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Urban Elementary School Prinicipals' Attitudes Toward the Inclusive Environment

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URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The principal is the single most influential person in shaping a school's climate, culture, positive teacher attitude towards students and school practices (Washington III, 2006; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Praisner, 2000). Based on this premise, the principal's attitude is the key to reshaping of the school. The purpose of this study was to identify the attitudes of urban elementary principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education environment. The study also investigated the relationships among the variables of demographics, professional training and education, and professional experience as they related to principal attitude.

The research instrument utilized was the *Principals and Inclusion Survey Modified for Urban Educators* (PISMUE). It was a modified version of Praisner's *Principals and Inclusion Survey* (2000). The PISMUE consisted of three sections which were designed to collect data on demographics, principals' experience and training, and principals' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. The population utilized for this study consisted exclusively of public elementary school principals from Hudson County, NJ. An attitude score was calculated for each principal and the data was then analyzed using univariate analyses of variance and linear regression analyses.

The results indicated that over 96% of the sample of urban principals self-reported positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. The results indicated that training, specifically in behavior management for students with special needs and special education law in combination with training on the handling of crises involving students with special needs was a predictor of more positive principal attitude. The results also indicated that the presence

of students classified as emotionally disturbed or orthopedically impaired was associated with lower attitude scores.

The findings demonstrate a need for the integration of special educations topics into administrative training programs. Greater levels of preparation and support for dealing with crisis and specific special needs classifications would better equip urban elementary principals for the implementation of inclusion programs and result in more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting.

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All of my family and friends, thank you for all the times you talked me down from the proverbial ledge and saw me through this to the end.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the students with specials needs who strive each day to be successful in inclusive classrooms.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout history, handicapped and impaired children were misunderstood, and often treated as outcasts of society (Torreno, 2010). Popular opinion depicted them as uneducable, and they were generally denied opportunities to receive any formal education (Torreno, 2010). The late nineteenth and early twentieth century marked an era of new thinking with the appearance of schools for children with special needs, but these institutions were based in the thought that these children must be segregated from their non-disabled peers (Torreno, 2010).

Developments in this area were slow, but by the mid-1920s the value of educating children with disabilities began to be recognized. Communities also realized the importance of involving handicapped adults as active members of society. Even though acceptance of this formerly marginalized group was growing, children with special needs were still placed in institutions and given minimal educational opportunities, if any at all. Parents, educators and advocates for the handicapped were disturbed by the gross disparity between the educational services for the general population as compared to those with special needs. In defense of these children, they commenced an onslaught of legal action, filing fifty lawsuits by 1974 (Washington III, 2006, p14).

A breakthrough occurred in 1975 with the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (P.L. 94-142). The law guaranteed that

children with handicaps or disabilities would have the opportunity to receive a free, appropriate public education (Ramirez, 2006; Washington III, 2006, p14). There was little room for interpretation when addressing the free and public aspects of education discussed within the law. The interpretation of what constitutes an appropriate setting and curriculum for students with special needs, however, proved to be unique to each state (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2007). Mere accessibility to educational programs did not ensure that students with special needs were receiving instruction within the guidelines of a standards-based curriculum. Since its enactment, EAHCA has evolved and been strengthened through revisions and its reauthorizations in 1990, 1997, and 2004. It also received a name change, and is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). In the early 1990s, children with disabilities began having access to their neighborhood schools; however, most were placed in segregated classrooms. Through the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, students with disabilities were not only granted equal access to educational services, but given the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2007).

The result of this legislation was a dramatic change in the structure and atmosphere of America's classrooms. Schools could no longer group all students with special needs in segregation from their age level peers. The changing mentality towards the learning potential of special education students and the introduction of the concept of least restrictive environment (LRE) caused the creation of inclusive classroom settings. In such settings, students who

receive special education services are heterogeneously grouped with their age appropriate, general education peers.

Inclusive Classroom Models

Creating an inclusive classroom requires the teaching staff to adapt instruction to the needs of individual learners in accordance with student Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Children with special needs in an inclusive classroom may either require in-class support or in-class replacement. Both in-class support and replacement are provided by a special educator in the general education setting. With in-class support, the special educator ensures that the children receive the accommodations and modifications required by the IEP in order for those students to successfully complete the same assignments as general education students. When students require in-class replacement, the special educator ensures that the children receive all of the social benefits of interacting with age-level peers while providing alternative assignments that are appropriate for the students' ability level (NJAC 14: 6A 1-3).

Curriculum adaptations can be categorized into nine groups: quantity, time allotment, level of support, skill level, delivery of content, method of assessment, student participation, modified goals, and substitute curriculum. With exception of a substitute curriculum, all of the other categories of adaptations would be used in an in-class support situation. In order to successfully implement changes

in any of the categories, the general educator and special educator must collaborate and establish a co-teaching model with which each is comfortable.

The Role of the Principal

The changing classroom has paralleled the metamorphosis of the role of the principal. Historically, school administrators were expected to demonstrate management skills which were modeled after classical organizational theory (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008 p1-3). This theory was derived through analyses of workplace efficiency in product-oriented industries, not institutions of learning. The skills of an effective business manager centered around organizing and coordinating personnel, supervising and evaluating subordinates, and making, communicating and implementing decisions (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008 p5). The efficiency and productivity of operations were the indicators used to critique the effectiveness of management. There were no considerations given to the psycho-social needs of workers (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008 p7).

In an institution of learning, the head administrator oversees and has the final say on all practical matters of daily operations. Principals are also responsible for the maintenance of a learning environment that is in compliance with federal and state education law, and are therefore required to possess near expert level legal knowledge. They are routinely called upon to act as public relations representatives, diplomats, mediators and advocates for student

services (Wilcox, 2010 p16). While a school administrator must possess managerial skills, the principal has a higher calling as the instructional leader of the institution.

The concept of instructional leader is becoming more popular as more schools struggle to meet the guidelines accountability under NCLB. Gone are the days in which administrators relied on instincts or trial and error in order to make decisions. Instructional leaders rely on scientifically-based research and collaborate with staff to establish goals and create a unified school vision (Guzman, 1997).

An instructional leader creates the school climate and nurtures and upholds the traditions of the school culture (Hidalgo, 2004 p3.2) Self-improvement is modeled as the principal follows a personal professional development plan (Guzman, 1997), and strategically promotes the ongoing professional growth of teachers (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008 p30, ch5). The principal empowers teachers to take on informal leadership roles through which they support each other via mentoring and professional learning teams (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008 p30; Guzman, 1997). There is a plan for decision-making, and staff input is a valuable and respected part of the process (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Hidalgo, 2004; Guzman, 1997).

Satisfying all of the responsibilities of the school administrator requires tremendous dedication. Various studies show that principals work from fifty to sixty hours a week (Viadero, 2009; Rayfield & Diamantes, 2003), indicating an

increase in the challenges of modern school leadership. Demands on time and high levels of job related stress may explain the recent lack of longevity in newly promoted principals (Wilcox, 2010 p17, 56).

Accountability

The two mandates which have proven most challenging for current principals are the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and meeting the state-designated marker of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) (Washington III, 2006). NCLB was designed to increase accountability for student achievement and provide parents and students with more educational choices (USDOE, 2004). Under this policy, schools must demonstrate measureable student achievement or face punitive consequences. Over the past decade, as the number of students with special needs has risen (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010; Wilcox, 2010), it has become increasingly difficult for schools with large populations of special education students to make AYP. Ironically, the implementations of reform models, utilization of content area experts and coaches or replacement of principals and staff have not been shown to produce consistent or significant gains in student achievement (Smarick, 2010 p22). On the contrary, these interventions increase the number of demands on already heavily burdened principals, while maintaining the status quo through the creation of loopholes which allow districts to temporarily evade the inevitable restructuring of failing schools (Smarick, 2010 p21-26).

In urban areas, there are high percentages of students with multiple risk factors for low academic achievement (Ormond, 2000). While these districts attempt to combat the effects of poverty, low parental education and low educational expectations for their students, family disruptions, and a multitude of special needs classifications (Hammond, Linton, Smink & Drew, 2007), the districts are also forced to find in loopholes in NCLB to avoid closing failing schools. There are two restructuring options that are proving to effectively reduce low student achievement. In both of these options, the administration is removed, and the failing school is temporarily closed, breaking the cycle of failure. In the first scenario, the school is reopened as a public charter; the second is to reopen as a public school which has been restructured from the bottom up, leaving no trace of the former establishment (Smarick, 2010 p25-6). When public schools are reopened as charter schools, they tend to be mission-oriented and have very concrete and attainable goals (USDOE, 2007). Charters have the benefit of greater flexibility in areas of curriculum and instruction, and can expeditiously implement reform measures because they are not subject to the bureaucracy caused by affiliation with larger districts (USDOE, 2007). Unlike public schools which are obligated by each state's compulsory education laws and IDEA to accept the registration of all children, charters are under no obligation to register students with special needs if the school cannot fulfill the requirements of the students' IEPs.

Opening a new public school in place of a failing one requires the creation of a distinct instructional climate and establishment of a culture of achievement

(USDOE, 2009). Articulating high standards for student performance is obligatory, but must be accompanied by a strategic plan of action. In a study of successfully restructured schools, the United States Department of Education (2009) identified "targeted professional development" and "intensive teacher monitoring and feedback" (p16) as key contributors to successful academic programs. The most challenging obstacle, however, is the creation of a new school climate. This must be tackled on several fronts, from changes in the physical plant, to student and staff behavior, as well as the reviving relationships between parents, the community, businesses and the school (USDOE, 2009 p26).

School Climate

Research dating back to the 1980s suggests that the principal is the single most influential person in shaping a school's climate and culture and positive teacher attitude towards students and school practices (Washington III, 2006; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Praisner, 2000). It is necessary to identify and explore the attitudes and perceptions of principals as their leadership is the primary influence on the success of an inclusive school (Praisner, 2003 p136).

Operating a school within the legal definition of compliance does not necessarily mean that the principal is in favor of an inclusive school environment, nor does it mean that resources are allocated in such a way as to maximize the potential for success of an inclusive program (Praisner, 2003 p136). The

principal's perceptions of proper placement of students in the LRE may also affect the amount of time during which the special education student is segregated from age-appropriate, non-disabled peers (Praisner, 2003 p136). A principal's negative attitude towards inclusion, expressed verbally or through the disproportionate allocation of resources, can be contagious to the staff (Guzman, 1997). Praisner (2000 p20) names the principal's positive attitude as a key factor when creating a climate which is accepting of the unique needs of all students. Livingston, Reed and Good (2001) concurred that an instructional leader has the greatest impact on successful implementation of special education services.

Problem Statement

The Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 (IDEA) requires that students classified with special needs be taught in classrooms with their general education peers, when possible (Nichols 2010 p647). The standard of the least restrictive environment (LRE) has led to new teaching models, such as the team teaching approach, in which a special education teacher and a general education teacher share a classroom. Educating special needs students in the general education setting has created new concerns and responsibilities for school principals. Principals must implement staff development in order to address the deficiencies of staff in the area of special education. They must also maintain current knowledge of special education law policies. School districts can face legal battles and loss of federal funding if special education students are not receiving

the services to which they are entitled (Ramirez, 2006 p5). Special education issues and implementation of a successful inclusion program are added to an already extensive list of responsibilities principals have. It is the aim of this study and the research discovered to increase the body of knowledge that exists on how principals can successfully implement fully inclusive environments for students classified with disabilities in New Jersey's public elementary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the attitudes and perceptions of urban elementary school principals in Hudson County, New Jersey toward inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom environment. Also, this study focuses on the determination of which characteristics influence elementary school principals in relation to their attitudes towards inclusion and students with disabilities. The characteristics that are addressed are the principals' age and gender, years of experience as a teacher and administrator, the amount of coursework or training completed on the instruction of students with special needs, and knowledge of special education terminology and law.

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs?

