educational Statistics' compilation of common

characteristics for "students attending alternative schools and programs for those

typically at risk of educational failure is poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior,

pregnancy, or similar factors associated with temporary or permanent withdrawal from

school" (Carver & Tice, 2010, p. 1).

Early researcher attempts to collect and report national data regarding alternative

schools were undertaken by Katsiyannis and Williams in the fall of 1995 and early spring

of 1996 (Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998). Mississippi's fledging efforts of

implementation of alternative education failed to yield sufficient data to be included in

the study. A second national inquiry into state level policy and research regarding

alternative schools in 2002 proved to be timely. The Mississippi Legislature passed SEC.

37-13-92, mandating every district in Mississippi to establish alternative schools during

the 1993-1994 school years. In response to this legislative directive, the Mississippi State

Board of Education adopted State Board Policy 901 on October 20, 1995 (Revised June

21, 1996), broadly creating the guidelines that districts were to follow for alternative

school establishment.

The Mississippi Department of Education Office of Compulsory School

Attendance Enforcement, Alternative Education/GED and Counseling was tasked with

development of the Alternative Education Guidebook and oversight of alternative education. Mississippi alternative schools serve compulsory-age school children who:

> Were "suspended for more than ten days or expelled"; "referred by parent, legal guardian, or custodian due to disciplinary problems"; "referred by youth court judges with the consent of the superintendent of the child's school district"; or any child "whose presence in the classroom, as determined by the superintendent or principal, posed a disruption to the educational environment of the schools or was detrimental to the best interest and welfare of the students and teacher of such class as a whole." (Mississippi Department of Education, 2010, p. 5)

At the local level, the legislation charged the local school board and superintendent with providing continuing education to students removed to the alternative schools. The legislation stipulated that before a student was removed to an alternative school the principal must receive an endorsement from the guidance counselor of the referring school verifying the child's suitability for placement. The endorsement of the referring superintendent ensures that the district has conducted a review of disciplinary policies and procedures including: an educational review to develop the student's individual instruction plan with appropriate review to ensure the student's educational progress; the duration of alternative placement; and notification and inclusion of parents or guardians in the evaluation and removal process.

The Mississippi Department of Education (2010) designed alternative education on the existing foundation for general education, then added specific procedures design to meet the alternative schools unique educational clientele by incorporating:

1. Procedural safeguards for placement into alternative education programs;

2. Development of individual instruction plans (IIP) for each student;

3. Due process procedures for discipline;

4. Provision of General Equivalency Diploma (GED) development;

5. Clear and consistent goals for students and parents;

6. Curriculum addressing cultural and learning styles differences;

7. Direct supervision of all activities on a closed campus;

8. Full-day attendance with a rigorous workload and minimal time off;

9. Transition planning and guidance with entrance and exit strategies;

10. Highly qualified, motivated, and culturally diverse staff;

11. Parental and student counseling;

12. Central office and community support; and

13. Procedures for annual alternative school program review and evaluation.

Alternative Schools and Students with Disabilities

Alternative schools appeared on the national educational landscape approximately 40 years ago. However, placement of students with disabilities into alternative schools was not legal until much later. Beginning in the 1990s, a zero tolerance approach toward violence, drugs, and weapons came to be viewed by some as being in conflict with a zero rejection approach in special education (Bear, 1999). "While legislators and educators developed punitive laws and policies designed to exclude students from school," Bear (1999) emphasized, "it became apparent that if individual determinations were not made consistent with the provisions of the IDEA, such exclusions violated students with disabilities' rights to a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) and to placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)" (p. 9). Telzrow (2001) suggested congressional

action in the reauthorization of IDEA 1997 instituted some of the most dramatic changes

since the enactment of P.L. 94-142 in 1975" (p. 7). Bear (1999) concurred by

emphasizing, that the compromises reached by congress sought to promote safe schools

while protecting both the rights of children with disabilities to a FAPE and procedural

safeguards (p. 8). Lehr further expounded on the core philosophies of these amendments

in 2004 by adding that the enrollment of students with disabilities in alternative schools

became more prevalent due to the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997. Under the new 2004

regulations school personnel have the authority to remove a student with disabilities to an

IAES for not more than 10 school days. Students with disabilities can also be moved to

an IAES for no more than 45 days if the students carries a weapon to school; knowingly

possesses, uses, sells, or solicits the sale of a controlled substance while at school; or

inflicts bodily harm on another student at school or a school function (IDEA, 2004, 20

U.S.C. §1415(k)(1)(A); 34CFR §300.520). (p. 2)

Rutherford and Quinn (1999) also recognized the potential for trampling of

procedural safeguards, stating it is still unclear how alternative programs will translate

the policies promulgated by the 1997 amendments to IDEA into practice. Wasburn-

Moses (2005) cautioned that increasing number of students with disabilities are being

served in alternative school settings with little or validation of the inclusive educational

services they are receiving (p. 1). Unruh et al. (2007) studied 300 Oregon alternative

schools' practices and programs for students with disabilities and commented that an

abundance of research exists on inclusive education in regular education. However, they

were concerned with the scant research on growing practice of placing the most

significantly challenged students with disabilities into alternative schools (p. 1)

Ahearn (2004) indicated that nationally, "about 12 percent of all students in alternative schools and programs for at-risk students were receiving special education services and had individualized education programs (IEP's)" (p. 2) according to a study in 2002 by Kleiner et al. An evaluation of selected Oregon schools by Unruh et al. (2007) stated, "32 percent of alternative education students were identified with a disability" (p. 3). Wasburn-Moses (2005) cited "a 21 percent enrollment of students with disabilities in alternative school programs in one Midwestern state" (p. 3). These statistics are alarming, given the lack of viable research on how well alternative schools serve the students they are entrusted to teach. Another area of concern revolved around how well alternative schools complied with the myriad of regulations set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

Alternative Schools as Interim Alternative Educational Sett*ings*

Interim Alternative Educational Settings (IAES), In-School Suspension, temporary alternative school placement, and the provision of instruction in a home-bound setting are available when "districts must continue to provide educational services for IDEA-eligible students with disabilities who have been suspended for more than ten school days or expelled" (Norlin, 2009, p. 11.1). Bear (1999) argued the IAES provision in the reauthorization of IDEA 1997 was a compromise to address the concerns of administrators and educators citing the need for expedient removal of students with disabilities for serious conduct violations and the arguments of parents and advocates concerned with safeguards stipulated by FAPE and LRE (p. 4).

There is little data on how well IAESs function as short-term alternatives for students with disabilities removed from regular schools. Even though current individual

state data are limited, "it is clear that students with disabilities are attending alternative schools and programs, yet questions remain about the extent of their participation and how they are being served in these settings" (Ahearn, 2004, p. 2). Even though procedural safeguards are clearly defined under IDEA, several authors expressed concern regarding how well those safeguards would be adhered to in alternative education settings (Lehr et al., 2008; Uhruh et al., 2007). Current studies reflecting the percentage of students with disabilities in alternative schools are extremely limited. In a national study of state special education directors, specific concerns for students with disabilities reported by Ahearn (2004) were "infrequent reporting data on the number of students with disabilities being served in alternative schools and the lack of certified special education teachers" (p. 3). Another concern expressed in 2004 by state special education directors and reported by Lehr was their fear that many students with disabilities in alternative schools suffer severe emotional disturbances. Directors specifically expressed concerns regarding the lack of adequate reporting possibly making the fact that alternative schools may be serving students with more serious disabilities including: autism spectrum disorders, Tourette's syndrome, significant cognitive delays, and conduct disorders (p. 2).

Final points of concern echoed by researchers reflect the impetus of this paper. Lehr and Lange (2003) reported, "Respondents also voiced concern about whether alternative schools met the requirement to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive setting, as some alternative schools tend to be somewhat isolated and serve an at-risk population" (p. 7). Additional existing research voiced concern over the lack of data on how well alternative schools do the job they are entrusted to do.

Gilson (2006) emphatically noted that despite the accelerated growth of alternative schools there was a lack of documentation on student retention and academics. He also expressed concern regarding the absence of archival student data required of all public schools (pp. 48-49). Montecel (1999) reported that "many successes were documented through collections of anecdotes, with little or no 'hard data' collected, tabulated or analyzed" (p. 6). Aron (2006) concluded in his national research of alternative education that the research base for understanding what works and for whom in alternative education is still evolving.

There are few scientifically based, rigorous evaluations establishing what program components lead to various positive outcomes for youth. Foley and Pang (2006) echoed other researchers' concerns saying, "despite the history of alternative programs, few data are available describing the governance, funding, and physical facilities supporting alternative educational programs" (p. 11).

The Cornerstones: Free and Appropriate Education and Least Restrictive Environment

IDEA and its amendments, according to Taylor (2011), are designed to ensure that students with disabilities have maximum access to the educational benefits of the public school system. Katsiyannisi and Herbst (2004) noted that school districts were legally required to place students with disabilities in their LRE educating them with their peers to the maximum extent possible (p. 106). Kavale in 2002 noted that FAPE stipulates the elements of an education program while the LRE expresses the expectation that students with disabilities are educated in the regular education classroom (pp. 201-202). The meaning of *appropriate* represents the most difficult part of FAPE to validate and often becomes confounded with LRE. The LRE requirement has generally been

interpreted as general education settings because of the possibilities of affording maximum contact with peers.

Taylor (2011) proposed that FAPE and LRE entitles every student to an education composed of equal access and maximum benefit regardless of their physical or learning status (p. 48). Norlin (2009) revealed that because of FAPE every student with a disability under both IDEA and Section 504 is entitled to receive a free and appropriate public education in their LRE. This includes special education and related services provided at no charge to the parents or guardians. Furthermore, it also stipulates FAPE and LRE are received in an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school and is in compliance with the students IEP (p. 3.1).

The word *free* in the law is self-explanatory. It provides that special education and the related services accompanying the education will be at public expense with no expense to the student's parents or guardian. The "appropriateness" of the education is described by Norlin (2009) as "cryptic" (p. 3.6). Norlin (2009) described an appropriate education in the eyes of the court where "FAPE does not require a 'Cadillac,' but it does require a 'Chevrolet' and suggested the basic floor of educational opportunity as not de minimis—but reflect some tangible gain in abilities" (pp. 3.6-3.7). These components are reflected and protected through the design of the student's IEP, and their design and instructs should not be taken lightly. It is imperative that schools fully consider the ramifications of riding roughshod over the rights of students expressed in their IEP.

Perhaps the most difficult, misunderstood, and debated concept of PL 94-142 is Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The LRE is defined by federal law as the setting where students with disabilities, adequately supported by appropriate supports and

services, are given opportunities for educational success commensurate with their peers.

Crockett and Kaufman (1999) stated in addition to defining student's rights under FAPE

and LRE, the EAHCA of 1975 (PL 94-142) defined parental rights of students with

disabilities. This legislation placed parents at the core of educational decision making by

mandating parental participation in IEP development (p. 6). Parents and advocacy groups

had enjoyed greater leverage in helping craft legislation and pushing litigation after

Brown with rulings in *PARC*, *Mills*, *Diana*, and *Larry P*. This litigation and legislation

forever ensured the parents' roles as active participants in their children's education

futures. The EAHCA, through subsequent reauthorizations, became known as the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA. The law mandated that placements,

selected from a continuum of options, be provided in the "least restrictive environment"

(LRE).

These placement decisions are based on, and consistent with, the child's IEP.

Norlin (2009) emphasized:

(a)34 CFR § 300.116; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of (2006):

"Placement teams must identify the placement that will allow the child to be

educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent possible." (p. 5.2-5.3)

(b)34 CFR § 300.114(a) (2); Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of

(2006): "To that end, the placement team must first consider if provision of

supplementary aids and services will permit placement of a child with a disability

in the regular education environment." (p. 5.2-5.3)

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) stated in *Letter to Trigg*, 50

IDELR 48 (OSEP 2007), "Placement decisions cannot be made based solely on factors

such as the category of disability, the availability of services, or administrative convenience" (p. 5.2).