2. How do various demographic indicators relate to urban elementary school principals' attitudes towards inclusion?

3. What is the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude towards inclusion?

Significance of the Study

In order for schools to receive federal funding and to avoid potential litigation, principals must establish environments which meet the guidelines of IDEA. It is necessary to determine if principals have received proper training on special education laws and the implementation of these laws. This study is intended to further the understanding of the attitudes and characteristics of principals who have implemented an inclusive environment. The results of this study may provide more insight into the leadership characteristics which are necessary for the creation of an effective and efficient inclusive school environment. Furthermore, the data gathered through this study may uncover areas of deficiency in the knowledge of school principals, and aid in the development of curricula for educational administrator and teacher training programs.

Limitations/Delimitation

The most notable limitation of this study is the limited sample of participants. The researcher attempted to gage the perceptions of acting principals in public elementary schools in Hudson County, NJ. At the time of the study, there were 88 subjects who met these criteria. As I was one of these principals, I removed myself from the list, leaving 87 principals. In order to get the highest possible volume of data, random sampling was not used, and participation was requested of all of the 87 subjects. A total of 58 responses were received. One of the surveys was omitted because it was incomplete. Therefore, data was collected from only 57 of the 88 principals in Hudson County, NJ.

Also, the population being studied was limited only to elementary public school principals. The attitudes of secondary principals may differ and were not taken into account for the purposes of this study. Principals of charter schools, parochial schools and other private institutions were also not solicited as participants in this study.

Another limitation of this study is the requirement that participants self-report perceptions of their attitudes towards inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. The researcher must assume that the participants accurately described their perceptions, and did not provide ideals to which they do not prescribe.

Definition of Terms

Note: The special education terminology used in this study is in accordance with the New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC 6A:14).

Inclusion: is the process of educating as many children as possible within their neighborhood schools and general education classrooms, while providing appropriate support services for specialized instruction and access to the general curriculum.

Special Education: Specially designed instruction that is provided at no cost to meet the needs of a child with a disability. Special education includes instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions and in other settings.

Child with a disability: A child between the ages of 3-21 with a physical, emotional, learning or cognitive disability, which has an adverse effect on the child's ability to learn.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Every child with a disability has a right to a public education at no cost to the parent. The child's educational program must be provided in accordance with his/her IEP. A FAPE must be provided to children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Every child with a disability must be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate.

Child Study Team (CST): The CST is made up of a school psychologist, learning disabilities teacher/consultant, and sometimes school social worker, all of whom are employees of the school district. The CST may also include professionals from other disciplines if the child is thought to have or diagnosed with problems in those disciplines (e.g. speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, audiology). The CST is responsible for evaluating a child to determine whether s/he is eligible for special education and related services.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written plan developed at a meeting with the *IEP Team* that serves as the roadmap for the child's education. The IEP must state the child's present levels of performance, measurable annual goals and short-term objectives aimed at improving the child's educational performance, and instructional activities and related services needed for the child to achieve the stated goals and objectives. It also must state the reasons for the child's educational placement. The IEP must be individually designed to meet the child's unique needs.

IEP Team: The IEP Team includes the parent, the student (if appropriate), the special education teacher, the regular education teacher (if appropriate), a Child Study Team member, the case manager, a representative of the school district, and anyone else the parent/guardian or school district wishes to bring.

Regular class with supplemental aides: This means that a child is placed in a regular education classroom with non-disabled students, but the child receives some additional help. "Supplementary aids" include:

a) Changes to the material that is taught (the curriculum) or the way the teacher teaches (the use of special teaching methods) to better suit the child with the disability and help him/her learn;

b) Additional instruction (i.e. after school tutoring);

c) Assistive technology devices and services, which are any items or pieces of equipment that increase, maintain or improve the disabled child's ability to function (i.e. eyeglasses, hearing aids, talking computers);

d) Instructional or teacher aides; and

e) Related services, which are supportive services that help a student with a disability to benefit from special education (i.e. transportation, speech/language therapy, counseling, physical therapy, occupational therapy).

Resource Programs: Resource programs provide individual or small group instruction to students with disabilities. A resource program teacher must be certified as a teacher of the handicapped. Resource programs may be provided either in a regular class or in a pull-out program. If the resource program is in-class, the child receives instruction in his/her regular classroom. If the resource program is "pull-out," the child leaves the regular classroom for the time during which s/he receives instruction. A resource program may provide "support" instruction or "replacement" instruction. In a support resource program, the child

must meet educational requirements for the child's grade or the subject being taught; however, the child receives additional assistance in certain subjects (i.e. reading, writing, spelling, math).

In a replacement resource program, the child's regular education curriculum and teaching methods may be changed based on the student's IEP. As a result, the child receives instruction in material that, to some degree, "replaces" the material that the child would be learning in a particular subject.

Chapter 2

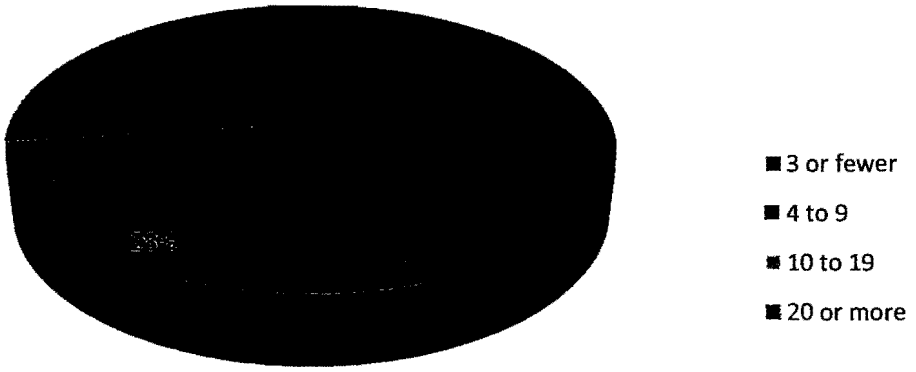
Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the attitudes and expectations of urban principals with respect to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom setting. While students with special needs are found in all walks of life, urban areas have much higher numbers of classified students than their rural and suburban counterparts (National Dropout Prevention Center, 2011). The dynamics created by the demography of urban areas result in unique demands being placed upon school principals. These demands inform the principals' attitudes towards special needs populations.

The Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142), later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Public Law 101-476), was groundbreaking legislation which improved the availability of educational programs and services for students with special needs. Under this law, all children were granted equal access to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Over three decades since FAPE became law, the policy of excluding students with special needs from equal access to the same services as their non-disabled peers seems archaic and inhumane. The days of special education classes being tucked away and forgotten in the basements of schools has fortunately been disassociated with the modern school. In the 2007-2008 school year, the average public school teacher only had thirteen and a half

years of teaching experience. Seventy-three percent of public school teachers had less than twenty years of teaching experience (See Graph 2.1) (USDOE, 2010). Consequently, the vast majority of twenty-first century educators have no first-hand experience with the segregation of students with disabilities.

Graph 2.1: Years of Experience of Public Elementary Teachers in the 2007-2008 School Year



The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) took integrated education to an even higher level by making schools directly accountable for student achievement. Under NCLB, schools are not only assessed on their overall proficiency on state-administered standardized tests, but on the performance of each subgroup. The subgroups include: race, socio-economic status (SES), English language learners (ELLs), and students with disabilities. In urban areas, this has had a tremendous impact on the status of the schools. Several of these subgroups have been documented as risk factors for low achievement (APA, 2011; KSBOE, 2006). The combination of high population density, the high concentration of racial minority groups, and high percentages of ELLs, students

with special needs and low SES in urban districts (Russo, 2004) is proving to be detrimental to the success of schools. More than fifty percent of schools which experience chronic failure are located in urban districts (KSBOE, 2006).

Under NCLB, each school is assigned a status based on the ability of the students to meet the school's goal for Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). A school which fails to make AYP for five consecutive years faces punitive measures, including the complete restructuring of the school. Restructuring means the removal of the principal, as well as fifty percent of the teaching staff. With the possibility of removal from their offices looming over principals' heads, it is not difficult to imagine how NCLB may affect the attitudes of principals towards inclusion.

NCLB was not meant to be ill-intentioned. The purpose was to uncover and hold schools accountable for the dramatic achievement gaps among the subgroups. An unfortunate consequence of this accountability is that there are schools which are fostering student growth and achievement that are being labeled as failing schools. This has caused a backlash at the state level, as certain states have attempted to "beat the test" by lowering the state standard for proficiency. A federal study found that from 2005 to 2007 there were fifteen states which had lowered the score required for proficiency in fourth or eighth grade reading or math. Most notable were Maine, Oklahoma and Wyoming which lowered their standards in both areas (Dillon, 2009).

Stemming from the argument that NCLB stifles school reform and deters systemic change in the nation's most troubled districts, President Obama has instituted a waiver that would allow states more flexibility in determining which schools are indeed failing the country's children. Instead of a single measure in the form of a standardized test, states will now have the option to use multiple measures to ensure accountability while lessening the achievement gap. The new measures call for states to demonstrate that (a) the schools are preparing students for college or career paths; (b) there are systems for recognition, accountability and support which are tailored to the needs of individual districts; (c) a system for teacher and principal evaluation and improvement (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2011).

NCLB may have made schools accountable for student achievement, but the waiver process appears to have placed schools under an even greater microscope. The State of New Jersey (NJ) has completed a waiver application. It categorizes the state's schools into three groups: (1) Priority – schools with high levels of chronic deficiency; (2) Focus – schools with a notable achievement gap, and; (3) Reward – schools with high achievement. In the application, there are several measures which take transparency to new heights. Specifically, the state plans to record multiple pieces of data at the school level that would directly link individual teachers to their students' achievement, provide principals with extensive professional development on how to collect and analyze teacher performance data, and implement the use of a new, teacher and administrator evaluation system (NJDOE, 2011). All of these measures will have the greatest

impact on the Priority and Focus schools, the majority of which are located in urban areas (New Jersey School Boards Association, 2011).

In chapter 2 the following definitions for mainstreaming and inclusion will be used:

Mainstreaming refers to the placement of students with special needs into general education classes. Mainstreaming has been shown to benefit the academic and social development of special needs students through their interactions with non-disabled peers. In order for a special needs student to be identified as a candidate for mainstreaming, he must have demonstrated the ability to be successful without additional support services.

Inclusion means educating students with special needs in the general education setting with support services. Generally, these services are provided by a certified teacher of the handicapped who has specific knowledge of the requirements of the students' individual education programs (IEPs). Services are brought to the child in the general education setting, as opposed to removing the child to an exclusionary special needs environment, such as a resource room or self-contained special education setting.

Full inclusion is defined as the placement of all students, regardless of severity of disability, into the general education classroom on a full time basis. In a fully inclusive environment, special needs students must continue to receive all

of the modifications and accommodations as specified in their IEPs without removing the students from the general education setting.

Section I: What are the attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs?

Philosophy of Inclusion

The educational philosophy behind the creation of the inclusive school is that the learning environment should be a reflection of society. In the world outside of the classroom, interactions between people with and without disabilities are not artificially regulated, and diverse groups of people are expected to exercise tolerance and coexist. Inclusive practices emphasize the necessity to educate students with disabilities in the same classrooms as general education students, providing the opportunity for all to experience diversity. By creating a microcosm of society within the classroom, tolerance and acceptance of individual differences can be nurtured in a controlled setting. Through positive interactions, students learn to be respectful and accepting of individual differences (Bailey, 1997 p.429; Avissar, 2000).

This philosophy is predicated on the belief that children who are exposed at a young age to diverse individuals, with or without disabilities, will grow into adults who are more tolerant. Tolerance of individual differences enhances the ability to coexist, lessening the segregation and marginalization of persons with

disabilities. This philosophy of inclusion differs greatly from traditional educational practices, in which students with disabilities were segregated from the general population.

Just as in the case of segregation by race, segregation based on a student's special needs classification is detrimental to the child's academic and social development. There is a tremendous academic benefit for the special needs child when he is taught in a classroom with his age-appropriate peers: the grade-level expectations and standards are reinforced to all students. Although the classified child may require modifications in order to attain success, the expectation of success is still present. Erwin and Soodak (2011) identified several social and emotional benefits of inclusion; (a) children develop a positive attitude about themselves and others, and they learn to appreciate diversity, (b) friendships develop and social skills are learned, all the children learn from each other, (c) parents begin to see that their children can function in society and are accepted. Their findings are similar to those reported by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) (1999), which also included a higher frequency of interactions between disabled children and their non-disabled peers, larger and more enduring non-disabled peer networks and improved social and communication skills. The USDOE also noted that inclusion allows for the possibility of variations in the social status and of social relationships for students with special needs as they interact with a variety of non-disabled students. Through inclusion, children can learn to accept students with disabilities just as they would learn to accept children who are of a gender or race that is different

from their own. Every child not only deserves the opportunity to be accepted, but more importantly, to be treated as a valued member of society.

In 1985-86, Wang and Baker conducted a study to analyze the efficacy of mainstreaming as an educational approach for student with disabilities. Their findings suggested that students with disabilities in mainstream classes made greater academic gains then their peers in segregated or self-contained classes. They concluded that mainstreaming improved performance and attitudes for students with disabilities (Katz & Mirenda, 2002 p. 16).

History and Court Decisions Relating to Inclusion

Throughout human history, there have always existed people with disabilities. While it would be both impossible and unnecessary to explore all of the beliefs held about the disabled, it is important to provide a historical frame for the modern Western perception of people with disabilities. Until relatively recent times, the survival of our species was dependent upon our ancestors' ability to adapt to the conditions of their environments. In Darwinian terms, it was dubbed survival of the fittest. Individuals with disabilities, who were unable to provide for their own needs, or were not viewed as productive members of their social groups, were not perceived as having evolutionary fitness. Our species may no longer judge the value of an individual based on his survival skills, but the millennia of stigma have left a negative perception of the disabled that is difficult

to erase from the collective unconscious. Instead of survival of the fittest, we now deal with social Darwinism in which those who do not conform to the established ideals of physical and mental ability are relegated to the fringes of society.

In the fight against the marginalization of people with disabilities, there have been both triumphs and setbacks. In recent history, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was the beginning of the end of government sanctioned discrimination against the mentally and physically handicapped. Social reformers pushed for the deinstitutionalization of the developmentally disabled in an attempted to provide them with some type of normalcy. In 1975, the United States Congress, under President Ford, passed Public Law (P.L.) 94-142, also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA). This act guaranteed a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) be provided for all children with disabilities in every state and municipality. The passing of this law demonstrated the nation's commitment to improving educational access for every child in America. The law has four distinct purposes:

1. To ensure that all children with disabilities had available to them a free appropriate public education which emphasized special education and related services designed to meet every child's unique needs.
2. To ensure that the rights of special education students and their parents are protected.

3. To assist states and municipalities in providing for the education of all children.
4. To assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities.

P.L. 94-142 was Congress' response to the concerns for the more than 1 million children with disabilities who were previously excluded from the public educational system. With this legislation, the deficiencies in the education of children with special needs were being recognized and dealt with for the first time (1975).

A key component of EAHCA was the requirement that all students with special needs have an individualized education program (IEP). According to the DOE (2007) each child's IEP should contain:

a) Current academic levels, including a statement on how the student's disability affects his ability to meet the requirements of the general education curriculum
b) Measureable annual goals
c) An explanation of how the student's progress towards meeting goals will be measured
d) The special education services and modifications the child will receive
e) An explanation of restrictions to the child's participation in classes or activities with non-disabled peers
f) Accommodations and modifications required by the child while taking district or state assessments or statement of exemption from such assessments

g) Time frame for services including the beginning date, frequency and location of said services

h) Transition services needed to attain postsecondary goals relating to training, education and employment

All decisions about the placement and services provided for a student with special needs are governed by the IEP. In order for any changes to be made to the child's educational program, an IEP meeting must be called and the current IEP reviewed. When placement is determined for the child, the IEP team must place the child according to his least restrictive environment (LRE). The ideal LRE for all students is the general education setting, but the nature and severity of some disabilities do not always allow for placement in the general education setting.

Although laws protecting the disabled are on the books, enforcement of the letter of the law is arbitrary. Each school district has its own interpretation of compliance, and the interpretation can be influenced by the knowledge and persistence of the disabled individuals, their families or legal guardians.

In 1983, P.L. 98-199 of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments, required the creation of parental training and information centers where parents of handicapped children could go to receive instruction on the provisions of EAHCA. P.L. 98-199 also increased the availability of special education services through financial incentives for programs for children from birth to age three and for programs that assisted in the transition from school to adult living. Another of the amendments, P.L. 99-457, led to the extension of early intervention services

for children with special needs through the requirement of FAPE for children age three to five. Additionally, this amendment required the development of an individualized family service plan for each participating child and family.

When EAHCA was amended and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (1990), it provided for additional services for students transitioning into adult life and placed emphasis on the requirement that children with special needs be placed in the LRE. President Clinton's reauthorization of IDEA (1997) forever changed the face of special education in the public school. It required IEP Teams to include general education teachers, and set provisions for the discipline of students with special needs that were separate from those of their non-disabled peers. Perhaps the most groundbreaking issue addressed in this reauthorization was the inclusion of special education students in district and state level assessments. Once the scores of students with special needs were included in state-wide public data, districts could be held accountable for the educational outcomes of these children. As history tells us, it was only a matter of time before special education students were expected to achieve proficiency in the areas tested.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), called for the utilization of standardized test data to hold local school districts accountable for the achievement of all students. NCLB broke data down into subgroups of race, gender, special education, English language learners and socio-economic status. It stated that all subgroups, special education included, must meet state

requirements for annual yearly progress (AYP). By 2014, NCLB requires that all subgroups achieve proficiency. Worse, NCLB called for severe punitive consequences for schools which fail to meet these goals.

IDEA and NCLB are the two federal legislations that have had the most influence on the shaping of the modern school. IDEA regulates the educational programs and services which must be provided for children and youth with disabilities, and NCLB forces schools to assume responsibility for the educational outcomes of all students. If a school is not demonstrating its ability to provide a quality education to all students through measureable gains on state-level standardized test scores, the school will be labeled as "in need of improvement". Schools in need of improvement have a limited time to take corrective measures, such as whole-school reform plans, teacher coaches and professional development, in order to change their status to "passing". Should the school remain in need of improvement for five consecutive years, the school will be identified as "failing" under NCLB, and the school district must take drastic action. School closure or complete restructuring are the two harshest consequences.

Trends in Inclusive Education

As school districts create inclusive classroom environments, administrators must adapt their leadership style and knowledge to support their teaching staff, students and parents. Inclusion may have begun as a social reform movement,

but it has snowballed into the restructuring of schools and school systems nationwide (Guzman, 1997). The success of an inclusive school is contingent upon the acts and attitudes of the adults charged with its management and implementation. An inclusive school is student-centered. It emphasizes equitable treatment and social acceptance of all children in a properly structured environment (Guzman, 1997).

The need to create a structure that provides for the educational needs of students receiving both general education (GE) and special education (SE) services has led to the co-teaching model. In this model, the GE and SE teacher are both responsible for the instruction of all of the students in the classroom. According to various researchers in the field of special education, there are six different approaches to this teaching model (Friend & Bursuck, 2010; Friend & Cook, 2009):

1. One teach, one observe – While one teacher is instructing, the other takes the opportunity to observe and record specific student behaviors. The data collected by the observing teacher should later be discussed by both team members in order to make decisions impacting future instruction.
2. One teach, one assist – As one teacher is instructing, the other circulates the room and provides struggling students with assistance and clarification, as needed.

3. Parallel teaching – The class is divided into two groups of learners and both teachers simultaneously provide instruction of the same content to their respective group. This method reduces the student to teacher ratio, allowing more interaction between the teacher and individual students.
4. Station teaching – The class is divided into two or more groups, each of which will learn different aspects of the content. Direct instruction may be provided by one or both teachers, or students can work independently while the teacher observes or assists.
5. Alternative teaching – One teacher provides instruction to a large group while the other works with a smaller group of struggling students. Groups should be established based on the students' need for assistance with the content, not because of their disabilities.
6. Team teaching – Both teachers simultaneously provide instruction to the whole class. This method can occur very naturally in some co-teaching situations, or be nearly impossible in others.

It is important for administrators to recognize that the success of any co-teaching situation depends on partnership established by the GE and SE teacher (Nichols, Dowdy & Nichols, 2010; Guzman, 1997). Working cooperatively requires that the teachers establish a set of ground rules for each of their roles and for the management of the classroom. The success of the situation can often be hinged upon what administrators may overlook or consider trivial.

Nichols, Dowdy and Nichols (2010, p649) identified some of the issues that must be resolved as:

1. Classroom rules and routines
2. Responsibility for student learning
3. Responsibility for grading student work
4. Teachers' personal space within the classroom

There are no two co-teaching situations that are identical because the classroom dynamics are created by the interactions of the co-teachers with each other and between the co-teachers and the students. Teachers with distinct personalities are expected to adapt to work cooperatively to provide students with meaningful learning opportunities, but the transition into a co-teaching situation can be challenging for some teachers. As the instructional leader, the principal must quickly establish expectations and set the example for staff attitude and behavior (Guzman, 1997).

Another trend that is becoming synonymous with inclusive classrooms is differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction refers to the "systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction for academically diverse learners (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003). Differentiation can be applied to the curricular content, methods of assessment, performance tasks and instructional strategies. It stems from the idea that "one size doesn't fit all" because there are different types of learners (Gregory & Chapman, 2002). An effective teacher intuitively differentiates instruction to meet the varying needs of the learners. If a teacher

believes that each child can be successful, the teacher must adapt the instruction to accommodate for different knowledge bases and learning styles present in the classroom.

Making accommodations is not a method of replacing state standards, but rather a means by which students can create a lasting understanding of the standards. By being sensitive to students' needs, the teacher can facilitate each student's progress through the creation of an instructional environment that builds on students' interests and the areas in which they excel. Success is not measured in how many facts students can repeat, but whether students have constructed a foundation upon which they can build successful lives. Enduring understanding comes from being able to connect with the materials being taught. When students are given multiple opportunities to connect with the content, in ways that are congruent with their learning styles, they are more likely to achieve positive learning outcomes and remain life-long learners (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003; Bender, 2002; Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999).

If teachers were to take on the attitude that the student, not the content is the most important aspect of our instruction, it would change the entire school environment. Students would not sit in cookie-cutter desks completing cookie-cutter assignments. Instead, students would work in their zones of proximal development, applying their skills and interests while being challenged to push themselves to the next skill level. The assignments developed by the teacher

would allow students to develop mastery of new content while being able to apply some aspect of the lesson to themselves and their lives.

In identifying trends relating to inclusive education, it is important to note that one of the initiatives that is having an impact on educators' perceptions of inclusion is not a special education initiative. IDEA and NCLB call for the institution of intervention services to decrease new classifications of special needs. This sharply contrasts with the traditional method of noting a child's educational deficiency and then following the procedure for special needs classification which was dubbed the "wait to fail" model by the President's Commission. The intervention services, called Response to Intervention (RTI) by the State of New Jersey, apply to all students. RTI entails making modifications necessary to effectively educate students who have not been able to achieve success. Also referred to as "instructional decision making" (IDM), RTI means tailoring curriculum, delivery of content or a behavioral modification program to support the learner in his journey towards the attainment of the school's vision. While the concept of RTI mimics the services provided for students with documented special needs, RTI is a proactive means of making instructional decisions before a student falls far behind his age-level peers (Council of Administrators of Special Education, 2011).

The Parallel between Attitudes and School Change

Inclusion has been a topic that has many educators divided, some firmly supporting it and stating that it enhances the education of all children and others feeling it does not benefit either the general education or special education child. Inclusion is different from mainstreaming; it is not simply placing a special education student in a general education classroom. It requires that the student be placed in a classroom with students his own age. Salend describes inclusion "as an attempt to establish collaborative, supportive, and nurturing communities of learning that are based on giving all students the services and accommodations they need to learn, as well as respecting and learning for each other's individual differences" (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003 p24).