At the core of this debate is the issue of including students with disabilities in the regular education classrooms. Norlin (2009) specifically defined the language in 34 CFR § 300.114(b), Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of (2006):

Each public agency shall ensure that—

1. 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 non-disabled; and

2. 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. (pp. 5.10-5.11)

The broader concept of inclusion allows students with disabilities the opportunity to be academically successful while learning with their nondisabled peers. Success is a fluid concept which, in theory, is over-shadowed by the belief that students with disabilities have inalienable rights as participants, capable of making valuable contributions and not being viewed or treated merely as spectators or nonparticipants in learning. The concept of inclusion and its educational predecessors, the practices of mainstreaming and utilizing resource rooms, creates contention and dissention in academia—especially in an era when teachers' and administrators' efforts are closely scrutinized under the microscope of accountability and broader educational reform. Crockett et al. (2007) clarified that "the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB)

requires most students with disabilities," except those with Significant Cognitive Delays, "to learn the same academic content as their grade-level classmates, and to be taught by educators highly qualified to teach in their academic disciplines" (p. 155). "*The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA, 2004) simultaneously requires administrators to ensure that highly qualified special education teachers address students' disability related needs" (Crockett et al.,2007, p. 155).

<center>Alternative Students with Disabilities and Their Exceptionalities</center>

Given the kaleidoscope of handicapping conditions, it is safe to assume that alternative schools contain children with as varied disabilities as special education departments in regular schools. A thorough discussion of disability categories is necessary because this diagnosis is foundational for construction of the IEP. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011) published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one, served under IDEA nationally at 8.46% with Mississippi recording 7.84%.

> The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012) defines Specific Learning Disability as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. (p. 4)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011) published the percentage of all students, ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA nationally with Specific Learning Disability at 3.51 percent with Mississippi recording 2.47 percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012)

Speech or Language Impairment is defined as a "Communication disorder such as

stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment

that adversely affects a child's educational performance" (p. 4).

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011)

published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one, served under IDEA

nationally with Speech and Language Impairment at 1.59 percent with Mississippi

recording 2.34 percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012)

defines Intellectual Disability is defined as a significantly sub average general

intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior

and manifested during the developmental period adversely affecting a child's

educational performance. "Intellectual Disability" is a new term in IDEA. Until

October 2010, the law used the term "mental retardation. (p. 3)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011)

published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA

nationally with Intellectual Disability 0.65 percent with Mississippi recording 0.55

percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012)

defines Emotional Disturbance is defined as a condition exhibiting one or more of

the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree

that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

(a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

(b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

(c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

(d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

(e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance. (p. 3)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011) published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA nationally with Emotional Disturbance at 0.56 percent with Mississippi recording 0.38 percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012) defines Multiple Disabilities are defined as concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness. (p. 4)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011) published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA

nationally with Multiple Disability at 0.18 percent with Mississippi recording 0.12

percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012)

defines Hearing Impairment is defined as an "Impairment in hearing, whether

permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance

but is not included under the definition of 'deafness'" (p. 3).

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011)

published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA

nationally with Hearing Impairment at 0.10 percent with Mississippi recording 0.09

percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012)

defines Orthopedic Impairment is defined as a severe orthopedic impairment that

adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes

impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease

(e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g.,

cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures). (p. 4)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011)

published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA

nationally with Orthopedic Impairment at 0.08 percent with Mississippi recording 0.07

percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012)

defines Other Health Impairment (OHI) is defined as having limited strength,

vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that— (a) is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and (b) adversely affects a child's educational performance. (p. 4)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011) published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA nationally with Other Health Impairment at 1.02 percent with Mississippi recording 0.96 percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012) defines Visual Impairment (including Blindness) is defined as "Impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness" (p. 4).

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011) published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA nationally with Visual Impairment at 0.04 percent with Mississippi recording 0.04 percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012) defines Autism is defined as a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other

characteristics often associated with autism are engaging in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term autism does not apply if the child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance. A child who shows the characteristics of autism after age 3 could be diagnosed as having autism if the criteria above are satisfied. (p. 3)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011) published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA nationally with Autism at 0.52 percent with Mississippi recording 0.32 percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012) defines Deaf – Blindness is defined as "Concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness" (p. 3).

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011) published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA nationally with Deaf-Blindness at 0.00 percent with Mississippi recording 0.00 percent.

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2012) defines Traumatic Brain Injury is defined as an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational

performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in

impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory;

attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory,

perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions;

information processing; and speech. (p. 4)

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2011)

published the percentage of all students, ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA

nationally with Traumatic Brain Injury at 0.04 percent with Mississippi recording 0.02

percent.

<center>Individual Education Programs</center>

Lehr and Lange's (2003) nationwide study of alternative schools and the students

they serve, interviewed 49 State Special Education Directors. One of the most

disconcerting revelations involved their perceptions of alternative schools and their

compliance with the components of their students with disabilities IEPs:

Once a student with a disability enrolls in an alternative school, several scenarios

may occur. In some alternative schools, procedures may be in place ensuring a

review of the IEP and implementation of services at a level similar to what the

student received in the past. In other schools, the IEP may be rewritten to reflect a

lower level of service, oftentimes indirectly. If the IEP is rewritten, it may not be

closely followed. In other cases, the student may shed the special education label,

either by student or parent choice or through termination of the IEP. (p. 7)

It is a well-established fact that "students with disabilities are entitled to special

education; it is a right provided to them by federal laws" and the mechanism used to

ensure that students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education is the IEP (Yesseldyke et al., 2000, p. 17). Henderson in 2003 explained that IEP development for any student with disabilities is the result of a collaborative effort by parents, regular, and special education teachers, school counselors, community health professionals, and any other pertinent educational or behavioral professional with expertise necessary to develop the most comprehensive plan for the student (p. 384).

In the eyes of the judicial system, IEPs are viewed as legally binding documents or contracts that are carefully and thoughtfully drafted by an IEP committee consisting of: the student, parents, special and regular education teachers, administrators, and any other educational, medical, or behavioral specialist enlisted and agreed upon by the parents and school district. The driving force behind IEP creation is the collaborative and often negotiated components crafted through collective dialogues of all stakeholders.

The development, degree of implementation, and measure of compliance with each student's IEP is central in this study. The IEP document summarizes all the information gathered concerning the student, sets the expectations of what the student will learn over the next year, and prescribes the types and amount of special services the student will receive (Clark, 2000). Rothstein (1990) as cited in Yesseldyke et al., (2000) echoed this concern, stating that the IEP is "in some ways the most important step in the [special education] process, for it has the potential to make or break the child's educational future" (p. 17). In order to understand the complexity of an IEP document, exploration of the IDEA required that components and the implementation complexities between the regular and alternative schools need to be presented. Alternative school students with disabilities have to meet the same accountability standards as their

nondisabled peers and are afforded all rights and safeguards that students with disabilities have in their home schools. The academic and behavioral instruction of alternative school students with disabilities is guided by their IEP.

Often times students referred to alternative schools travel with IEPs that are simply forwarded to the alternative school in advance of the student's arrival or hastily developed. The majority of the time, this is done with no collaboration with special education staff at the alternative school. A referral to the alternative school signifies a change in placement requiring parental agreement and endorsement of any revisions to the student's IEP before the child is enrolled. Drasgow, Yell, and Robinson (2001) stipulated that, although the forms on which IEPs are written vary somewhat across states and local school districts, IDEA spells out clearly the component that must be included in every IEP.

Friend (2006) stressed that "a student's IEP must include accurate and current information about any domains in which a concern exists; including academic achievement, social functioning, behavior, communication skills, physical skills, vocational skills and others as appropriate" (p. 63). The cover sheet of the IEP contains pertinent personal data and creates a snap shot of the student's present educational performance.

Collaboratively planned annual goals, both academic and behavioral, set the bar for teachers, support professionals, and students to strive to reach during the school year. Students with disabilities referred to the alternative school have a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) developed. FBAs require constant review and input by teachers, counselors, and students for the duration of the students' stay. These documents set

parameters for students' behaviors and can be contractual in nature, making assessments for return criteria contingent on acceptable behaviors.

Friend (2006) noted that "the presumption in IDEA is that students with disabilities should, in most cases, be educated with their non-handicapped peers" (p. 66). If the IEP committee determines that the student with disabilities will receive segregated instruction they have to justify in writing their rational supporting their placement decision. Most students with disabilities are given accommodations and modifications regarding assessments. Numerous beneficial accommodations and modifications are allowed for daily classroom instruction and assessments while state assessments are more restrictive and offer limited assistance. Transition services are included when students with disabilities reach the age of 14. These goals incorporate ideas that the student has in relationship to employment or post high school education.

Regular high schools, middle schools, elementary schools, and alternative schools are drastically different environments. Those differences through the eyes of IDEA are nonexistent. Under IDEA, the expectations for students with disabilities are not diluted or compromised regardless of LRE. Students are still expected to be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible. Lack of resources, either human capital or budgetary constraints, is not a plausible excuse to circumvent the directives of IDEA. Norlin (2009) stated that "administrative convenience, for example, does not excuse compliance" (p. 4:16). It is evident why students in transition from their regular school environment to the alternative school need to have their IEP reviewed and revised to reflect those differences. Lehr (2004) emphasized similar concerns voiced by state special education directors regarding educational opportunities for students with

disabilities within alternative school settings. Specific concerns revolved around the familiar topics of certified staff availability, subject area and curriculum opportunities commensurate with the referring regular school and the ability of alternative schools to meet FAPE and LRE (p. 5).

Lehr (2004) was careful to contrast that not all feedback from the study was negative. One quarter of the state directors of special education perceived that alternative schools could be beneficial settings for students with disabilities. Many pointed to characteristics of alternative schools that could facilitate a successful school experience including smaller class size, more individual attention, individualized work pace, focus on career planning or vocational education, provision of work-study experiences, provision of counseling, and flexible schedule (p. 5).

From Brown vs. Board of Education to Inclusion

From its infancy through the early years of IDEA, special education was creating historical "exclusionary practices, such as educating students with disabilities within separate facilities and outside of the general education which are contradictory to the goals of educating students in the LRE" (Obiakor, 2011, p. 11). Zigmond, Kloo, and Volonino in 2009 described core special education philosophies by emphasizing what, where, and how. What historically described a special curriculum, where is aptly described as a segregated classroom often isolated from regular students, and how described teaching students with disabilities utilizing task analysis—systematically breaking the instruction into repetitive steps (p. 189).

Kavale (2002) suggested, "The success of the law is unquestionable in terms of extending public education to millions of children who previously received an

inappropriate education" (p. 202). The educational benefit to children with disabilities comes at a high price, according to distracters who focus on the cost of special education services at the expense of regular education. Kavale in 2002 reiterated that the cost of special education in the United States is estimated to be $35 to $60 billion dollars per year spent on 12 percent of the American school population. This reflects an astronomical amount of money, for what numerous researchers decry as a system, producing minimal measurable results and questionable returns on taxpayer investment (p. 202).

Even before the passage of Public Law 94-142, Lloyd Dunn (1968), as cited in Zigmond et al. (2009), posited that:

Placement of students with disabilities into self-contained special education classrooms was for the most part unjustifiable. Excluding only students with the most severe disabilities, Dunn called for the education of exceptional students to take place within general education classrooms with some special education teachers providing appropriate diagnostic-prescriptive supplemental instruction in resource rooms and others guiding the work of the general educator in a consultant or team teaching role. (p. 191)

Horrocks, White, and Roberts (2008) indicated in 1971 that the concept of inclusion began with the ruling in Pennsylvania vs. PARC decreeing that children with mental retardation were entitled to a free appropriate public education in regular classrooms, rather than segregated from the general education population. In 1972, Mills vs. Board of Education of District of Columbia expanded this decision to include all disabled children. The predecessors for inclusion were the resource room,

mainstreaming, and the Regular Education Initiative. Obiakor (2011) defined what he simply called the "resource…where students are pulled out of the regular education environment and served outside of the regular environment, usually in the special education classroom" (p. 11). Mainstreaming is an educational term that refers to the practice of placing students with disabilities in general education classes with appropriate instructional support. Mainstreaming is one means of meeting the LRE requirement, but the IDEA does not require mainstreaming in all cases (Osborn & Dimattia, 1994, para. 3).

Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg (1987) as cited in Kavale (2002) noted that "mainstreaming continued to be concerned with access to general education with calls for even more inclusive placements in what was termed the Regular Education Initiative (REI)" (p. 203). The REI, proposed by then-Assistant Secretary of Education Madeline Will in 1984*,* was based on the argument that students, no matter how different, can learn when taught by good teachers in classroom environments void of discrimination or exclusion practices (Kavale, 2002, p. 204). Ysseldyke et al. (2000) noted that many of the undergirding ideals associated with the REI served as foundational components for the inclusion (p. 128).

"Inclusion is a movement seeking to create schools that meet the needs of all students by establishing learning communities for students with and without disabilities, educated together in age-appropriate general education classrooms in neighborhood schools" (Ferguson, 1996, as cited in Kavale & Forness (2000, p. 279). Obikator (2011) stated that "the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has continued to stimulate policy debates in education" (p. 10). Rouse and Florian stressed in 2006 that findings on a national study on inclusion and secondary school achievement in

England concluded that significant numbers of students with special education needs (SEN) did not adversely affect the educational progress of their regular peers (p. 491). Skrtic (1991) proposed an "adhocratic school organization, one which stresses that collaboration and active problem solving, would provide all students with schooling that is both excellent and equitable" (p. 179). As a point of evolving positive practices, Gandhi's research in 2007 indicated that frequent planning meetings between inclusive classroom teachers and implementation of co-teaching practices proved beneficial for both students with and without disabilities in inclusive classrooms (p. 109). Sailor and Roger (2005) agreed "that the sum of available evidence overwhelmingly supports integrated instructional approaches over those that are categorically segregated" (p. 504).

This increase of regular classroom participation will continue to grow under the new philosophy of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In a speech given on September 2, 2010, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan described the impact of CCSS:

> All English Language Learners and students with disabilities will take the new assessments, with the exception of the one percent of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Unlike existing assessments, which often retrofit mediocre accommodations into the test, the new assessment systems will be designed, from the start, to accurately assess both English learners and students with disabilities and provide appropriate accommodations. And for the one percent of students with the most significant disabilities, states will have funds to develop an alternate assessment as a result of a soon-to-be-completed competition (para. 6).

Districts Roles and Responsibilities in Creating Inclusive Alternative Schools

The literature review revealed an investigative gap regarding superintendent and district office roles and responsibilities in creating inclusive alternative schools. District supports are essential for inclusion to be successful. Administrators' can ill afford to allow teachers to hide on isolated islands of autonomy. Wise (2004) argued, "Professionals do not work alone; they work in teams" (p. 43). Teacher isolation has to be supplanted by the establishment of a collaborative culture. The impetus for development of that culture comes from the top. Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) as cited in Schmoker (2006), pointed out, it can be "very difficult for an individual school to become a professional learning community if the district leader shows a different set of priorities, or priorities that are in another direction" (p. 151). In 2005, White also touted collaborative classroom by stating effective principals, because of increased accountability for students with disabilities, are implementing site-based management of inclusionary practices. These principals are fast-tracking the evolution of single teacher regular classrooms into collaborative inclusionary classrooms (p. 43). Henderson (2003) listed administrative commitment to inclusion, clearly communicated expectations for shared student outcomes, collaborative planning times, and professional growth opportunities as necessary components for successful district implementation of inclusion (p. 390).

Priority needs involve monitoring systems and the provision of special services for students with disabilities because very little is known about the participation of or services received by students with disabilities placed in alternative school settings (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998). Lehr (2004) noted that those students

with disabilities, referred to alternative school, often face limited placements and actually often times conflict with inclusionary practices. Hadderman (2002) stated that alternative sites can be seen as a dumping ground for students who are unwanted in traditional settings. These placements, according to Washburn-Moses (2011), create segregated settings and often result in lowered standards and expectations.

Concerns about the experience of students with disabilities in alternative settings are many. These issues include the lack of data and oversight, the potential lack of special services (including appropriate staffing and resources), and the lack of knowledge about quality of instruction and student outcomes on the part of program staff and leadership (Lehr, 2004). Further complicating these issues is the wide variety of curricula, instructional models, and service delivery offered by these schools and programs, precipitating the need for multiple measures of student achievement and success (Unruh et al., 2007).

Additional concerns for special education directors were emphasized in the research of Washburn-Moses (2011), describing implications for students with disabilities in alternative schools, including: potential service gaps, unclear and inconsistent placement decisions (including change of placements) not being made by the IEP team, lack of confidence in students being taught by on-site licensed special educators, and lack of adherence to the LRE when reintegration back into the home school is restricted. Other areas of concern mentioned were scant data on special services provided in alternative settings, placement procedures, and nonobservance of due process.

Teachers' Roles and Responsibilities in Creating Inclusive Alternative Schools

Gandhi (2007) stressed that "IDEA requires students with disabilities to be educated in the 'least restrictive environment' to the maximum extent appropriate with supplementary supports alongside non-disabled peers, and to participate in the same assessments while being taught the general education curriculum" (p. 92). Educators are mandated by the NCLB legislation to strengthen academic expectations and accountability for children with disabilities and to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing and advantaged and disadvantaged students so that no child is left behind. Sailor and Roger (2005) noted, "Legislation makes clear that *all children* in public education are general education students and that education requires approved methodologies anchored in accountability" (p. 503).

White (2005) indicated that "experienced, highly qualified teachers struggle to meet the diverse need of students in heterogeneous classes" while countering, "special education teachers may not have core academic subject matter content knowledge to teach students to levels ensuring success at the middle and secondary levels" (p. 43). Smith and Leonard (2005) stressed that "Teamwork, mutual goals, teacher empowerment, and principal as facilitator emerged as highly significant for successful school inclusion" (p. 269).

Most educators embrace greater inclusion of all students, but simultaneously fear a loss of equity for students with disabilities unless they are provided with appropriate curriculum and instruction, supportive peer and teacher interactions, and suitable organization and management of their educational environments (Crockett & Kauffman,

1998). Van Reusen et al. (2000) stated that inclusive education expects regular high schools teachers to address the educational needs of every child, both regular students and those with special needs (p. 1). Smith and Leonard, in 2005, stated that both general education and special education teachers lacked clarity as to individual roles and responsibilities in the inclusive classroom (p. 277).

 Van Reusen et al. (2000) echoed the sentiment that "teachers need specification about their roles and responsibilities in providing inclusive instruction, supported by administrative and instructional leadership and accompanying resources" (p. 10). White (2005) stressed that "both general and special educators will need to be trained in communication skills, supportive attitudes, and collaborative teaching skills to effectively work together as a team" (p. 43).

Van Reusen et al. (2000) recognized seven instructional conditions supporting inclusion:

1. The philosophical commitment is to meet the instruction needs of all students.

2. Placement of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms is driven by the IEP.

3. Teachers are afforded adequate time to think about and plan for learners' diverse needs.

4. Teachers of inclusive classrooms are afforded ongoing opportunities to validate instructional practices.

5. Responsibilities of all parties are operationally defined, and all parties work collaboratively to assess, teach, and monitor student progress.

6. Inclusive classroom teachers can obtain short-term instructional support from special education teachers and other support staff.

7. Inclusive classroom teachers have the option for their students to receive extensive and intensive instruction in basic academic or learning strategies.

(p. 10).

Sailor and Roger (2005) offered, "Mounting evidence suggests that integrated applications of special education practices, especially in low-performing schools, can yield positive outcomes for all students" (p. 505). Crockett (2000) reported that "in 1995-1996, approximately 45 percent of school-age students with disabilities spent 80 percent of their day in regular classrooms. In 2005, 53.7 percent of students with disabilities spent at least 80 percent of their day in regular classrooms" (p. 46). Current data reflect that 60.5% of students with disabilities are in regular classes 80% of the day (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs 2010).

Principals' Roles and Responsibilities in Creating Inclusive Alternative Schools

Smith and Leonard (2005) insisted that empowerment of teachers to collaboratively make decisions relevant to successful inclusion will experience greater success (p. 276). Henderson (2003) stated that since its inception IDEA has emphasized collaboration as fundamental to the guarantee of a free appropriate public education for children and youth with disabilities. Collaboration is expected between educators, schools, parents, agencies providing counseling, transition services, and youth services (p. 383).

Udvari-Solner (1996) promoted the idea of inclusive education as "a value-based practice that attempts to bring students, including those with disabilities, into full

membership within their local school community" (para. 2). Gameros (1995)

emphasized that inclusive principals promote the rights of every child, facilitate inclusive

placement decisions, model ownership of every student with disabilities, and

communicates the need to build success incrementally realizing that successful

implementation is a long term process (pp. 16-17). Praisner (2003) claimed that in order

to establish inclusion successfully, it is important for leaders to be committed to the

philosophy of inclusive education and to develop attitudes and behaviors that promote the

inclusion of students who experience difficulties in learning.

Angelides, Antoniou, and Charalambous (2010) some 15 years later, echoed the

thoughts of Gameros that inclusive education is a process that evolves over time through

an intuitive collaborative process. The process is guided by leaders who are confident

enough in their leadership to loosen the reins of control, giving educators freedom to use

their intuition and imagination in a school wide collaboratively effort (p. 332).

White (2005) argued that, "collaboration and training are essential components

for development of programs that improve all students' academic performance" (p. 43).

Smith and Leonard's (2005) findings suggested it was necessary that both general and

special educators realize that each is responsible for the instruction of all students, both

need skills in critical areas such as language and reading, both must develop a positive

attitude toward the inclusion initiative, and that the principal plays a key role in

promoting positive attitudes regarding inclusion.

Ainscow (2005) noted four elements recommended to those in any education

system who are intending to review their own working definition of inclusion: Inclusion

is a process, inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers,

inclusion is about the presence, participation and achievement of all students, and

inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk

of marginalization, exclusion, or underachievement. Ryan (2006), as cited in Angelides

et al. in 2010, approached leadership as a collective influence process that promotes

inclusion by involving as diverse a group of interested stakeholders possible. Stake

holders who fully invest in the inclusionary process are usually more than willing to cast

aside their individual agenda's for the good of the whole (p. 321).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Mississippi school

district superintendents, alternative school principals, alternative school secondary

mathematics and English teachers, and special education teachers across the State of

Mississippi regarding how well their alternative schools comply with inclusion of special

needs students in the regular classrooms. The *School Principals' Attitudes toward*

Inclusion questionnaire (Appendix A) consisted of 24 Likert-type questions, 12

demographic responses, one generic question regarding attitudes toward inclusion, and

four open-ended questions. The breadth of this study was expanded from school

principals' attitudes, Bailey's original respondent group to include: *Superintendent's*

Attitudes toward Inclusion (Appendix B)*, Secondary Regular Education Teachers'*

Attitudes toward Inclusion (Appendix C), and *Secondary Special Education Teachers'*

Attitudes toward Inclusion (Appendix D).

Broadening the scope of this study resulted from numerous researcher concerns

expressed in the literature. Lehr (2004) argued that research is needed regarding the

involvement of students with disabilities in alternative school settings. Lehr and Lange

(2002) asserted that alternative schools have operated with a relatively high degree of

autonomy, and little is known about their governance or the consistency of program

policies across various states or regions. Gilson (2006) noted that despite the accelerated

growth of alternative schools, research and evaluation of these schools and the effect they

have on student retention and academic achievement is very limited. Rutherford and

Quinn (1999) stressed that in most alternative schools, a full continuum of special

education services is not in place for students with disabilities. Lehr et al. (2008)

questioned whether alternative schools had the availability, quality, and licensure of staff

to work with students with disabilities. Gable et al. (2006) argued that one of the

challenges to conducting rigorous research stems from the fact that alternative programs

serve extremely homogeneous populations of children and youth in extremely diverse

settings.

     Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education questionnaire served as the

foundational instrument and was subsequently modified with permission from John

Wiley and Sons (Appendix I), the owner of the copyright to the article, to accommodate

superintendents', regular education teachers', and special education teachers'

perceptions.

      The design of the study was survey methods, quantitative and qualitative. The

Superintendents' Attitudes Toward Inclusion questionnaires (Appendix B) were mailed to

61 Mississippi school district superintendents responsible for alternative schools. The

researcher received 25 responses from superintendents granting permission for the

researcher to conduct research in their alternative schools. Of the 25 superintendent

responses returned, 21 superintendents included a completed *Superintendents' Attitudes*

Toward Inclusion questionnaires (Appendix B). *School Principals' Attitudes Toward*

Inclusion questionnaires (Appendix A) were subsequently mailed to the 25 principals

whose schools were granted participation permission. Each principal's packet also

included three questionnaires for a total of 75 additional questionnaires. The principals

distributed 25 *Secondary Regular Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion* questionnaires (Appendix C) to regular secondary English teachers; 25 *Secondary Regular Education Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion questionnaires* (Appendix C) to regular secondary mathematics teachers, and 25 *Secondary Special Education Teachers Attitudes toward Inclusion* questionnaires (Appendix D) to the special education teacher responsible for secondary inclusion students with disabilities. A total of 136 questionnaires were mailed.