Supporters of inclusion have found inclusive programs to have a more positive impact on student achievement and learning for students with mild disabilities when compared to segregated settings. Supporters of inclusion also emphasize the importance of students learning to accept diversity among their peers and others in the community that they have to interact with on a daily basis.

Opponents of inclusion believe that general education teachers are not thoroughly or properly trained to handle children classified with disabilities. Opponents also state that teachers have a difficult time working collaboratively, and that inclusion negatively impacts the time a teacher has to work with all the students in the class. Opponents also believe that there is a lack of evidence

which confirms that inclusion benefits students with disabilities academically and socially. They do not view the relationship between administrators and teachers as one in which the teachers are provided with the support required to create successful inclusive environments (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003 p25).

Implications for Administrators

The success of inclusion in a school is directly tied to the attitudes and beliefs of the principal (Guzman, 1997 p3). Attitudes are seen to be enduring feelings that one has towards a person, object or issue (Bailey, 1997 p429). It is possible for individuals to hold different attitudes about the same issue. For example someone may support inclusion and rights for people with disabilities on a personal level, but as a principal or teacher have a different view. Principals who successfully implemented inclusion programs in their schools, demonstrated the ability to (a) establish an open communication between the staff that allows for rich, relevant dialog; (b) be actively involved in the IEP process; (c) have direct involvement and communications with the parents of the students with disabilities; (d) collaborate with staff and others to develop philosophies about inclusion; (e) articulate clear policies for addressing discipline issues; (f) put into action staff development related to inclusion and successful practices; (g) successfully solve problems and gather data (Garrison-Wade, 2007 p.120).

The leadership of the principal has been proven to be integral for successful school change (Praisner, 2003). Principals exert major influence over the running of their schools. As the school policy leaders, they influence

decisions, control resources and determine where they will be concentrated, and supervise school personnel. "Hence principal's attitudes toward inclusion represent a particularly powerful influence on school wide policy implementation and operational innovations" (Praisner, 2003 p.136).

Inclusive schools have general education teachers working cooperatively with special education teachers to enhance the educational program for all students. General education teachers would no longer abandon the educational needs of the classified student, but work alongside the special educator, one strong in the area of content the other in learning styles. This educational partnership can be very challenging for the principal to orchestrate. Principals are now expected to do more than just manage a school and complete paperwork, they are expected to implement programs for all students including those with disabilities, they must work with parents and community members to advance positive values and promote positive action on the part of students. In order for schools to meet these goals the principal's leadership is critical (Praisner, 2003 p.135). Because of the principal's position of power within the school, their attitudes about inclusion can result in an increase in the number of opportunities for children with disabilities in the general education setting.

Section II:
How do various demographic indicators relate to urban elementary school principals' attitudes towards inclusion?

Urbanicity

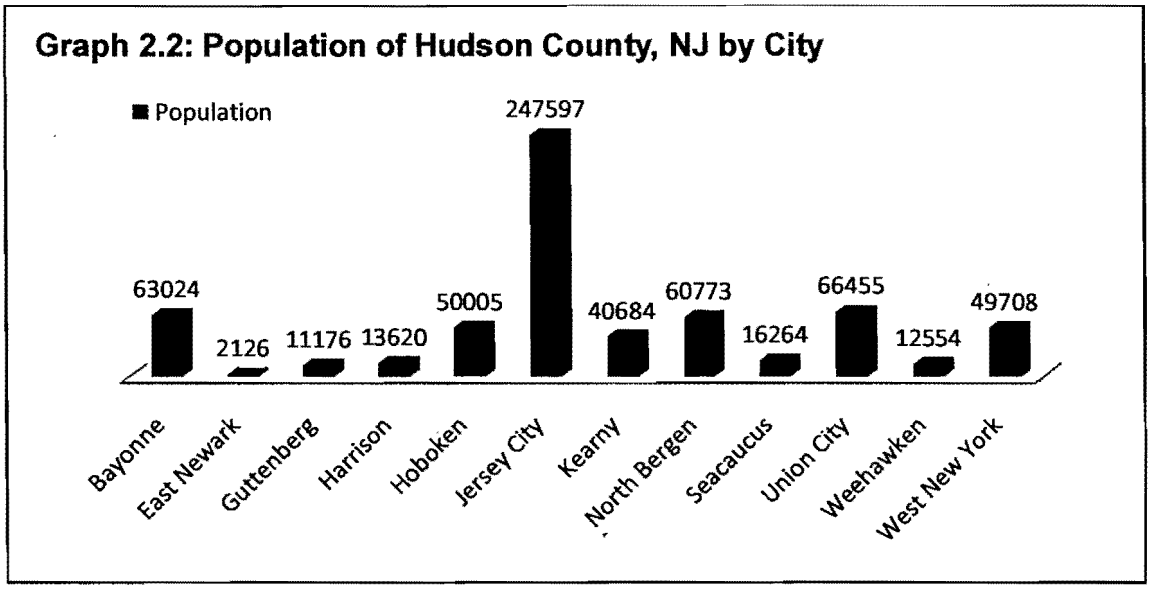
Despite differences in geographic location, urban school districts throughout the nation share several common characteristics. The high population density of urban areas often results in high enrollments in schools (Bowers, 2000). Urban areas also have higher concentrations of low-income families (CTE, 2011; Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 2011). In fact, forty percent of all urban schools are considered high poverty, compared to twenty-five percent of rural and only ten percent of suburban schools (CTE, 2011). Research indicates that students in high poverty schools are less likely to report they "feel safe" while in the school (CTE, 2011). In the area of student behavior, urban districts commonly experience high student absenteeism, frequent interruptions to instructional time due to classroom discipline issues, and greater number of incidences of weapon possession than suburban or rural schools (CTE, 2011). Urban districts enroll high numbers of children who are English Language Learners (ELLs) (US DOE, 2003) and report lower average achievement scores in reading, writing, mathematics and science than suburban schools (CTE, 2011). All negative characteristics aside, urban schools tend to have greater students diversity, encouraging interactions between racial and ethnic groups (CTE, 2011)

The participants in this study are of varying backgrounds and upbringings, but one commonality shared by all is that they are the head administrators of

schools in Hudson County, NJ. The researcher chose to focus on principals from Hudson County because of the county's noted urbanicity. Urbanicity refers to "the degree to which a geographical unit is urban" (Martin, 2004). The Index of Urbanicity can be used to determine if an area is in fact urban. The index generally makes use of a county as the geographic region being analyzed due to its median size and the existence of commonalities within the area (Martin, 2004). In keeping with the format of the index, the researcher examined four aspects of Hudson County: (1) the county's metropolitan status, (2) the county's centric order, (3) size of the county's urban units, and (4) the county's percent urban.

Hudson County's metropolitan status was designated as an Urban Area by the U. S. Census Bureau (2010). The total population in 2010 was 634,266 people, with a density of 9,999.9 persons per square mile. The population of each city in the county is shown in Graph 2.2.

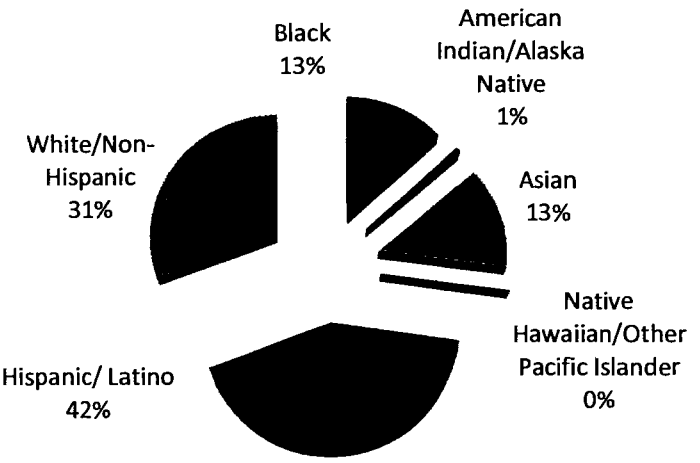
Graph 2.2: Population of Hudson County, NJ by City



Within this county, there are twelve school districts representative of the county's twelve urban units, or municipalities. Jersey City is the ranked second for population in the state of NJ, and seventy-second in the country.

The county is has high racial and ethnic diversity. Sixty-nine percent of the county's population identified itself as belonging to racial or ethnic minority groups in the 2010 Census. Graph 2.3 shows the reported racial and ethnic breakdown of the population.

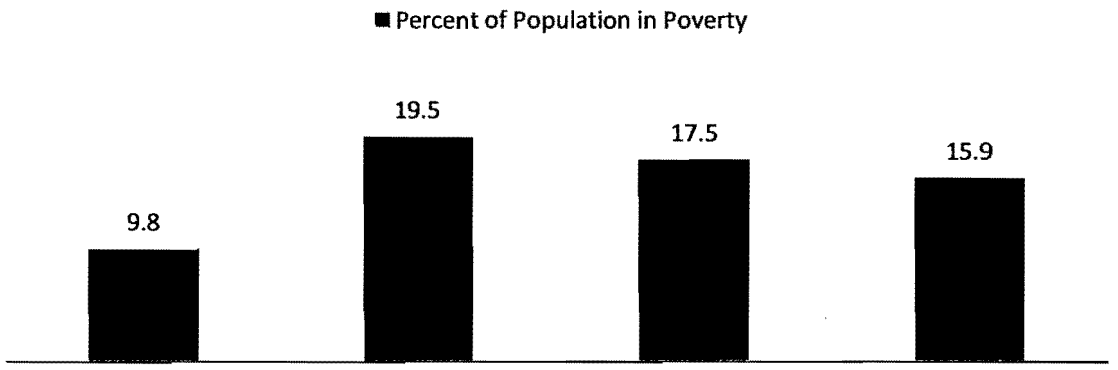
Graph 2.3: 2010 Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Hudson County, NJ



The county is considered as part of the New York metropolitan area. Metropolis status is determined by the level of marketing, transportation and administrative services. Hudson County provides both low and high order services for its inhabitants. Low order services, such as food markets and other types of basic necessities, are within walking distance for most residents. In terms of higher order services, the county is home to three institutions of higher education: Hudson County Community College, New Jersey City University and St. Peter's College.

Like many urban centers, Hudson County residents are representative of all socio-economic classes. Although NJ boasts the second highest annual median household income in the nation, $68, 342, and the percentage of households in poverty is 9.8 percent, the same is not true of Hudson County. The annual median income of the county is $56, 745, and the percentage of residents living in poverty is 14.5 percent. There are a disproportionately large percentage of the county's minority residents living in poverty (Advameg Inc., 2010). The percentages are shown in Graph 2.4.

Graph 2.4: Poverty in Hudson County, NJ by Racial Subgroup



Other Demographic Indicators

The demographic data included in this study includes the principals' age and gender, the number of students in their buildings, the percent of students in their buildings with IEPs, the percent of students with IEP in an inclusive setting for at least 75% of the school day, and the special education programs and

services provided in the school. The most recent studies (Smith, 2011; Ramirez, 2006; Fontenot, 2005; Praisner, 2000) on the relationship of principal age and gender with the principals' attitudes have shown that there is no significant relationship between age and gender and principals' attitudes. However, in an older study, Levy (1999) found there to be a negative correlation between age and the principals' attitudes.

In their respective studies, both Smith (2011) and Ramirez (2006) analyzed data on the demographic indicators of building size, percent of students with IEPs, and percent of students with IEPs in inclusive settings for more than 75% of the day. Neither found there to be any significant relationship between these variables and principals' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting.

Section III:
What is the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude toward inclusion?