Research Design

The design utilized a survey methods approach; quantitative responses were evaluated using causal comparative methodologies, qualitative responses to three short answer questions were also analyzed. The following questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: Is there a difference in the perceptions of regular education teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes?

Research Question 2: How did regular teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents categorize their perceptions about inclusion?

Research Question 3: What did regular teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents perceive as the major benefits, greatest disadvantage, and absolutely essential elements for making inclusion work effectively for inclusion of students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes?

Correlational design was used to define the differences in perceptions between superintendents, principals, regular education teachers, and special education teachers regarding implementation of full inclusion in Mississippi alternative schools. Qualitative

responses were used to compare superintendents', principals', regular education teachers', and special education teachers' opinions on the major benefit or strongest argument for having inclusion, the greatest disadvantage of inclusion, and two absolute essential elements for making inclusion work effectively.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

Mississippi school districts' superintendents were selected to participate due to the dearth of available literature involving inclusion of students with disabilities in regular and alternative school educational settings nationally. Questionnaires were mailed to 61 superintendents in Mississippi who have administrative responsibility of their alternative school. Superintendent and district contact information was obtained from the Mississippi Department of Education website at www.mde.k12.ms.us.

Mississippi alternative school principals' contact information was requested from the Mississippi Department of Education website, http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout-prevention-and-compulsory-school-attendance. Upon receiving signed superintendent participation permission forms the researched mailed questionnaire packets to Mississippi alternative schools' principals. Included in the alternative school principals' packets were three additional sealed questionnaire packets.

The principal's role requires evaluation of his or her faculty, making the principal the logical choice to select participants with knowledge of inclusionary practices. Each alternative school principal will select the appropriate regular secondary math teacher, regular secondary English teacher, and the special education teacher most familiar with secondary students with disabilities to complete these questionnaires. The selected teachers will receive sealed packets containing their Informed Consent Letter, their

specific questionnaire, a letter from their superintendent granting permission for their school to participate in the study, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the teacher's questionnaire to the researcher.

<div align="center">Instrument</div>

Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education was developed by Dr. Jeff Bailey and published in *Australian Psychologist* in March 2004. Bailey in 2004 asserted:

> The impetus for the study came from the growing importance of inclusive education to parents, students, regular and special educators. More importantly, though, the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools was seen as part of a powerful worldwide, and to some extent, historical trend. (p. 76)

For the purposes of the study, Bailey (2004) defined students with special needs as students with intensively involved needs: academic, physical, and behavioral, not simply students with learning disabilities needing remedial assistance. For purposes of the study, inclusion requires students with disabilities to be in a regular classroom with same age peers, receiving appropriate instruction from the classroom teacher while having access to all services and opportunities regular students receive (Bailey, 2004).

Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education was developed through: review of other scales; exhaustive literature evaluation; development of extensive item pool; consultation with inclusion and special education specialists to establish face validity; and grounding of the study through extensive interviews of three school principals (Bailey, 2004). The initial scale design was a Likert- type 5 point scale using bipolar labels of "*Strongly Disagree*" to "*Strongly Agree*" consisting of a pool of 64 items.

Subsequent review by professionals who were experts in inclusive education reduced the pool to 30 items (Bailey, 2004).

Bailey pilot tested his scale with a saturation sample of all 1,367 government school principals in Queensland, Australia. Bailey reported 644 scales returned, resulting in a return rate of 47.1%. Face validity was established through the use of three people with considerable expertise in scale development and special education.

Initial SPSS data validation revealed a small amount of missing data from the 644 initial respondents, a data loss of 0.6%. Even though acceptable, to achieve more reliability, any respondent with 20% or more missing data was removed from the sample. This resulted in five respondents being removed, providing a complete data set of 639 respondents and 30 items with a Cronbach's alpha of .9210.

Bailey (2004) suggested "the validation to this point showed *School Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusion* to be a reliable and useful scale" (p. 81). To make the instrument more useful for future research, Bailey (2004) deemed it necessary to extract a subset of factors. Two forms of factor analysis were used—Principal Components Analysis (PCA) and Principal Axis Factoring (PFA). Bailey (2004) suggested using Principal Axis Factoring and removing items P7, P8, P14, P22, P23, and P30 from his original 30 item scale. Bailey (2004) reported "Cronbach's alpha for the new 24-item scale (with items 7, 8, 14, 22, 23, and 30 deleted) was .9110" (p. 83). Bailey (2004) noted "the significance of high level inner-item consistency, well above the .70 generally regarded as being acceptable for affective instruments" (p. 80). Bailey's revised scale, a more robust scale, designated five factors investigating the following:

- •"Implementation Issues" which contained responses examining items P3, P8, P10, P14, P16, and P23,

- •"Inclusion Benefits/Level of Disabilities" evaluated items P7*, P9*, P12*, P15, P20*, P21*, and P22*,

- •"Learning Challenges in Inclusive Education" reflected responses from P6, P13, P19*, and P24,

- •"Excluded Students" comparing P2, P4, P5, and P18, and

- •"Professional Training" of principals and teachers answered questions to P1, P11*, and P 17*.

Note. * signifies reversed questions

Bailey (2004) concluded, "It would be interesting to compare the validity and utility of this instrument with other relevant populations, for example, teachers, parents, and school Psychologist" (p. 84).

Procedures

Once permission (Appendix H) from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Southern Mississippi was received, the researcher contacted all 61 superintendents responsible for their alternative schools requesting permission to conduct research in their alternatives schools. The superintendents packet contained an Informed Consent letter which when endorsed served as acknowledgement of permission to participate (Appendix E) and a copy of the Institutional Review Board's approval letter (Appendix H). Because the superintendents were a respondent group of the study, a *Superintendents' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (Appendix B) was included in their packet. A self-addressed stamped envelope was included in each superintendent's

packet to facilitate the return of superintendents' permission to conduct the research and completed questionnaire.

Receipt of the superintendents' permission resulted in principals' packets being mailed to each of the 25 Mississippi Alternative school principals granted permission to participate in the study.

1. Principals' packet contained: a signed superintendents' informed consent letter granting permission to participate in the study (Appendix E), a Principal's Informed Consent Letter defining the purpose of the study (Appendix F), *Principals' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (Appendix A), and a self-addressed stamped envelope to facilitate return of completed *Principals' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire.* Because the principal is the most knowledgeable person regarding the staff at the alternative school, the principals' packets also contained three additional questionnaire packets for dissemination:

2. The secondary math teacher the principal selects will receive a packet containing the superintendents' letter granting permission to participate in the study (Appendix E), a Teachers Informed Consent letter defining the purpose of the study (Appendix G), the *Secondary Regular Education Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (Appendix C) and a self-addressed stamped envelope to facilitate return of completed *Secondary Regular Education Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire*.

3. The secondary English teacher the principal selects will receive a packet containing the superintendents' letter granting permission to participate in the study (Appendix E), a Teachers Informed Consent letter defining the purpose of

the study (Appendix G), the *Secondary Regular Education Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (Appendix C), and a self-addressed stamped envelope to facilitate return of completed *Secondary Regular Education Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire*.

4. The secondary special education teacher the principal selects will receive a packet containing the superintendents' letter granting permission to participate in the study (Appendix E), a Teachers Informed Consent letter defining the purpose of the study (Appendix G), the *Secondary Special Education Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (Appendix D), and a self-addressed stamped envelope to facilitate return of completed *Secondary Special Education Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire*

5. As questionnaires were returned, data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Data were later transferred to SPSS statistical software to conduct analysis.

6. No identifying information was requested of respondents.

7. Returned questionnaires were locked in a secure home filing cabinet.

8. Questionnaires were held until data input was completed and analysis was verified. Questionnaires were then incinerated.

Data Analysis

Data produced by this study was analyzed using SPSS. Data were disaggregated by superintendent, principal, secondary mathematics teacher, secondary English teacher, and secondary special education teacher perceptions of inclusion. Demographic data was analyzed and compared for each respondent group. A One-way ANOVA with a criterion for significance set at an alpha of .05 was used to determine differences in perceptions

between the individual respondent groups. A MANOVA with a criterion for significance set at an alpha of .05 was used to determine differences in perceptions between the five factors established by Bailey.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Mississippi school district superintendents, alternative school principals, alternative school secondary mathematics and English teachers, and special education teachers across the State of Mississippi regarding how well their alternative schools comply with inclusion of special needs students in the regular classrooms.

The *Superintendents' Attitude toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (Appendix B) was sent out to 61 superintendents who were administratively responsible for the alternative school in their district. Twenty-five *Principals' Attitude toward Inclusion Questionnaires* (Appendix A) were sent to principals whose alternative schools were granted permission to participate in the study. Fifty *Secondary Regular Education Teachers' Attitude toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (Appendix C) was included in the principals packet for distribution to a secondary English and mathematics teacher and twenty-five *Secondary Special Education Teachers' Attitude Toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (Appendix D) were included.

The following questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: Is there a difference in the perceptions of regular education teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes?

Research Question 2: How did regular teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents categorize their perceptions about inclusion?

Research Question 3: What did regular teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents perceive as the major benefits, greatest disadvantage, and absolutely essential elements for making inclusion work effectively for inclusion of students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes?

Descriptive

Not all school superintendents in the State of Mississippi have administrative responsibility for alternative schools. Determining which superintendents to include in the study were compiled from the Mississippi Department of Education website, http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/dropout-prevention-and-compulsory-school-attendance. Sixty-one questionnaires were sent out and 25 (40.9%) superintendents responded. Based on superintendent consent to participate twenty-five questionnaires were sent out and seven (28.0%) alternative school principals responded. Principals distributed questionnaires to 50 regular mathematics and English teachers with 16 (32%) responding and 25 special education teachers with eight (32%) responding.

Superintendent Demographics

Table 1 contains superintendent information regarding gender, age, years of teaching experience, years of administrative experience as a principal, alternative school acceptance of students with special needs, regular and/or special education endorsements earned, licensure level, and categorization of level of support for inclusion. According to the questionnaire data, 19 (90.5%) were male. As it related to age categories, six (28.8%) were between the ages 41 to 50, and six (28.8%) were between the ages of 61 to 70. In responses defining years of teaching experience, nine (42.9%) reported one to ten years experience and nine (42.9%) cited 11 to 20 years of experience. Fifteen (72%)

superintendents reported zero to ten years of site based administrative experience.
Twenty-one (100%) of the superintendents responded that their alternative school
accepted students with disabilities. As it related to holding special education and/or
regular education licensure endorsements, 21 (100%) reported holding regular education
endorsements while 21 (100%) cited holding no special education endorsements. Level
of licensure earned by the superintendents reflected, 10 (47.6%) AA, and seven (33.3%)
AAAA. When superintendents were ask to categorize their perception about inclusion,
six (28.6%) responded that they were supportive of inclusion while 15 (71.4%) expressed
strong support for inclusion.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentages for Superintendent Demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Gender		
Male	19	90.5%
Female	2	9.5%
Age		
25-30	1	4.8%
31-40	2	9.6%
41-50	6	28.8%
51-60	4	19.0%
61-70	6	28.8%
Years teaching experience		
1-10	9	42.9%

Table 1 (continued).

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
11-20	9	42.9%
21-30	1	4.8%
31-40	1	4.8%
41-50	1	4.8%
Years principal experience		
1-10	15	72%
11-20	4	19.2%
21-30	2	9.6%
Allows enrollment of students with disabilities in alternative school		
Yes	21	100%
Special education certification		
No	21	100%
Level of licensure		
AA	10	47.6%
AAA	4	19%
AAAA	7	33.3%
Supportive of inclusion		
Strongly opposed	0	0%
Opposed	0	0%
Supportive	6	28.6%

Table 1 (continued).