Findings of Prior Research Studies

The school principal is ultimately responsible for any and all actions taken within the school, and for the education of every child. Knowledge of school law is paramount to the successful operation of the building. Although special education law heavily influences the decisions of daily operations, researchers have documented that many school leaders feel they were ill-prepared in both their knowledge of special education law and the implementation of special education programs and services upon graduation from their respective preparation programs (Garrison-Wade, Sobel & Fulmer, 2007; Rodriguez, 2008; Praisner, 2002). Preparation programs for school administrators tend to provide minimal instruction on the requirements of IDEA, but do not provide in-depth examination of how the laws categorically influence administrative decisions. There is not only a deficiency in the quantity of training provided, but also in the quality of its presentation to prospective administrators (Garrison-Wade, Sobel & Fulmer, 2007).

Due to NCLB's emphasis on accountability for the success of all subgroups, special education programs have been pushed to the forefront of the discussion on school reform. New and experienced principals alike are being forced to take active roles in the implementation of special education programs and services. Patterson, Marshall and Bowling (2000) noted that a principal's involvement in the school's special education program positively correlated to the

amount of training the principal received in the area of special education. It was also reported that principals with a background in special education were perceived to have an advantage over other administrators when implementing special needs programs.

Smith (2011) conducted a study on the attitudes of secondary school principals towards the inclusion students with special needs in the general education setting. The characteristics that Smith addressed in his study were age, gender, years of experience as a principal, years of experience in the general education classroom, years of experience in the special education classroom, number of college credits in special education, certification in special education, training in different types of disabilities, special education models and programs, and demographic data about the school. Surveys were sent to all of the 448 public secondary school principals in Georgia, and 102 principals responded. An analysis of data showed that the vast majority of participants had a favorable opinion about the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. In fact, only three of the participating principals indicated that their attitudes were less than neutral (p.87).

Smith's research on Georgia secondary principals uncovered several interesting finds. The single greatest predictor of principals' attitudes towards inclusion was the number of students with IEPs on campus. The significant relationship between these two variables was moderate and positive. This indicates that as the number of students with IEPs in the building increased, so did the principal's positive attitude (p.85). With respect to principals' training in

special education, those who had completed at least 10% of their training in either supporting teacher implementation of inclusion or teacher collaboration showed significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusion (p.82). The uncovering of the number of IEPs within a building and content of training as predictors is valuable to the field of educational administration. Smith also found another piece of information that may offer insight to the effects of external pressures on the office of the principal. When asked if inclusion of students with special needs in general education programs and activities should be policy or law, 33.7% of respondents indicated they were either neutral or disagreed (p.77). Of the ten questions used to formulate the principals' attitudes, this was the one which provoked the most diverse responses. The relatively high percentage of principals indicating a less than positive attitude may be indicative of the discord between the requirements of NCLB and the implementation of a successful inclusive program. This response demonstrates an overlap between principals with generally positive attitudes about inclusion and those who feel negatively about formal policies or legislation dictating building operations.

In a 2010 study, Wilcox investigated the extent to which a principal's special education background was associated with measureable gains in AYP of middle school students with disabilities. Wilcox sent out 622 questionnaires to middle school principals in Ohio. The questionnaires were used to collect basic demographic information and data relating to the principals' years of experience in their current positions, years of experience with special education, if they had a background in special education, the highest level of education they had

achieved, and if their school had made AYP for the subgroup of students with disabilities. Of the 622, only fifty-seven principals responded with complete, usable data. Ten of the fifty-seven indicated that their schools were not required to meet AYP for the subgroup. With such a limited sample, Wilcox was unable to make generalizations about the association between a principal's background in special education and the subgroup's ability to make AYP. Speaking relative to her participants, Wilcox found that 71.9% of the principals without a background in special education and 60.0% of principals with a special education background made AYP for the subgroup. Overall, there was not a significant statistical difference between either category of principals.

In this study, any perceived advantage of principals with a background in special education over those without is not supported by quantitative data. Wilcox conducted three follow-up interviews: two with principals of middle schools that had met AYP for the subgroup of students with disabilities for the 2009-2010 school year, and one that was not required to make AYP because the subgroup was representative of less that 30% of the district's population. Two of the principals interviewed were formally trained special educators. The other had no special education teaching experience, but had served as director of education for two years while working as an assistant principal. When asked if they thought a principal's background in special education increased the probability of the school making AYP for the subgroup, two believed it did not, and one believed it did. The one who felt the principal's background in special education would positively affect the AYP of special needs students was from the

school which had no requirement of AYP for the subgroup. The other two principals, one with a background in special education and one without, felt that the leadership style and attitude of the principal were much more influential in regard to student achievement.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2012), attitude is "a mental position with regard to a fact or a state". Consistent with the formation of all "mental positions", the concept of inclusive schools evokes an emotional response which is either formulated through a principal's personal experience, knowledge and training in the area of special education or his lack thereof. In an attempt to further our knowledge of the formation of principals' attitudes towards inclusion, Ramirez (2006) examined the existence of correlations between attitude and principals' training and experience. By collecting data from a sample population of 110 principals in Texas, she concluded that the principals' regular education teaching experience, experience as an elementary principal, in-service hours received in the area of inclusive practices and the college credits received in special education did not significantly influence the principals' attitudes towards inclusion. Ramirez' data indicated that the one variable which did significantly affect attitude was the principals' special education teaching experience. In that study, Ramirez found that principals with one to twenty years of special education teaching experience had similar, positive attitudes towards inclusion. Principals with more than twenty years of special education teaching experience, however, showed a significant decrease in their attitudes. Due to the quantitative nature of the study, there was no follow-up with the principals to

uncover the possible causes for the significant drop in positive attitude. Changes in special education law, increased teacher accountability for student achievement, and teacher burnout may all be factors which contributed to the formation of the less positive perceptions of more seasoned special educators.

Ramirez (2006) did explore the link between principals' knowledge of special education law and programs and their attitudes towards inclusion. Again using a quantitative design, she found that there is a significant relationship between knowledge of special education law and attitude. Principals with expert knowledge indicated very positive attitudes, but, as knowledge level decreased, so did the principals' attitudes towards inclusion. Since the law governs the operation of the school, it seems very logical for principals with higher levels of knowledge of the law to be able to execute decisions with confidence. Research has shown that confidence and self-esteem are contributors to the development of positive attitudes. Conversely, fears and insecurities inhibit self-confidence and therefore lead to more negative attitudes (Seaward, 2009).

With respect to knowledge of special education programs, Ramirez (2006) collected data about the relationship between attitudes and knowledge of eight, specific special education programs. Of the eight programs, Behavior unit, co-teaching, resource, other pull-out, life skills, and preschool programs for children with disabilities demonstrated no significant relationship to attitudes. Two of the programs in the survey had a significant relationship to attitude: Content Mastery (CM) and other inclusion. "Other inclusion" was an option given to allow principals to indicate that the program with which they were familiar was not

listed on the survey. CM is a support program that was developed in Texas. It was designed to allow students with special needs to be placed in the general education classroom, yet receive the assistance they require to achieve success. CM can replace resource in some instances. Through this program, students first receive direct instruction. Then modifications such as guided or independent practice can be made as needed. Knowledge of this model may influence principals' attitudes as it makes use of differentiated instructional techniques and its implementation is not exclusive to students with special needs. The adaptability of this program for use with all struggling students presents an instructional model which recognizes diversity of learning style rather than ostracize students with disabilities.

In a similar study which focused on secondary principals' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with autism/Asperger's syndrome (AAS), McKelvey (2008) surveyed seventy-five administrators in New York, Maryland, Texas and Wisconsin. Using a Likert-type survey, McKelvey found there to be a significant relationship between secondary school principals' years of teaching experience in regular education and their attitude towards the inclusion of students with AAS in the general education setting. Her statistical analysis showed a positive correlation between the two variables; as the years of regular education teaching experience increased, the reporting of positive attitudes also increased. McKelvey also analyzed the potential significant relationships between secondary school administrators' years of administration experience, years of full-time special education teaching experience, and the number of credits from

formal training in the area of special education and their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with AAS. The statistics showed no significant relationship between any of the variables, however, as the years of full-time special education teaching increased the researcher noticed a slightly negative trend in attitudes towards the inclusion of students with AAS.

Chapter 3

Introduction

This chapter provides insights into the methods that were used to conduct this study. The topics addressed include a statement of the problem, a description of the research design, a description of the sample population, the process of data collection, a description of the analysis of the data and an explanation of how the research questions related to the instrument.

This study attempts to identify and analyze the attitudes of urban elementary school principals correspondent to the implementation of an inclusive school environment. Hudson County, New Jersey was selected as the location for this study because it possesses many of the characteristics which have become synonymous with urban education. High enrollment, high concentrations of low income students, low student achievement, high racial and ethnic diversity and high proportions of students with limited English proficiency impact the educational environments created in urban school districts (Russo, 2004). Coupled with high percentages of students with special needs, these characteristics have made urban districts hotbeds for educational reform.

DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003) identified the school-level administrator as the single greatest influence on school climate and culture.

Yet, programs that educate future school leaders offer little preparation for urban environments. Furthermore, the majority of educational administration programs provide little or no training on the implementation of programs for students with special needs. Adequate preparation allows for principals to make proactive decisions about school structure, and may influence their attitudes about the placement of students with special needs.

Problem Statement

In order for schools to receive federal funding and to avoid potential litigation, principals must establish environments which meet the guidelines of IDEA. However, there is a lack of formal preparation for school administrators on how to successfully implement the requirements of special education law. Administrators who are not confident in their understanding of programs and services for students with special needs may develop attitudes which could negatively impact their decisions about this population. This study is intended to further the understanding of the attitudes towards inclusionary practices and characteristics of principals who have implemented inclusive environments. The characteristics that will be addressed are the principals' age and gender, years of experience as a teacher and administrator, the amount of coursework or training completed on the instruction of students with special needs, and knowledge of special education terminology and law. The results of this study may provide more insight into the leadership characteristics which are necessary for the

creation of an effective and efficient inclusive school environment. Furthermore, the data gathered through this study may uncover areas of deficiency in the knowledge of school principals, and aid in the development of curricula for educational administration training programs.

Research Design

This quantitative research study was devised in order to determine the existence of significant relationships between the principals' characteristics and professional experience and their attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. Attitudes, which are generally synonymous with feelings or dispositions, are usually not expressed numerically. In order to objectively analyze the attitudes of participants, the instrument asked participants to quantify their attitudes using a Likert-type scale. The quantification of data allowed for the more concise articulation of principals' attitudes and perceptions. The design of this experiment partially replicates a 2006 study of elementary principals in the state of Texas (Ramirez, 2006) and a 2000 study of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Praisner, 2000). While those studies did explore the principals' attitudes and perceptions of inclusive environments, demographics varied greatly among participants; this study is limited to urban educators.

Research Questions

The primary focus of this study was to identify the attitudes of principals in Hudson County, NJ correspondent to the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. Obviously, each principal's attitude is informed by myriad factors, not all of which can be addressed within the boundaries of this study, nor controlled by administrative education programs, nor school districts. With this in mind, this study collected data and sought to identify predictors of attitude that are quantifiable and can be manipulated to affect future populations. The three research questions that were addressed by this study are:

1. What are the attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs?
2. How do various demographic indicators relate to urban elementary school principals' attitudes towards inclusion?
3. What is the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude towards inclusion?