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Strongly Supportive	15	71.4%

Principal Demographics

   Table 2 contains principals information regarding gender, age, years of teaching experience, years of administrative experience as a principal, alternative school acceptance of students with special needs, regular and/or special education endorsements earned, licensure level, and categorization of level of support for inclusion. Principal responses to the question regarding gender revealed five (71.4%) were male. As it related to age categories, five (71.5%) were between the ages of 51 to 60. When principals defined their years of teaching experience, four (57.2%) cited 11 to 20 years of experience. Six (85.8%) principals reported 11 to 20 years of administrative experience. Regarding responses to full-time teachers employed, two principals (28.6%) reported having six teachers while another two principals (28.6%) reported supervising 10 teachers. With regard to special education teachers employed four principals (57.1%) reported having two special education teachers. Seven (100%) principals responded that their alternative school accepted students with disabilities. Responses related to holding regular and/or special education licensure endorsements, six (85.7%) reported holding regular education endorsements. Level of licensure earned by the principals reflected six (85.7%) AA.   When principals were asked to categorize their perceptions about inclusion, seven (100%) expressed strong support for inclusion.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentages for Principal Demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Gender		
Male	5	71.4%
Female	2	28.6%
Age		
40-50	2	28.6%
51-60	5	71.5%
Years teaching experience		
1-10	2	28.6%
11-20	4	57.2%
31-40	1	14.3%
Years principal experience		
1-10	1	14.3%
11-20	6	85.8%
Full-time regular education teachers employed		
1 teacher	1 principal reporting	14.3%
6 teachers	2 principals reporting	28.6%
10 teachers	2 principals reporting	28.6%
12 teachers	1 principal reporting	14.3%
25 teachers	1 principal reporting	14.3%
Full-time special education teachers employed		

Table 2 (continued).

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
1 teacher	2 principal reporting	28.6%
2 teachers	4 principals reporting	57.1%
3 teachers	1 principals reporting	14.3%
Allows enrollment of students with disabilities in alternative school		
Yes	7	100%
Special education certification		
Yes	1	14.3%
No	6	85.7%
Level of licensure		
AA	6	85.7%
AAAA	1	14.3%
Supportive of inclusion		
Strongly opposed	0	0%
Opposed	0	0%
Supportive	0	0%
Strongly Supportive	7	100%

Regular Education Teacher Demographics

Table 3 contains regular teacher information regarding gender, age, years of teaching experience, regular and/or special education endorsements earned, licensure level, and categorization of level of support for inclusion. The survey data revealed 13

(86.7%) were female. Related to age categories, eight (87.1%) were between the ages of

31 to 40. Respondent range of teaching experience yielded eight (53.6%) reporting one

to ten years experience and six (40.2%) citing 11 to 20 years of experience. Regular

education teachers revealed 13 (86.7%) reported possessing regular education

endorsements. Responses regarding level of licensure held by regular educators revealed

seven (46.7%) holding AA and seven (46.7%) AAA. Asking regular education teachers

to categorize their perception about inclusion yielded a varied response, with two (13.3%)

expressing strong opposition to inclusion; 11 (73.3%) were opposed to inclusion.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentages for Regular Education Teacher Demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Gender		
Male	2	13.3%
Female	13	86.7%
Age		
25-30	2	13.4%
31-40	8	53.6%
41-50	2	13.4%
51+	2	13.4%
Years teaching experience		
1-10	8	53.6%
11-20	6	40.2%
21+	1	6.7%

Table 3 (continued).

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Special education certification		
Yes	2	13.3%
No	13	86.7%
Level of licensure		
AA	7	46.7%
AAA	7	46.7%
AAAA	1	6.7%
Supportive of inclusion		
Strongly opposed	2	13.3%
Opposed	11	73.3%
Supportive	1	6.7%
Strongly Supportive	1	6.7%

Special Education Teacher Demographics

Table 4 contains special education teacher information regarding gender, age, years of teaching experience, regular and/or special education endorsements, earned licensure level, and level of support for inclusion. Survey data results indicated seven (87.5%) were female. Related to age categories, three (37.5%) were between the ages of 31 to 40, and three (37.5%) revealed they were over the age of 50. Respondent range of teaching experience yielded two (25.0 %) teachers reporting one to ten years experience, two (25.0%) citing 11 to 20 years of experience, and two (25.0%) revealed 21 to 30 years

experience. Special education teachers revealed all eight (100.0%) held special education endorsements, while four (50.0 %) held dual, regular and special education endorsements. Level of licensure held by special education teachers revealed six (75.0%) with AAA. Four (50.0%) special education teachers were supportive of inclusion.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentages for Special Education Teacher Demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Gender		
Male	1	12.5%
Female	7	87.5%
Age		
31-40	3	37.5%
41-50	1	12.5%
50+	3	37.5%
Years teaching experience		
1-10	2	25.0%
11-20	2	25.0%
21-30	2	25.0%
31-40	1	12.5%
Special education certification		
Yes	8	100%
Level of licensure		

Table 4 (continued).

Variable	Variable	Variable
AA	1	12.5%
AAA	6	75%
AAAA	1	12.5%
Supportive of inclusion		
Strongly opposed	1	12.5%
Opposed	2	25%
Supportive	4	50%
Strongly Supportive	1	12.5%

Instrument

Bailey's *Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education* was the instrument used to determine the perception of Mississippi Alternative School superintendents, principals, regular education, and special education teachers. *Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusive Education* contained 24 questions employing a Likert-type scale to obtain scores. The response choices included 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree.

Tables 5-8 reflects the five highest and lowest means and standard deviations from the 24 perceptions reported on by the superintendents, principals, regular education, and special education teachers.

Table 5

School Superintendents Five Highest and Five Lowest Perceptions of Inclusions

Table 5

Number	Responding Characteristic	Mean	SD
P7	Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	4.67	.58
P21	Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	4.52	.60
P12	Students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion.	4.48	.60
P22	Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	4.43	.75
P9	Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported.	4.29	.72
P16	Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication boards/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	1.76	.89
P8	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	1.57	.60

Table 5 (continued).

Number	Responding Characteristic	Mean	SD
P10	Special needs students belong in special schools where all their needs can be met.	1.48	.60
P4	Students who cannot read normal print size should not be included in regular education.	1.33	.66
P2	Students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	1.43	.68

Note. Bailey's Scale 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree

Table 6

Alternative School Principals Five Highest and Five Lowest Perceptions of Inclusions

Number	Responding Characteristic	Mean	SD
P21	Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	4.57	.79
P9	Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported.	4.14	1.46
P7	Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	4.14	1.07
P20	Students with moderate disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	3.71	.95

Table 6 (continued).

Number	Responding Characteristic	Mean	SD
P6	Students who are continually aggressive towards their fellow students should not be included in regular classrooms.	3.71	1.11
P23	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teachers' time.	2.00	1.00
P5	Because special schools are better resourced to cater for special needs students, these students should stay in special schools.	2.14	1.35
P8	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	2.00	1.00
P10	Special needs students belong in special schools where all their need can be met.	1.71	1.50
P2	Students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	1.71	1.11

Note. Bailey's Scale 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree

Table 7

Alternative School Regular Education Teachers Five Highest and Five Lowest
Perceptions of Inclusions

Number	Responding Characteristic	Mean	SD
P7	Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	4.40	.73
P6	Students who are continually aggressive towards their fellow students should not be included in regular classrooms.	3.93	1.10
P21	Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	3.87	1.06
P14	Students who are continually aggressive towards school staff should not be included in regular classrooms.	3.80	1.20
P22	Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	3.73	.96
P16	Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication boards/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	2.27	1.22
P8	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	2.20	1.14

Table 7 (continued).

Number	Responding Characteristic	Mean	SD
P2	Students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	2.07	1.22
P19	Students with severe disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	1.73	.79
P4	Students who cannot read normal print size should not be included in regular education.	1.60	.91

Note. Bailey's Scale 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree

Table 8

Alternative School Special Education Teachers Five Highest and Five Lowest Perceptions of Inclusions

Number	Responding Characteristic	Mean	SD
P7	Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	4.75	.46
P12	Students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion.	4.38	.74
P9	Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported.	4.25	1.16

Table 8 (continued).

Number	Responding Characteristic	Mean	SD
P22	Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	4.13	1.12
P21	Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	4.13	1.12
P10	Special needs students belong in special schools where all their need can be met.	1.63	.91
P4	Students who cannot read normal print size should not be included in regular education.	1.63	1.18
P16	Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication boards/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	1.50	1.06
P5	Because special schools are better resourced to cater for special needs students, these students should stay in special schools.	1.50	.75
P2	Students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	1.38	.74

Note. Bailey's Scale 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree

Tables 5 - 8 provided an examination of the five highest and lowest mean scores of the four respondent groups' perceptions of inclusion. Subsequent ANOVA and MANOVA analysis revealed no significant differences in the perceptions of the respondent groups. On the surface this revelation could easily be brushed aside as the results one might expect when dealing with a topic as polarizing as the implementation of inclusion, especially when viewed through the eyes of superintendents, administrators, and teachers working in Mississippi's alternative schools. However, a deeper analysis reveals the significance of these responses, even in the light of there being no significance difference in respondent perceptions. Table 9 reflects the unanimity of positive respondent agreement that overwhelmingly supported and even strongly supported the implementation of inclusion in Mississippi alternative schools.

For example, respondents' perceptions (P) revealed unanimous agreement that students with mild disabilities benefited socially from inclusion (P21) and that students with disabilities should be taught in regular classrooms (P7). Superintendents, regular and special education teachers recognized the importance of the socialization aspect of inclusionary classes for regular students (P22). Superintendents, principals, and special education teachers agreed that inclusion should be implemented despite potential concerns of regular students' parents (P9). Superintendents and special education teachers recognized the potential for students with disabilities to benefit academically from inclusion (P12).

Conversely, all respondents groups disagreed with many current misconceptions regarding implementation of inclusionary practices. All respondent groups universally disagreed that students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/wheel chairs) created too

many movement problems to be included in the inclusionary classroom (P2).

Superintendents, principals, regular, and special education teachers did not feel that

students who could not read normal print size, nor students who would have to

communicate in a special way, such as through communication boards or through sign

language, should be excluded from the regular classroom (P4 and P16). Superintendents,

principals, and regular education teachers did not put any credence in students with

disabilities taking up too much of the teacher aides' time (P8). And finally,

superintendents, principals, and special education teachers disagreed with students with

disabilities being placed in special schools that could meet all their needs (P10).

Table 9

Means and Standard Deviations of Superintendents', Principals', Regular Education Teachers', and Special Education Teachers' Five Highest and Five Lowest Most Agreed upon Perceptions of Inclusions

Perception	Respondent	Mean
P7 - Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	Principals	4.14
	Superintendents	4.67
	Regular Teachers	4.40
	Special Education Teachers	4.75
P21 - Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	Principals	4.57
	Superintendents	4.52
	Regular Teachers	3.87
	Special Education Teachers	4.13
P22 - Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	Principals	3.57
	Superintendents	4.43

Table 9 (continued).

Perception	Respondent	Mean
	Regular Teachers	3.73
	Special Education Teachers	4.13
P9 – Regardless of whether the parents of	Principals	4.14
regular students object to inclusion, the	Superintendents	4.29
practice should be supported.	Regular Teachers	3.47
	Special Education Teachers	4.25
P12 – Students with disabilities benefit	Principals	3.43
academically from inclusion.	Superintendents	4.48
	Regular Teachers	3.60
	Special Education Teachers	4.38
P2 - Students with physical disabilities (wrists/	Principals	1.71
crutches/wheelchairs) create too many	Superintendents	1.43
movement problems to permit inclusion.	Regular Teachers	2.07
	Special Education Teachers	1.38
P4 - Students who cannot read normal print	Principals	2.43
should not be included in regular education.	Superintendents	1.33
	Regular Teachers	1.60
	Special Education Teachers	1.63
P16 – Students who have to communicate in a	Principals	2.57
special way (e.g., communication board/	Superintendents	1.76
signing) should not be included in regular	Regular Teachers	2.27
classes.	Special Education Teachers	1.50

Table 9 (continued).

Perception	Respondent	Mean
P8 – Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	Principals	2.00
	Superintendents	1.57
	Regular Teachers	2.20
	Special Education Teachers	2.50
P10 – Special needs students belong in special schools where all their needs can be met.	Principals	1.71
	Superintendents	1.48
	Regular Teachers	2.50
	Special Education Teachers	1.63

Note. Bailey's Scale 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree

Research Question 1: Is there a difference in the perceptions of regular education teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes?

In an effort to more closely examine the perceptions of the four respondent groups the researcher compared the responses based on the following five factors proposed by Bailey (2004). The following statistical data reflects the perceptions of the following groups: superintendents, principals, secondary regular education teachers, and secondary special education teachers. Means and standard deviations comparisons will be based on the following pertinent aspects of inclusion. Table 9 contains the first factor investigated, "Implementation Issues" containing responses from perceptions P3, P8, P10, P14, P16, and P23. The second factor, "Inclusion Benefits/Level of Disabilities" evaluates perceptions P7, P9, P12, P15, P20, P21, and P22. The third factor," Learning Challenges

in Inclusive Education" will reflect perception responses P6, P13, P19, and P24. Bailey's

fourth factor dealt with issues involving "Excluded Students" and compares perceptions

P2, P4, P5, and P18. The final factor, "Professional Training" of principals and teachers

explores perceptions P1, P11, and P 17.

Table 10

Means and Standard Deviations of Superintendents', Principals', Regular Education Teachers', and Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Factor: Implementation Issues, Inclusion Benefits/Level of Disabilities, Learning Challenges in Inclusive Education, Excluded Students, and Professional Training

Factor	Group	Mean	SD
Implementation Issues	Principal	2.21	.86
	Superintendent	2.00	.56
	Regular Teacher	2.39	.72
	Special Education Teacher	2.07	.76
Inclusion Benefits/Levels of Disabilities	Principal	2.00	.71
	Superintendent	1.57	.54
	Regular Teacher	2.11	.75
	Special Education Teacher	1.76	.78
Learning Challenges in Inclusive Education	Principal	2.49	1.00
	Superintendent	1.85	.73
	Regular Teacher	2.24	.77

Table 10 (continued).

Factor	Group	Mean	SD
	Special Education Teacher	1.93	.81
Excluded Students	Principal	3.38	1.11
	Superintendent	3.48	.81
	Regular Teacher	3.77	.79
	Special Education Teacher	3.59	.85
Professional Training Of Principals and Teachers	Principal	3.00	.64
	Superintendent	3.11	.46
	Regular Teacher	3.19	.42
	Special Education Teacher	3.15	.41

Note. Bailey's Scale 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree

Statistics

Table 11

Number of Respondents, Means, Standard Deviations, Minimum Means, and Maximum Means of the Overall Perceptions of Principals, Superintendents, Regular Education, and Special Education Teachers

Group	Number	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Principals	7	2.52	.73	1.33	3.54
Superintendents	21	2.18	.51	1.38	3.00

Table 11 (continued).

Group	Number	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Regular Teachers	16	2.59	.60	1.58	4.04
Special Education Teachers	9	2.35	.58	1.58	3.17

Note. Bailey's Scale 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, and 5=strongly agree

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of perceptions of inclusion of principals, superintendents, regular education teachers, and special education teachers. There was not a significant difference in perceptions of inclusion between principals, superintendents, regular education teachers, and special education teachers at the p<.05 level for the four groups $F(3, 49) = 1.682$, $p = .183$. A MANOVA using all five factors also found no significant differences $F(15,141) = .814$, $p = .661$)

Research Question 2: How did regular teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents categorize their perceptions about inclusion?

In Table 11 the individual respondents reported their level of support for inclusionary education. All respondents were ask to categorize their perceptions about inclusion based on one of the four following responses; 1=strongly opposed, 2=opposed, 3=supportive, or 4=strongly supportive. Superintendents and principals expressed neither being strongly opposed nor opposed to inclusion. Both respondent groups of teachers expressed slight opposition to inclusion. Twenty-three of the respondent group expressed support for inclusion with twenty-five respondents expressing strong support for inclusion of students with special needs in regular classes. These responses are

significant in the fact that they reflect the similar unanimity expressed in the respondents

overall perceptions of inclusion.

Table 12

*Frequency of Superintendents', Principals', Regular Education Teachers', and Special
Education Teachers' Categorizations of Their Individual Perceptions about Inclusion*

Group	Strongly Opposed	Opposed	Supportive	Strongly Supportive
Principals	0	0	4	3
Superintendents	0	0	6	15
Regular Teachers	0	2	10	3
Special Education Teachers	0	1	3	4

Note. Scale 1=strongly opposed, 2= opposed, 3=supportive, 4= strongly supportive

Research Question 3: What did regular teachers, special education teachers,

principals, and superintendents perceive as the major benefits, greatest disadvantage, and

absolutely essential elements for making inclusion work effectively for inclusion of

students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes?

Research Question 3 was analyzed using qualitative analysis of short answer

responses from principals, superintendents, regular education teachers, and special

education teachers to categorize their opinions of the major benefits of inclusion using

thematic coding. The practice of using self-contained classrooms for educating students

with disabilities, especially lower functioning and disruptive students, has been the

educational norm for many years. The recognition of the importance of socialization

versus the practice of isolation as a major benefit of implementation of inclusionary

practices by principals (n = 3), superintendents (n = 8), regular education teachers (n =

14), and special education teachers (n = 5). Collaborative learning, including peer

tutoring, was recognized as being beneficial to the success of inclusion by

superintendents (n = 4) and special education teachers (n = 2). Having students with

disabilities exposed to current academic testing protocols, as stipulated with Common

Core Standards, was recognized as beneficial by superintendents (n = 2), and special

education teachers (n = 12). Superintendents (n = 2) and principals (n = 4) recognized

inclusion as a moral imperative in balancing the rights and needs of students with

disabilities. Superintendents (n = 3) also recognized the importance of compliance with

IDEA, the need for recognizing the diversity of the classroom, and for eliminating the

stigma of being singled out that many students with disabilities endure.

Analysis of what all four respondent groups perceived as the greatest

disadvantages to inclusion yielded the following findings. Principals (n = 2),

superintendents (n = 1), regular education teachers (n = 3), and special education teachers

(n = 1) emphasized the fact that inclusion slows the instructional pace of regular students.

Principals (n = 2) and superintendents (n = 4) immediately recognized the need to

provide opportunities for teachers to improve their classroom management skills.

Principals (n = 2), superintendents (n = 7), regular teachers (n = 1), and special education

teachers (n = 1) highlighted the need for professional development in collaborative

practices, specifically in the areas of co-teaching and differentiated instruction.

Superintendents (n = 2) and regular education teachers (n = 4) emphasized the necessity

of employing trained inclusion teachers and the fact that often times the inclusion of

students with severe disabilities creates disadvantages for all learners. Superintendents (n

= 2) noted the legal mandates imposed by IDEA and the financial stresses inclusion

creates in an era of ever shrinking revenue streams. Regular education teachers (n = 2)

duly noted that inclusion students were placed in their rooms with no placement meeting

or discussions regarding pertinent information contained the student's Individualized

Education Program.

The final qualitative questions evaluated what principals, superintendents, regular

and special education teachers considered as absolute necessities for making inclusion

work. Superintendents (n = 3), regular education teachers (n = 1), and special education

teachers (n = 1) emphasized clear communication of academic and behavioral

expectations. Principals (n = 3), superintendents (n = 11), and regular education teachers

(n = 1) verbalized the importance of teachers' compassion and commitment; expressing

positive attitudes; and especially buying in to the success of inclusion. Ongoing school

wide professional developments in all areas of good inclusionary practices were

considered essential by principals (n = 8) and superintendents (n = 6). Daily

collaborative planning opportunities were considered imperative by principals (n = 1),

superintendents (n = 6), and special education teachers (n = 2). Superintendents (n = 2)

recognized the importance of ongoing training and implementation of current best

instructional practices for both regular and special education teachers. Superintendents (n

= 1) and special education teachers (n = 1) recognized the importance of involving the

parents in the inclusionary process. Principals (n = 3), superintendents (n = 3), and

regular education teachers (n = 10) emphasized the necessity of central office and school

based leadership support in conjunction with full funding of inclusion. Regular education

(n = 2) and special education teachers (n = 3) recognized the importance of having

special education teachers or trained teacher assistants to the success of inclusion.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary

National progress toward full implementation of inclusion by school districts

nationwide statistically reflects the diversity of each of those school districts. Friend

(2006) highlights how the magnitude of that diversity, through its collective actions, has

the potential to excite or exacerbate efforts to implement inclusion by stating, "Inclusion

is a belief system shared by every member of a school as a learning community—

teachers, administrators, other staff members, students, and parents—about responsibility

of educating all students so that they can reach their potential" (p. 22).

Nationally, inclusion has witnessed a shuffling of feet implementation philosophy

by administrators, educators and parents. This slow motion stride to implement full

inclusion is the result of No Child Left Behind allowing nearly 5% of the school

population, mostly English language learners and students with disabilities to be assessed

by alternate means. However, this shuffling of feet philosophy is on the cusp of running

at full stride. This increase of regular classroom participation will continue to grow

under the new philosophy of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In a speech given

on September 2, 2010, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan described the impact of

CCSS:

> All English Language Learners and students with disabilities will take the new
>
> assessments, with the exception of the one percent of students with the most
>
> significant cognitive disabilities. Unlike existing assessments, which often retrofit
>
> mediocre accommodations into the test, the new assessment systems will be

designed, from the start, to accurately assess both English learners and students with disabilities and provide appropriate accommodations. And for the one percent of students with the most significant disabilities, states will have funds to develop an alternate assessment as a result of a soon-to-be-completed competition (para. 6).

Schools nationwide are coming to grips with the reality that slightly in excess of 99% of their students will have to be assessed by new Common Core State Standards. This includes students enrolled in alternative schools. Superintendents, special education directors, principals, regular and special education teachers realize the scores of all students in alternative schools are suddenly going to be included in every districts composite report. This should be alarming to administrative staff especially given the numerous concerns researchers' have echoed regarding the education of students with disabilities in alternative schools. For example, Lehr (2004) emphasized concerns voiced by state special education directors regarding educational opportunities for students with disabilities within alternative school settings. Specific concerns revolved around the familiar topics of certified staff availability, subject area and curriculum opportunities commensurate with the referring regular school and the ability of alternative schools to meet FAPE and LRE (p. 5). There are few scientifically based, rigorous evaluations establishing what program components lead to various positive outcomes for youth. Aron (2006) concluded in his national research of alternative education that the research base for understanding what works and for whom in alternative education is still evolving. Foley and Pang (2006) echoed other researchers concerns saying, "despite the history of alternative programs, few data are available describing the governance,

funding, and physical facilities supporting alternative educational programs" (p. 11).

Montecel (1999) reported that "many successes were documented through collections of

anecdotes, with little or no 'hard data' collected, tabulated or analyzed" (p. 6).

Educators are mandated by the NCLB legislation to strengthen academic

expectations and accountability for children with disabilities and to close the achievement

gap between high- and low-performing and advantaged and disadvantaged students so

that no child is left behind. This chapter discusses the perceptions of school

superintendents and their principals, regular education teachers, and special education

teachers on implementation issues, benefits of inclusion/level of disabilities, learning

challenges, excluded students, and professional training in inclusionary practices in their

alternative schools. It will also focus on how superintendents, principals, regular

teachers, and special education teachers categorize their perceptions about inclusion.

Overview

A total of sixty-one questionnaires were sent out to Mississippi school

superintendents responsible for Mississippi alternative schools. Based on superintendent

consent to participate, twenty-five questionnaires were sent to alternative school

principals. Principals distributed questionnaires to 50 regular mathematics and English

teachers and 25 special education teachers. The survey consisted of 24 perceptions of

inclusion questions in which respondents could select responses ranging from strongly

disagree to strongly agree. Perceptions involving the factors of implementation issues,

benefits of inclusion/level of disabilities, learning challenges, excluded students, and

professional training were within the 24 questions. Participants also categorized their

perceptions about inclusion with responses ranging from strongly opposed to strongly

supportive. Short answer responses of the major benefits, greatest disadvantages, and absolute necessities for making inclusion work were categorized utilizing thematic coding. Demographic data on the four respondent groups were also obtained.