Participants

This study focused on the attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusive environment. Principals' eligibility for participation in this study was based on their meeting of the following criteria:

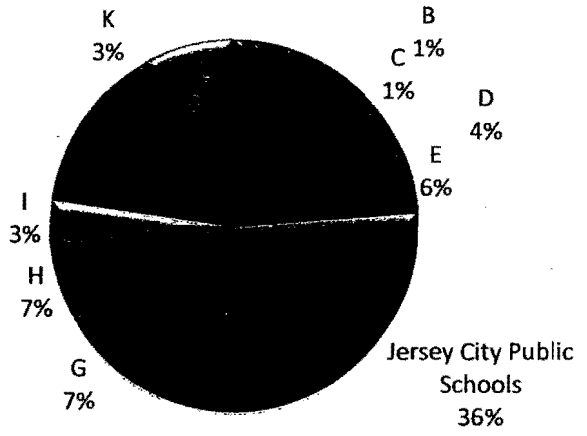
- Elementary school principal – limited to the chief building administrator at a site which housed students through grade eight
- Public school principal in Hudson County, New Jersey – limited to the twelve public school districts identified by the New Jersey State Department of Education's 2010-2011 Hudson County Public School Directory (NJ DOE, 2010); charter schools and private institutions were excluded
- Employed to the office of principal at the time of participation – Limited to active principals; former or retired principals were not eligible to participate

All totaled, there were 130 non-charter, public school principals in the selected region (NJ DOE, 2010). After the elimination of secondary schools, there were eighty-eight principals who were deemed eligible for participation. As I was one of these principals, I removed myself from the list, bringing the total down to eighty-seven principals. Due to the relatively small number of eligible principals, no exclusions were made when recruiting participants, making random sampling unnecessary.

Although all principal-participants were the building-level administrators of urban schools in the same county, the populations of school districts, number of schools per district, and student enrollment of individual schools varied greatly. As of 2011, the eighty-eight principals in the sample population oversaw the

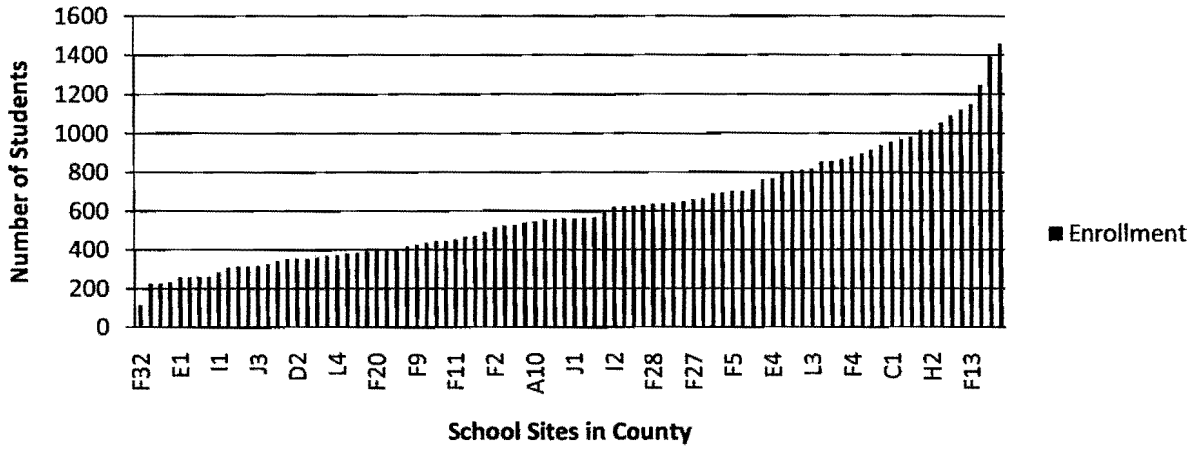
education of 53,620 students. Graph 3.1 shows the breakdown of the sample of principals by district.

Graph 3.1 Distribution of Principals by District



Student enrollment is a factor which may influence a principal's attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs. The sample for this study was representative of schools ranging from student enrollments of 115 to 1458. The distribution of students among the eighty-eight school sites is shown in Graph .2.

Graph 3.2 Student Enrollment



Instrument

The measure utilized in this study is a modified version of the Praisner's *Principals and Inclusion Survey* (PIS) (2000). The content of this instrument was designed to facilitate the investigation of a relationship between the personal characteristics and experience, and the principals' attitudes and perceptions of inclusive learning environments. The PIS was divided into four sections: I. Demographics, II. Training and Experience, III. Attitudes towards Inclusion, and IV. Principals' Knowledge of Placements and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The content and structure of Praisner's questions were reviewed by a panel of special education and administration experts for validity and their ability to measure the possible variables which would affect the principals' attitudes and perceptions. The panel only suggested minor revisions in wording.

For the purposes of this study, modification of the instrument was required in order to remove potentially ambiguous phraseology. For use with this population, the special education terminology was altered, making it consistent with that utilized by the State of New Jersey as per New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC 6A:14). The revised wording was reviewed by a panel of six experts in the fields of special education, educational administration and curriculum in order to ensure that the language used was clear, concise, and in accordance with the terminology of the State of New Jersey. The panel made no changes to the content of the first three sections of the survey, only minor revisions to the format. The fourth section of Praisner's PIS was removed as per

the suggestion of the panel which did not see the need to analyze the principals' perceptions of LRE for the intended purposes of this study. The instrument was called the *Principals and Inclusion Survey Modified for Urban Educators* (PISMUE) for clarity.

Section I: Demographics

Questions in this section were designed to collect basic information about the participants and their schools. There were seven questions in the section. Information collected included the principal's age and gender, the total number of students enrolled in the school, the percentage of the student population with special needs, the range of classifications represented within special needs population, the special education programs and services available on the campus, and the percentage of special needs students educated in inclusive classrooms for a minimum of 75% of the school day. The instrument directs participants to exclude students who have been labeled as "gifted" from their responses about students with special needs.

Section II: Principal's Training and Experience with Special Education

This section addresses the principals' knowledge of special education as derived through formal training, coursework, and experience. There were nine questions in this section. Questions in this section were informed by inclusion and special needs literature. Data collected in this section includes the principal's area of certification as a teacher, years of teaching experience in the

general education and special education settings, years of experience as principal, number of college credits received in the area of special education, and hours of in-service or other training completed on the subject of inclusive practices. Principals were also asked to indicate whether they had been formally trained on academic programming, characteristics of, and behavior management for students with disabilities, special education law and crisis intervention.

Section III: Attitudes

This section was designed to measure principals' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs. A Likert-type scale was used to measure how closely principals identified with each of a set of nine statements. Principals were asked to generalize about teacher qualifications and expectations for teaching the special needs population, effects of inclusion on the general education environment, and placement of students with special needs. They were also questioned about the allocation of financial resources for the integration of special needs students, and special education policy and law.

Data Collection

The following describes the procedures utilized for the collection of study data. A letter was sent via U.S. Postal Service to the superintendents of each of the nine school districts in Hudson County, NJ in order to receive permission to access personnel in their districts. One of the districts required that an extensive

application process be completed before approval to conduct research could be granted. The researcher complied and access was granted. All other district superintendents returned a letter of approval to conduct research within their respective districts.

A packet was sent via U.S. Postal Service to the office of every public elementary school principal currently employed in the twelve school districts in Hudson County, NJ. The packet contained a cover letter, the PISMUE, and a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE). The cover letter outlined the purpose of the research, provided information to satisfy the requirements of informed consent to participate in the research, and explained the procedure for returning the survey. Contact information of the researcher was also provided for the reporting of any problems with the survey or inquiries about the study. The survey was completely confidential and anonymous; no coding of any kind was used by the researcher. Due to the voluntary nature of the study, participants were directed to either complete the PISMUE and return it in the SASE or to discard the incomplete survey. After two weeks, the packet was sent out a second time to provide the sample with another opportunity to complete the survey. The complete anonymity of the instrument made it impossible to isolate which principals in the sample had completed the survey after the first mailing.

The paper-based PISMUE required the researcher to convert collected survey data to a digital format for the purposes of analysis. The researcher opted to utilize a paper survey and manually input data to avoid the recording of

any identifying, personal information from the participants that could have been exposed through the use of an Internet-based survey.

Data Analysis

There were two methods of analysis used in order to answer the research questions presented in this study. First, there was a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVAs were completed to compare the independent variables of the demographic information in Section I and the principals' education and training in Section II of the PISMUE and the dependent variable. The dependent variable was derived from the principals' attitude scores measured in Section III of the survey (Ramirez, 2006). The second method of analysis was a linear regression analysis. This was used to examine the existence of relationships between and within the groups of variables.

Linking Research Questions to Methodology

Table 1 is a matrix of the survey which demonstrates the relationship between the research questions and the four areas outlined in the methodology: Section 1 – Demographic Information, Section II – Training and Experience, Section III – Attitudes toward Inclusion of Students with Special Needs.

Table 1: Survey Matrix

Research Question	Section I: Demographic Information	Section II: Training and Experience	Section III: Attitudes toward Inclusion of Students with Special Needs
1. What are the opinions and attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs?			X
2. How do various demographic indicators relate to urban elementary school principals' attitudes towards inclusion?	X		
3. What is the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude towards inclusion?		X	

Chapter Four

Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the data analyses and study findings are reported. Descriptive statistics, including the frequencies and means for the survey responses are addressed. The coding and calculation of the principals' attitude scores is addressed. Also, the results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and linear regression analysis are reported and discussed

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the attitudes and perceptions of urban elementary school principals in Hudson County, New Jersey toward the inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom environment. This study also focuses on the identification of characteristics which may influence elementary school principals relative to their attitudes towards inclusionary practices and students with disabilities. The characteristics that are addressed are the principals' age and gender, years of experience as a teacher and administrator, the amount of coursework or training completed on the instruction of students with special needs, and knowledge of special education terminology and law.

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs?
2. How do various demographic indicators relate to urban elementary school principals' attitudes towards inclusion?
3. What is the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude towards inclusion?

Methods

In January of 2012, a packet was sent via the U.S. Postal Service to every practicing elementary school principal in Hudson County, New Jersey. The packet contained a cover letter, the *Principals and Inclusion Survey Modified for Urban Educators* (PISMUE), and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. The cover letter provided the information necessary for informed consent, and clearly outlined the instructions for completing and returning the survey. After a two week time period had passed, the researcher sent out a follow-up letter via e-mail to all of the principals requesting that they complete the survey if they had not previously done so. Attached to the e-mail was a document containing the PISMUE, which could be printed and returned to the researcher after completion.

The data collection method was a paper-based version of the PISMUE. The PISMUE was adapted from Praisner's *Principals and Inclusion Survey* (PIS) (2000). The modifications of Praisner's PIS entailed the altering of special education terminology, making it consistent with that utilized by the State of New Jersey as per New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC 6A:14), and the elimination of the fourth section: *Principals' Knowledge of Placements and Least Restrictive Environment.* As the surveys were received, the researcher maintained them in a secure location. Six weeks after the initial contact had been made with the 87 eligible participants, the researcher had received 58 completed surveys. The data was then entered for analysis into the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.

Sample

The population for this study consisted of public elementary school principals in Hudson County, NJ. The initial list of principals was obtained using the New Jersey State Department of Education's 2010-2011 Hudson County Public School Directory (NJ DOE, 2010), but due to status changes within specific school districts, the list was updated utilizing information gathered from district superintendents and district websites. All totaled, Hudson County had 88 practicing public elementary principals. As the researcher was one of these principals, he removed himself from the list, bringing the number down to 87 principals. Due to the relatively small number of eligible principals, no exclusions

were made when recruiting participants, making random sampling unnecessary. Of the 87 principals in the sample, 58 responded. Due to incomplete data in Section III of one survey, it was removed, bringing the total count down to 57 useable surveys.

Research Question 1:
What are the opinions and attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs?

One of the main goals of this study was to determine if principals in Hudson County, NJ have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. The attitudes were measured by utilizing the principals' responses to Section III of the PISMUE. The internal reliability for this section was established by using Cronbach's alpha. The results indicated that $\alpha = .701$, meaning that the survey items in this section are correlated and the survey can be considered reliable.

There were 58 surveys returned to the researcher, however, due to incomplete responses for Section III, one of the surveys was removed. Section III of the survey utilized a Likert-scale with the following responses: (1) Strongly agree, (2) Agree, (3) Uncertain, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree. There were a total of nine questions in this section. There were six negative valence questions for which the researcher used reverse coding when calculating the subjects' attitude scores. The possible score range was 9 to 45. A score of 27 was interpreted as having neutral feelings towards inclusion. Lower scores indicated more negative attitudes, and higher scores indicated more positive

attitudes. Table 4.1 shows the relationship between the numerical score and descriptor for attitude.