<div align="center">Conclusions and Discussions</div>

Research question one was, "*Is there a difference in the perceptions of regular education teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents regarding inclusion of students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular education classes"?* Data analysis indicated that there was no significant difference in the perceptions of the four respondent groups. However, a closer and more detailed examination of the study results yielded both surprising and exciting findings. The results reflected unanimity among perceptions of participant responses in the highest and lowest means grouping. Respondents voiced support for the inclusion of both mildly and moderately disabled students in the regular classroom. Respondents also acknowledged positive social and academic benefits for both students with special needs and regular students in inclusionary classrooms. Strong support was also noted for implementation of inclusion even over the opposition voiced by parents of regular students. Survey participants disagreed with ostracizing students with disabilities from regular classrooms because they utilized communicative devices or required wrist crutches or wheelchairs to assist with mobility. They also disagreed that including students with special needs would dramatically infringe on the teacher or teacher aides' time. In a response to the isolationist attitudes of special educations' past, participants adamantly disagreed with the idea that students with disabilities were better served in special schools. The positive nature of the majority of these responses is encouraging

and hopefully bodes well for implementation of inclusionary practices not only in alternative schools but throughout public education. These results neither support nor contradict current research, but highlight the need for larger scale studies of alternative school populations.

Research questions two was, *"How did regular teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents categorize their perceptions about inclusion"?* Participant responses emphatically supported inclusionary practice within alternative schools. These findings are supported by 49% of respondents reporting strong support for the implementation of inclusion. This level of support was nearly echoed with 45% of respondents indicating that they supported the implementation of inclusion. Only 6% of respondents indicated they opposed inclusion with no respondents indicating a strong opposition to inclusions' implementation. These results are exciting and signal potential differences of opinions with other earlier researchers cited in this study. Lehr (2004) for instance, noted that those students with disabilities, referred to alternative school, often face limited placements that often times conflict with inclusionary practices. These placements, according to Washburn-Moses (2011), create segregated settings and often result in lowered standards and expectations. The contradictory results of these responses to current research publications documents the need for a more in depth study of current inclusionary practices.

Research Question three was, *"What did regular teachers, special education teachers, principals, and superintendents perceive as the major benefits, greatest disadvantage, and absolutely essential elements for making inclusion work effectively for*

inclusion of students with disabilities in Mississippi alternative schools' regular

education classes"?

These open ended questions allowed participants to candidly express their opinions

about inclusions. Following are the highest frequency responses and how the participant

responses reflected the research also cited in this study.

The recognition of the importance of socialization versus the practice of isolation

was recognized as a major benefit of implementation of inclusionary practices by

principals (n = 3), superintendents (n = 8), regular education teachers (n = 14), and

special education teachers (n = 5). These beliefs were echoed by Udvari-Solner (1996)

who promoted the idea of inclusive education as "a value-based practice that attempts to

bring students, including those with disabilities, into full membership within their local

school community" (para. 2). A second major benefit of inclusion by superintendents (n

= 2) and principals (n = 4) was the recognition of inclusion as a moral imperative in

balancing the rights and needs of students with disabilities. Henderson (2003) touched on

doing the right things when he listed the importance of: administrative commitment to

inclusion, clearly communicated expectations for shared student outcomes, collaborative

planning times, and professional growth opportunities as necessary components for

successful district implementation of inclusion (p. 390).

Analysis of what all four respondent groups perceived as one of the greatest

disadvantages to inclusion yielded principals (n = 2), superintendents (n = 1), regular

education teachers (n = 3), and special education teachers (n = 1) emphasizing the fact

that inclusion slows the instructional pace of regular students. Rouse and Florian in

2006 refuted these finding when reporting on a national study on inclusion and secondary

school achievement in England concluding that significant numbers of students with

special education needs (SEN) did not adversely affect the educational progress of their

regular peers (p. 491). Superintendents (n = 2) and regular education teachers (n = 4)

emphasized the necessity of employing trained inclusion teachers and the fact that often

times the inclusion of students with severe disabilities creates disadvantages for all

learners. As a point of evolving positive practices, Gandhi's research in 2007 indicated

that frequent planning meetings between inclusive classroom teachers and

implementation of co-teaching practices proved beneficial for both students with and

without disabilities in inclusive classrooms (p. 109).

The final qualitative questions evaluated what principals, superintendents, regular

and special education teachers considered as absolute necessities for making inclusion

work. Principals (n = 3), superintendents (n = 11), and regular education teachers (n = 1)

verbalized the importance of teachers' compassion and commitment; expressing positive

attitudes; and especially buying in to the success of inclusion. Praisner (2003) bolstered

these characteristics by claiming that in order to establish inclusion successfully, it is

important for leaders to be committed to the philosophy of inclusive education and to

develop attitudes and behaviors that promote the inclusion of students who experience

difficulties in learning. A second imperative identified by principals (n = 1),

superintendents (n = 6), and special education teachers (n = 2) are daily opportunities for

regular and special education teachers to share collaboratively planning time. This

researcher agrees teachers can ill afford to hide on isolated islands of autonomy. Teacher

isolation has to be supplanted by establishment of a collaborative culture. The impetus

for development of that culture comes from the top. Wise (2004) agreed, "Professionals

do not work alone; they work in teams" (p. 43). Teacher isolation has to be supplanted by establishment of a collaborative culture. Expectations and support for development of a collaborative culture appear to have been identified by administrative leadership.

Limitations

Limitations to this study included a limited number of alternative schools, a limited number of respondents, and a limited response rate. These limitations are discussed further and should be taken into consideration when evaluating these findings.

Only 61 out of 143 Mississippi school districts have alternative schools. Some alternative schools are housed on existing school campuses; some are located on separate campuses, while others constitute consortiums allowing several districts to transport students to a central site.

This study was limited by a limited number of respondents. Sixty-one questionnaires were sent to superintendents with alternative school administrative responsibility. Twenty-five superintendents or 40.9% responded with 21 responses included in the study. The number of superintendents responding limited the overall scope of the study due to lack of receiving permission for participation for principals and teachers.

Seven alternative school principals or 28% responded, severely limiting the scope of school site principals' perceptions regarding inclusion. Sixteen regular education teachers or 32% and 8 special education teachers or 32% responded limiting perceptions from the participants with the most potential insight into implementation and practice of inclusion. Another limiting factor is the fact individual alternative school student

populations vary greatly, influencing administrative and educational staffing requirements.

A final limitation exists due to smaller percentages of students with special needs in alternative schools. Smaller populations of students with special needs are easier to assimilate into existing regular classrooms without assistance from a special education teacher than larger populations. Larger populations of students with special needs would increase the generalizability of the study.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Prior cited research lacks pertinent recommendations as comprehensive as the responses collected in this study. Therefore, the researcher incorporated responses attained in the study as current recommendations for policy and practice.

The increased accountability for students with disabilities with the implementation of Common Core Standards has been well documented throughout this study. Individual student accountability currently drives school policy and will do so for the foreseeable future. Therefore, having students with disabilities exposed to current academic material and testing protocols, as stipulated with Common Core Standards, serves the best interest of the students with disabilities and the school district.

School superintendents should develop policy grounded in current legal requirements and existing community norms and values. Inclusion is not only recognized as a legal right but also a moral imperative in balancing the rights and needs of students with disabilities. This is supported by the recognition of the importance of socialization of students with disabilities versus the practice of isolation in this study. Inclusion

creates diversity in the classroom and eliminates the stigma of being singled out and isolated that many students with disabilities endure.

Administrators must embrace the practice of verbalizing and modeling positive attitudes regarding inclusion, compassion for all students, and commitment to the successful implementation of inclusion. Central office and school based administration must be unified in their support for and full funding of inclusion.

Recommendations for practice gleaned from this study supplements nicely suggestions documented in cited literature. The benefits of social interaction with peers, especially in the areas of peer tutoring and collaborative learning, are once again recognized as being beneficial to the success of inclusion. Sound educational practice is recognized as the result of prior preparation and ongoing school wide professional developments in all areas of good inclusionary practices. Providing both the regular and inclusion teachers collaborative planning time is considered imperative. Other areas supporting good inclusionary practices are: providing opportunities for teachers to improve classroom management skills; developing collaborative practices, specifically in the areas of co-teaching and differentiated instruction; emphasizing clear communication of academic and behavioral expectations; verbalizing the importance of teachers compassion, commitment, positive attitudes and support of successful inclusion; and the importance of involving parents in the inclusionary process.

Recommendations for Future Research

Most of the current cited research evaluates alternative schools and students with special needs through the lens of national studies. In terms of identifying policies and practices with real world applications, future research will require a nationwide approach

from the perspective of instrument development with state-by-state distribution, collection, and analyses. The researcher believes there is commonality between states in terms of inclusionary implementation in alternative schools. However, as stated, the researcher believes questionnaires should be distributed on a state-by-state basis by the state level agency responsible for alternative education to encourage timely and complete reporting.

The researcher would encourage an expansion of the qualitative responses contained in the original instrument. Qualitative responses yield insightful and often more in depth discussions. These data could potentially provide implementation ready practices that are practitioner ready for introducing in classrooms and districts.

Summary

The goals of this research was to determine the perceptions of Mississippi school district superintendents, alternative school principals, alternative school secondary mathematics and English teachers, and special education teachers across the State of Mississippi regarding how well their alternative schools comply with inclusion of special needs students in the regular classrooms. The findings suggested there was not a significant difference in perceptions of inclusion between principals, superintendents, regular education teachers, and special education teachers. The research also requested alternative school principals, superintendents, alternative school secondary mathematics and English teachers, and special education teachers categorize their feeling toward inclusion. The findings were overwhelmingly in support of inclusionary practices. This research warrants expansion in an effort to explore what works and why in alternative schools.

APPENDIX A

PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION

#	Item Descriptor	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
P1	Regular teachers are not trained adequately to cope with the students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P2	Students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/ wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P3	Including students with special needs creates few additional problems for teachers' class management.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P4	Students who cannot read normal print size should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P5	Because special schools are better resourced to cater for special needs students, these students should stay in special schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P6	Students who are continually aggressive towards their fellow students should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P7	Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P8	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P9	Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P10	Special needs students belong in special schools where all their needs can be met.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P11	Teacher aides are trained adequately to cope with students special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P12	Students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P13	Regular students will be disadvantaged by having special needs children in their classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P14	Students who are continually aggressive towards school staff should not be included in regular	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

#	Item Descriptor	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
P15	Special needs students whose achievement levels in basic skills are significantly lower than their age classmates should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P16	Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication boards/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P17	Regular school principals are trained adequately to cope with the students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P18	Including students with special needs is unfair to regular teachers who already have work load.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P19	Students with severe disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P20	Students with moderate disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P21	Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P22	Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P23	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teachers' time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P24	Students with severe speech difficulties should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

To assist in the analysis of the responses, please provide the following information. **Please be assured that all of the information provided in this study is absolutely confidential and anonymous**.

1. Are you the principal of your alternative school?   Yes ☐   No ☐

2. Your age in completed years?   _____ years

3. Gender   Female ☐   Male ☐

4. Completed years of teaching experience?   _____ years

5. Completed years as a principal?   _____ years

6. As principal in your alternative school, how many full-time

equivalent teachers do you employ? _____

7. As principal, what is your student enrollment?

   Grades 1-4 _____ Grades 5-8 _____ Grades 9-12 _____

8. In terms of your experience as principal of a regular school
   or alternative school, have you had a situation where you have   Yes ☐   No ☐
   had, on average, one or more students with disabilities in each class?

9. As principal, does your alternative school accept students with   Yes ☐   No ☐
   disabilities?

10. If you answered YES, how many full-time equivalent special   _____
    education teachers do you employ?

11. Do you hold a Special Education endorsement?   Yes ☐   No ☐

12. If no, do you hold regular education endorsements?   Yes ☐   No ☐

    Please list subject area endorsements: _____

13. Please indicate any graduate degrees you hold in regular or special education?

    AA ☐   AAA ☐   AAAA ☐

14. If you were asked to categorize your perceptions regarding inclusion, which of the
    following four positions would you choose?