Table 4.1 Relating Score to Attitude

Scores	Attitude Descriptor
9-18	Strong Negative
19-26	Moderate Negative
27	Neutral
28-35	Moderate Positive
36-45	Strong Positive

Table 4.2 contains the response frequencies for the first item (Q17) in Section III of the PISMUE. Subjects were asked to respond to, "Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with special needs in a school setting". Only 1.8% of the sample strongly agreed and 5.3% agreed. 8.8% was uncertain. The majority of the sample, almost 85%, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 4.2 Response Frequencies for Q17

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	1	1.8
(2) Agree	3	5.3
(3) Uncertain	5	8.8
(4) Disagree	31	54.4
(5) Strongly Disagree	17	29.9
Total	57	100

Table 4.3 contains the response frequencies for Question 18 (Q18), "Inclusive schools enhance the learning experiences of all students". This was the first of the negative valence items. 79% of the sample either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. 10.5% was uncertain about this item. 7% disagreed with this statement, and 3.5% strongly disagreed.

Table 4.3 Response Frequencies for Q18

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	25	43.9
(2) Agree	20	35.1
(3) Uncertain	6	10.5
(4) Disagree	4	7
(5) Strongly Disagree	2	3.5
Total	57	100

Table 4.4 shows frequencies for Question 19 (Q19), "A good general educator can do a lot to help a student with special needs". 61.4% of the sample strongly agreed and 21.1% agreed. 8.8% of the sample was uncertain. 3.5% disagreed, and 5.3% strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 4.4 Response Frequencies for Q19

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	35	61.4
(2) Agree	12	21.1
(3) Uncertain	5	8.8
(4) Disagree	2	3.5
(5) Strongly Disagree	3	5.3
Total	57	100

The next statement that was presented to the sample read: "In general, students with special needs should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them". Table 4.5 shows the summary of results. While only 3.5% of the sample strongly agreed, 15.8% of the sample agreed and another 15.8% were uncertain. Approximately 65% of the subjects either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 4.5 Response Frequencies for Q20

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	2	3.5
(2) Agree	9	15.8
(3) Uncertain	9	15.8
(4) Disagree	17	29.8
(5) Strongly Disagree	20	35.1
Total	57	100

Table 4.6 addresses frequencies for Question 21 (Q21), "Students without disabilities can benefit from contact with students with special needs". Almost 90% of the subjects either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 3.5% of the participants indicated that they were uncertain. Only one participant (1.8%) disagreed, and three participants (5.3%) strongly disagreed.

Table 4.6 Response Frequencies for Q21

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	31	54.4
(2) Agree	20	35.1
(3) Uncertain	2	3.5
(4) Disagree	1	1.8
(5) Strongly Disagree	3	5.3
Total	57	100

Table 4.7 contains the frequencies for the responses for Question 22 (Q22), "General education classes should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with special needs". Approximately 90% of the subjects either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 3.5% was uncertain and about 7% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 4.7 Response Frequencies for Q22

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	31	54.4
(2) Agree	20	35.1
(3) Uncertain	2	3.5
(4) Disagree	1	1.8
(5) Strongly Disagree	3	5.3
Total	57	100

The summary of results for Question 23 (Q23) is shown in Table 4.8. Q23 stated: "It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with special needs". Slightly more than 7% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, and another 7% were uncertain. 86% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 4.8 Response Frequencies for Q23

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	1	1.8
(2) Agree	3	5.3
(3) Uncertain	4	7
(4) Disagree	26	45.6
(5) Strongly Disagree	23	40.4
Total	57	100

Table 4.9 contains the frequencies for Question 24 (Q24), "Discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with special needs". More than 77% of the sample either strongly agreed or agreed with this item. Almost 9% was uncertain. 14% of the sample disagreed, but no subjects strongly disagreed with the item.

Table 4.9 Response Frequencies for Q24

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	23	40.4
(2) Agree	21	36.8
(3) Uncertain	5	8.8
(4) Disagree	8	14
(5) Strongly Disagree	0	0
Total	57	100

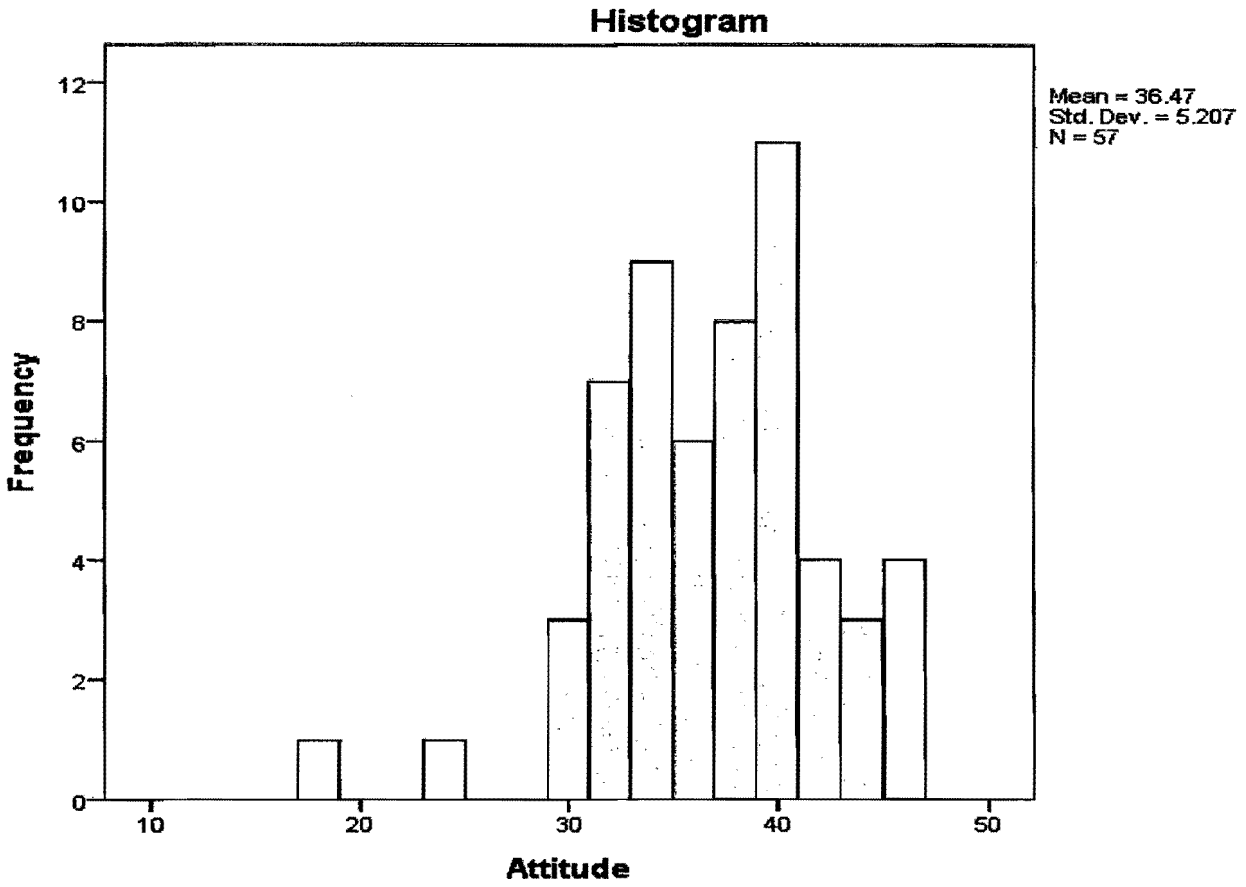
The summary of results for Question 25 (Q25) is located in Table 4.10. The item stated, "It should be policy and/or law that students with special needs are integrated into general education programs and activities". Less than 30% of the sample strongly agreed with the statement, and less than 37% agreed. 17.5% of the sample indicated that it was uncertain. Almost 16% of the sample either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this item.

Table 4.10 Response Frequencies for Q25

Response	n	%
(1) Strongly Agree	17	29.8
(2) Agree	21	36.8
(3) Uncertain	10	17.5
(4) Disagree	6	10.5
(5) Strongly Disagree	3	5.3
Total	57	100

Upon tabulating the attitude scores, the results were first analyzed for frequency (Table 4.11). The scores ranged from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 45 with a mean score for attitude was 36.47. The median score was 37 and the mode was 34. Graph 4.1 shows the distribution of attitude scores.

Graph 4.1 Frequency of Scores for Attitudes towards the Inclusion of Students with Special Needs



The scores indicated that only one subject (1.8%) in this sample had a strong negative attitude towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. One of the subject's scores (1.8%) indicated that the subject had a moderate negative attitude. All totaled, negative attitudes were only associated with 3.6% of the sample. Twenty-two scores, the equivalent of 38.6% of the sample fell into the moderate positive attitude range. Thirty-three scores, or 57.9% of the sample, had strong positive attitudes towards inclusion. In response to Research Question 1, more than 96% of this sample of urban

elementary school principals had positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting.

Table 4.11 Attitudes towards Inclusion

Attitude

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18	1	1.8	1.8	1.8
	24	1	1.8	1.8	3.5
	29	1	1.8	1.8	5.3
	30	2	3.5	3.5	8.8
	31	3	5.3	5.3	14.0
	32	4	7.0	7.0	21.1
	33	2	3.5	3.5	24.6
	34	7	12.3	12.3	36.8
	35	3	5.3	5.3	42.1
	36	3	5.3	5.3	47.4
	37	4	7.0	7.0	54.4
	38	4	7.0	7.0	61.4
	39	5	8.8	8.8	70.2
	40	6	10.5	10.5	80.7
	41	2	3.5	3.5	84.2
	42	2	3.5	3.5	87.7
	43	3	5.3	5.3	93.0
	45	4	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Establishing the attitudes of Hudson County, NJ principals has inherent value to the school districts within that geographic unit. Once established, however, the scores have further value as they serve as the dependent variable to which the independent variables addressed by this study can be compared.

Through analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and regression analyses, the dependent variable, "Attitude", was used to identify the independent variables associated with demographics and principals' education and training. The final goal is the detection of characteristics that may be indicators of attitude.

Research Question 2:
How do various demographic indicators relate to urban elementary school principals' attitudes towards inclusion?

As Hudson County has been labeled 100 percent urban by the U.S. Census Bureau, all participants can be categorized as principals of urban schools. In Section I of the PISMUE, the principals were asked to indicate their gender (Table 4.12) and age range (Table 4.13). With respect to their schools' demographic indicators, principals were asked to indicate an approximate school population (Table 4.14), the percentage of students with IEPs (Table 4.15), an approximate number of students with IEPs that are included in regular education classrooms for at least seventy-five percent of their school day (Table 4.16), the special education classifications which are currently present within the school (Table 4.17), and the special education programs and services which are currently available at the school (Table 4.18).

The survey asked participants to identify their gender (Table 4.12) and age group (Table 4.13). In the sample population, there was exactly the same number of male and female participants. 49.1% of the population was male, and

49.1% was female. One participant, who accounted for 1.8% of the sample, did not respond to this question.

Table 4.12 Gender Frequencies

Descriptors	n	%
Male	28	49.1
Female	28	49.1
No response	1	1.8
Total	57	100

The participants were next asked to identify their age group. No participants indicated that they were under thirty years of age; therefore the study was limited to principals who were thirty-one or older. The 31-40 year olds and the 41-50 year olds accounted for 21.1% and 19.3% of the sample respectively. The 51-60 year olds were the largest group, making up almost half, 49.1%, of the sample. The 61 and older group was the least represented in the sample. Only 10.5% of participants or six people indicated that they identified with this group.

Table 4.13 Age Group

Descriptors	n	%
Years		
20 -30	0	0
31-40	12	21.1
41-50	11	19.3
51-60	28	49.1
61 or older	6	10.5
Total	57	100

The participants were next asked to provide descriptive information about the student populations in their current building assignments. Table 4.14 shows the approximate school populations. The least represented group was that of 0-

250 students, which accounted for only 5.3% of the sample. The 251-500 students group and the 501-750 students group had almost an equal showing, each making up approximately 30% of the sample. The 751-1000 students group and the 1000 or more students group were also comparable as they accounted for 17.5% and 15.8% of the sample, respectively.