    Strongly Opposed ☐   Opposed ☐   Supportive ☐   Strongly Supportive ☐

15. In your opinion, what is the strongest argument for having inclusion?
    _____
    _____
    _____

16. In your opinion, what is the greatest disadvantage of inclusion?
    _____
    _____
    _____

17. To make inclusion work effectively, what are two absolute essentials?
    _____
    _____

APPENDIX B

SUPERINTENDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION

#	Item Descriptor	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
P1	Regular teachers are not trained adequately to cope with the students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P2	Students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/ wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P3	Including students with special needs creates few additional problems for teachers' class management.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P4	Students who cannot read normal print size should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P5	Because special schools are better resourced to cater for special needs students, these students should stay in special schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P6	Students who are continually aggressive towards their fellow students should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P7	Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P8	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P9	Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P10	Special needs students belong in special schools where all their needs can be met.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P11	Teacher aides are trained adequately to cope with students special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P12	Students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P13	Regular students will be disadvantaged by having special needs children in their classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P14	Students who are continually aggressive towards school staff should not be included in regular	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

#	Item Descriptor	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
P15	Special needs students whose achievement levels in basic skills are significantly lower than their age classmates should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P16	Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication boards/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P17	Regular school principals are trained adequately to cope with the students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P18	Including students with special needs is unfair to regular teachers who already have work load.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P19	Students with severe disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P20	Students with moderate disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P21	Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P22	Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P23	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teachers' time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P24	Students with severe speech difficulties should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

To assist in the analysis of the responses, please provide the following information. **Please be assured that all of the information provided in this study is absolutely confidential and anonymous**.

1. Are you the superintendent of your school district?   Yes ☐   No ☐

2. Your age in completed years?   _____ years

3. Gender   Female ☐   Male ☐

4. Completed years of teaching experience?   _____ years

5. Completed years as a principal?   _____ years

6. In terms of your experience as principal of a regular school or alternative school, have you had a situation where you have had, on average, one or more students with disabilities in each class?   Yes ☐   No ☐

7. As superintendent, does your alternative school accept students with disabilities?   Yes ☐   No ☐

8. Do you hold a Special Education endorsement?   Yes ☐   No ☐

9. If no, do you hold regular education endorsements?   Yes ☐   No ☐

   Please list subject area endorsements: _____

10. Please indicate any graduate degrees you hold in regular or special education?

    AA ☐   AAA ☐   AAAA ☐

11. If you were asked to categorize your perceptions regarding inclusion, which of the following four positions would you choose?

    Strongly Opposed ☐   Opposed ☐   Supportive ☐   Strongly Supportive ☐

12. In your opinion, what is the strongest argument for having inclusion?
    _____
    _____
    _____

13. In your opinion, what is the greatest disadvantage of inclusion?
    _____
    _____
    _____

14. To make inclusion work effectively, what are two absolute essentials?
    _____
    _____
    _____

APPENDIX C

REGULAR EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION

#	Item Descriptor	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
P1	Regular teachers are not trained adequately to cope with the students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P2	Students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/ wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P3	Including students with special needs creates few additional problems for teachers' class management.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P4	Students who cannot read normal print size should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P5	Because special schools are better resourced to cater for special needs students, these students should stay in special schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P6	Students who are continually aggressive towards their fellow students should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P7	Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P8	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P9	Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P10	Special needs students belong in special schools where all their needs can be met.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P11	Teacher aides are trained adequately to cope with students special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P12	Students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P13	Regular students will be disadvantaged by having special needs children in their classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P14	Students who are continually aggressive towards school staff should not be included in regular	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

#	Item Descriptor	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
P15	Special needs students whose achievement levels in basic skills are significantly lower than their age classmates should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P16	Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication boards/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P17	Regular school principals are trained adequately to cope with the students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P18	Including students with special needs is unfair to regular teachers who already have work load.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P19	Students with severe disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P20	Students with moderate disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P21	Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P22	Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P23	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teachers' time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P24	Students with severe speech difficulties should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

To assist in the analysis of the responses, please provide the following information. **Please be assured that all of the information provided in this study is absolutely confidential and anonymous**.

1. Are you a regular education teacher in the alternative school?   Yes ☐   No ☐

2. Your age in completed years?   _____ years

3. Gender   Female ☐   Male ☐

4. Completed years of teaching experience?   _____ years

5. As a regular education teacher what grades do you teach?

   Grades 5-8 _____ Grades 9-12 _____

6. In terms of your experience as regular education teacher in a regular school or regular school have you had a situation where where you have had, on average, one or more students with disabilities in each class?   Yes ☐   No ☐

7. Do you hold a Special Education endorsement?   Yes ☐   No ☐

8. Please list all subject area endorsements you hold: _____

9. Please indicate any graduate degrees you hold in regular or special education?

   AA ☐   AAA ☐   AAAA ☐

10. If you were asked to categorize your perceptions regarding inclusion, which of the following   four positions would you choose?

   Strongly Opposed ☐   Opposed ☐   Supportive ☐   Strongly Supportive ☐

11. In your opinion, what is the strongest argument for having inclusion?
   _____
   _____
   _____

12. In your opinion, what is the greatest disadvantage of inclusion?
   _____
   _____
   _____

13. To make inclusion work effectively, what are two absolute essentials?
   _____
   _____
   _____

APPENDIX D

SPECIAL EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION

#	Item Descriptor	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
P1	Regular teachers are not trained adequately to cope with the students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P2	Students with physical disabilities (wrist crutches/ wheelchairs) create too many movement problems to permit inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P3	Including students with special needs creates few additional problems for teachers' class management.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P4	Students who cannot read normal print size should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P5	Because special schools are better resourced to cater for special needs students, these students should stay in special schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P6	Students who are continually aggressive towards their fellow students should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P7	Students with mild disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P8	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teacher aides' time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P9	Regardless of whether the parents of regular students object to inclusion, the practice should be supported.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P10	Special needs students belong in special schools where all their needs can be met.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P11	Teacher aides are trained adequately to cope with students special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P12	Students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P13	Regular students will be disadvantaged by having special needs children in their classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P14	Students who are continually aggressive towards school staff should not be included in regular	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

#	Item Descriptor	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
P15	Special needs students whose achievement levels in basic skills are significantly lower than their age classmates should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P16	Students who have to communicate in a special way (e.g., communication boards/signing) should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P17	Regular school principals are trained adequately to cope with the students with disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P18	Including students with special needs is unfair to regular teachers who already have work load.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P19	Students with severe disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P20	Students with moderate disabilities should be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P21	Students with disabilities benefit socially from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P22	Regular students benefit socially from inclusion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P23	Students with special needs will take up too much of the teachers' time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
P24	Students with severe speech difficulties should not be included in regular classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

To assist in the analysis of the responses, please provide the following information. **Please be assured that all of the information provided in this study is absolutely confidential and anonymous**.

1. Are you a special education teacher in the alternative school?   Yes ☐   No ☐

2. Your age in completed years?   _____ years

3. Gender   Female ☐   Male ☐

4. Completed years of teaching experience?   _____ years

5. As a special education teacher what grades do you teach?

   Grades 5-8 _____ Grades 9-12 _____

6. In terms of your experience as special education teacher in a
   regular school or alternative school have you had a situation   Yes ☐   No ☐
   where you have had, on average, one or more students with
   disabilities in each class?

7. Do you hold a Special Education endorsement?   Yes ☐   No ☐

8. If not, do you hold a regular education endorsement?   Yes ☐   No ☐

   Please list all subject area endorsements you hold: _____

9. Please indicate any graduate degrees you hold in regular or special education?

   AA ☐   AAA ☐   AAAA ☐

10. If you were asked to categorize your perceptions regarding inclusion, which of the
    following four positions would you choose?

    Strongly Opposed ☐   Opposed ☐   Supportive ☐   Strongly Supportive ☐

11. In your opinion, what is the strongest argument for having inclusion?
    _____
    _____
    _____

12. In your opinion, what is the greatest disadvantage of inclusion?
    _____
    _____
    _____

13. To make inclusion work effectively, what are two absolute essentials?
    _____
    _____
    _____

APPENDIX E

SUPERINTENDENT INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Superintendent:

I am Gary Tune, a doctoral student in Educational Administration at The University of Southern Mississippi. My proposed doctoral research solicits the perception of superintendents, principals, regular teachers, and special education teachers regarding how well Mississippi alternative schools meet the challenge of inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms.

My interest in this topic is both personal and professional. I currently teach special education in an alternative school that after many years of discussion implemented inclusion this year for our secondary students.

Your role in my study is two fold: First, I would like to request your permission to conduct my research in your alternative school. Secondly, I have also included a questionnaire that I would appreciate your completing. Your responses will contribute to the literature regarding central office administrative opinions regarding inclusion. Please complete the consent form granting permission for your alternative school personnel to participate in this study and return your questionnaire and signed consent form to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

With your permission I will send a questionnaire packet to your alternative school principal. The principal's packet will contain a copy of this letter signifying your consent to participate, Principal's Informed Consent letter, principal's questionnaire, and a self-addressed, stamped envelop. Included will be a secondary mathematics teacher, secondary English teacher, and a secondary special education teacher packet. These packets will also include a Teacher's Informed Consent letter, teachers' questionnaire, and a self-addressed, stamped envelop.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me at 601-616-1081 or email me at gltune51@yahoo.com. This dissertation study has been review by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

Your consent to participate in this study is implied by the return of completed questionnaire. Thank you for your time and consideration,

Gary Tune

Consent to Participate_____

APPENDIX F

PRINCIPAL INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Principal:

I am Gary Tune, a doctoral student in Educational Administration at The University of Southern Mississippi. My proposed doctoral research solicits the perception of superintendents, principals, regular teachers, and special education teachers regarding how well Mississippi alternative schools meet the challenge of inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms.

As I told your superintendent, this topic is both personal and professional. I currently teach special education in an alternative school. After several years of discussing implementation of inclusion we are this year including our students with disabilities, grades 10 -12, in our secondary English, Biology, and Algebra classes.

Your superintendent completed a questionnaire and granted his consent (enclosed) for you and three of your teachers to participate in my dissertation research. I have included in your packet a questionnaire entitled, School Principal's Attitudes toward Inclusion. Please take time to complete your questionnaire and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Your assistance is also requested in obtaining responses from your teachers. In your questionnaire packet I included three teacher packets. Each contains a specific teacher questionnaire, cover letter, and a self-addressed, stamped envelop. Whether your school currently practices inclusion or is considering implementing inclusion please select a secondary mathematics teacher, secondary English teacher, and a secondary special education teacher to complete the questionnaire. If your school is currently practicing inclusion your selection will be straight forward; if not, please select three teachers as though you were implementing inclusion next semester and these teachers were implementing inclusion.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me at 601-616-1081 or email me at gltune51@yahoo.com. This dissertation study has been review by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

Your consent to participate in this study is implied by the return of completed questionnaire. Thank you for your time and consideration,

Gary Tune

APPENDIX G

TEACHER'S INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Teacher:

I am Gary Tune, a doctoral student in Educational Administration at The University of Southern Mississippi. My proposed doctoral research solicits the perception of superintendents, principals, regular teachers, and special education teachers regarding how well Mississippi alternative schools meet the challenge of inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms.

As I told your superintendent and principal, this topic is both personal and professional. I currently teach special education in an alternative school. After several years of discussing implementation of inclusion we are this year including our students with disabilities, grades 10 – 12, in our secondary English, Biology, and Algebra classes.

Your superintendent completed a questionnaire and granted his consent for you to participate in my dissertation research. I have included in your packet a questionnaire entitled either; Regular Educator's Attitude toward Inclusion or Special Educator's Attitude toward Inclusion. Please take time to complete your questionnaire and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelop.

Your participation in this study will help me to better understand the difference in perceptions of inclusion between administration, both central office and school site, and classroom teachers. Your packet contains a questionnaire that explains your perception of inclusion based on your educational background and a self-addressed, stamped envelop.

If you have any questions or concerns you may contact me at 601-616-1081 or email me at gltune51@yahoo.com. This dissertation study has been review by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

Your consent to participate in this study is implied by the return of completed questionnaire. Thank you for your time and consideration,

Gary Tune

APPENDIX H

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **13031903**
PROJECT TITLE**: The Challenges of Inclusion: Perceptions of Superintendents, Principals, and Teachers in Mississippi Alternative Schools**
PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation**
RESEARCHER(S): **Gary Lynn Tune**
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**
DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & School Counseling**
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: **N/A**
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **04/04/2013 to 04/03/2014**

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX I

JOHN WILEY AND SONS LICENSE AGREEMENT

WILEY

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