Table 4.14 Approximate School Population

Descriptors	n	%
Number of Students		
0 – 250	3	5.3
251 – 500	18	29.8
501 – 750	17	31.6
751 – 1000	10	17.5
1000 or more	9	15.8
Total	57	100

The next descriptor addressed was the approximate percentage of students in the building with IEPs (Table 4.15). One subject, or 1.8% of the sample, did not respond to this question. The most represented group was that of buildings in which 6-10% of the students have IEPs. They accounted for almost 37% of the sample. The second largest group was that of buildings in which 11-15% of students have IEPs. That group made up almost a quarter of the sample. There were equal numbers of buildings that were categorized in the 16-20% and the 21% or more categories. Eight subjects or 14% of the sample indicated their buildings fit into each of these categories.

Table 4.15 Approximate Percentage of Students with IEPs

Descriptors	n	%
0 – 5%	5	8.8
6 – 10%	21	36.8
11 – 15%	14	24.6
16 – 20%	8	14
21% or more	8	14
No Response	1	1.8
Total	57	100

Table 4.16 shows the sample's description of the percentage of inclusion students in their buildings. The subjects were asked to indicate the approximate percentage of special education students who are in the general education setting for at least 75% of the school day. One subject did not respond to this question. Another subject did not select any of the categories provided, but wrote a note on the survey which stated that the question did not apply to the subject's school. Upon further review of the subject's survey it was determined that there were no general education students at the school being described. The largest group of the sample, 38.6%, indicated that 0-20% of students with IEPs were in the general education setting for at least 75% of the day. Only 5.3% of the sample, or 3 participants, indicated that their school represented the 21-40% category. 14% of the sample represented the 61-80% category. The 61-80% category applied to 17.5% of the sample. 21.1% of the sample indicated that 81-100% of their special education students were in inclusive settings.

Table 4.16 Approximate Percentage of Students with IEPs included in Regular Education Classrooms for at Least 75% of the School Day

Descriptors	n	%
0 – 20%	22	38.6
21 – 40%	3	5.3
41 – 60%	8	14
61 – 80%	10	17.5
81 – 100%	12	21.1
Not Applicable	1	1.8
No Response	1	1.8
Total	57	100

Survey question six presented the subjects with a list of all of the special education classifications currently recognized by New Jersey. Participants were asked to identify which classifications are currently present in their schools. The classification which was most frequently identified as present in the subjects' schools was Specific Learning Disability (SLD). 78.9% of the sample or 45 of the 57 participants have students classified with SLD in their schools. Autism also had a very high frequency, as 41 subjects or 71.9% of the sample indicated its presence. Almost 60% of the sample indicated the presence of Other Health Impairment classifications in their schools. Slightly more than half of the sample, 51.6%, have students with Mild Cognitive Impairment. Traumatic Brain Injury had the lowest frequency as it is present in only 7% of participants' schools. Severe Cognitive Impairment and Deaf/Blindness also had low frequencies. Both are present in only 10.5% of the sample. The frequencies and percentages for all classifications are identified in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17 Special Education Classifications Currently Present in the School

Descriptors	n	%
Auditorily Impaired	21	36.8
Autistic	41	71.9
Mild Cognitive Impairment	32	51.6
Moderate Cognitive Impairment	19	33.3
Severe Cognitive Impairment	6	10.5
Preschool Child with a Disability	18	31.6
Other Health Impairment	34	59.6
Traumatic Brain Injury	4	7
Communication Impaired	22	38.6
Emotionally Disturbed	26	45.6
Multiply Disabled	19	33.3
Deaf/Blindness	6	10.5
Orthopedically Impaired	7	12.3
Social Maladjustment	8	14
Specific Learning Disability	45	78.9
Visually Impaired	13	22.8

Following the list of classifications, the subjects were asked to identify the services that were provided to classified students within their buildings. The most widely utilized special education service was identified as Individual Student Aides. 98.2% indicated that this service was provided in their buildings. The next most prevalent services were Inclusion Classrooms and Speech-Language Services which were indicated by 96.5% of the sample. Occupational Therapy and Classroom Aides were also common services, as they are provided in 93% of the schools being described. At the other end of the spectrum, Services for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing are provided by only 15.8% of the sample, which is the equivalent to 9 of the 57 schools. Table 4.18 provides frequencies and percentages for all reported special education programs and services.

Table 4.18 Special Education Programs & Services Currently Available in the School

Descriptors	n	%
Counseling Services for Students	50	87.7
Speech-Language Services	55	96.5
Occupational Therapy	53	93
Classroom Aides	53	93
Inclusion Classrooms	55	96.5
Pull-out Resource Services	47	82.5
Counseling Services for Parents	20	35.1
Services for the Blind/Visually Impaired	14	24.6
Physical Therapy	45	78.9
Individual Student Aides	56	98.2
Self-contained Classrooms	44	77.2
Services for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing	9	15.8

According to the results from Section I of the PISMUE, participants are an equally distributed group of males and females with a mean age between the 41-50 and 51-60 year old age groups. The median and mode for age groups, however, was 51-60 years. The student populations for the schools described by this sample ranged from under 250 to more than 1000 students. The mean, median and mode for this descriptor was 501-750 students. In regard to the percentage of students with IEPs, the range was from 0-100%, with a median response of 11-15%. However, the mean and mode were slightly less, falling into the group which identified 6-10% of the student population as having IEPs. This sample indicated the presence of every classification recognized by NJ within their schools. The most prevalent classification was SLD. Programs and services provided by this sample also included all of those recognized by NJ,

with the most frequent being Individual Student Aides, Inclusion Classrooms, Speech-Language Services, Occupational Therapy and Classroom Aides.

The demographic information was then analyzed using univariante analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The first ANOVA was used to determine if the independent variables of gender, age, student population, percentage of students with IEPs, and percentage of students with IEPs in the inclusion setting could be used as predictors of the dependent variable, attitude. The dependent variable was calculated from the scores for attitude that were attained in Section III of the PISMUE. There were a total of 57 respondents that were included in the analyses. None of these independent variables showed a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable. The summary of results is in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19 Demographic ANOVA Results

Source	dF	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Gender	2	.669	.563	.401
Age	1	.125	.895	.200
Student Population	4	.248	.885	.498
Percentage of Students with IEPs	4	2.075	.474	.892
Percentage of Students with IEPs Included in Regular Education Classrooms for at Least 75% of the School Day	4	2.947	.409	.922

The next ANOVA was used to compare the classifications in the subjects' current school assignments with the dependent variable, attitude. None of the independent variables in this category showed statistical significance as predictors of attitude. The results are summarized in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20 ANOVA for Classifications Represented in Current School Assignment & Attitude

Dependent Variable: Attitude

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	448.491[a]	16	28.031	1.048	.432	.295
Intercept	7370.374	1	7370.374	275.600	.000	.873
Q6.1	67.140	1	67.140	2.511	.121	.059
Q6.2	22.165	1	22.165	.829	.368	.020
Q6.3	27.218	1	27.218	1.018	.319	.025
Q6.4	27.696	1	27.696	1.036	.315	.025
Q6.5	31.041	1	31.041	1.161	.288	.028
Q6.6	29.760	1	29.760	1.113	.298	.027
Q6.7	3.751	1	3.751	.140	.710	.003
Q6.8	2.750	1	2.750	.103	.750	.003
Q6.9	3.742	1	3.742	.140	.710	.003
Q6.10	48.501	1	48.501	1.814	.186	.043
Q6.11	8.077	1	8.077	.302	.586	.007
Q6.12	2.125	1	2.125	.079	.779	.002
Q6.13	95.566	1	95.566	3.573	.066	.082
Q6.14	36.159	1	36.159	1.352	.252	.033
Q6.15	7.428	1	7.428	.278	.601	.007
Q6.16	22.718	1	22.718	.849	.362	.021
Error	1069.720	40	26.743			
Total	77347.000	57				
Corrected Total	1518.211	56				

a. R Squared = .295 (Adjusted R Squared = .014)

The final analysis of demographic indicators was done to examine possible relationships between special education programs and services and attitude. There were independent variables which did show statistically significant relationships with the dependent variable, attitude. Specifically, 7.2: Speech-Language Services and 7.12: Services for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing.

Table 4.21 ANOVA for Special Education Services and Programs & Attitude

Dependent Variable: Attitude

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	480.280[a]	12	40.023	1.643	.117	.325
Intercept	4140.088	1	4140.088	169.904	.000	.806
Q7.1	33.151	1	33.151	1.360	.250	.032
Q7.2	154.889	1	154.889	6.356	.016	.134
Q7.3	9.613	1	9.613	.395	.533	.010
Q7.4	46.657	1	46.657	1.915	.174	.045
Q7.5	8.221	1	8.221	.337	.565	.008
Q7.6	10.398	1	10.398	.427	.517	.010
Q7.7	2.733	1	2.733	.112	.739	.003
Q7.8	36.355	1	36.355	1.492	.229	.035
Q7.9	23.275	1	23.275	.955	.334	.023
Q7.10	2.990	1	2.990	.123	.728	.003
Q7.11	34.373	1	34.373	1.411	.242	.033
Q7.12	108.702	1	108.702	4.461	.041	.098
Error	999.053	41	24.367			
Total	73202.000	54				
Corrected Total	1479.333	53				

a. R Squared = .325 (Adjusted R Squared = .127)

In response to research question 2, the only demographic indicators addressed by this study that have a significant relationship with the sample's attitudes are in the area of Special Education Programs and Services. Speech-

Language Services and Services for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing have a statistically significant effect on the principals' attitude scores.

Research Question 3:
What is the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude towards inclusion?

In section II of the PISMUE, the participating principals were asked to describe their training and experience. Specifically, they were requested to indicate their years of full-time regular education experience (Table 4.22), years of full-time special education experience (Table 4.23), years of elementary principal experience (Table 4.24), an approximate number of special education credits they had received as part of their formal training (Table 4.25), an approximate number of in-service training (Table 4.26) or other training hours on the subject of inclusive practices (Table 4.27). Subjects were also asked to identify from a provided list of topics those for which they had received formal training (Table 4.28) and whether they are certified in special education (Table 4.29). Last, subjects were asked to specify if their school has a specific plan for dealing with crises involving students with special needs (Table 4.30).

Table 4.22 shows the frequencies and percentages for the subjects' responses to Question 8: years of full time regular education teaching experience. Of the fifty-seven responses to this question, only four subjects, 7% of the sample, had no years of teaching experience in a regular education classroom. Upon review of the survey data, it was determined that these

individuals had spent the entirety of their teaching careers as educators of children with special needs. The 1-6 year group and the 13-18 year group had similar results with frequencies of nine and ten subjects respectively. The 7-12 year group was the most frequent of all the responses (eighteen), but not significantly different than the 19 or more years group which had sixteen responses.

Table 4.22 Years of Full Time Regular Education Teaching Experience

Descriptors	n	%
Years		
0	4	7
1-6	9	15.8
7-12	18	31.6
13-18	10	17.5
19 or more	16	28.1
Total	57	100

The next variable that was addressed was the subjects' years of full time special education teaching experience (Table 4.23). The overwhelming majority, 66.7% of the sample had no years of experience. Of the remaining nineteen subjects, eight indicated that they had 1-6 years, five had 7-12 years, three had 13-18 years and three had 19 or more years. Only one third of this sample had teaching experience in the special education setting.

Table 4.23 Years of Full Time Special Education Teaching Experience

Descriptors	n	%
Years		
0	38	66.7
1-6	8	14
7-12	5	8.8
13-18	3	5.3
19 or more	3	5.3
Total	57	100

After providing data on their teaching experience, the subjects were asked to indicate the number of years of experience they have as elementary school principals (Table 4.24). Thirty subjects, which was more than half of the sample, selected the descriptor of 0-5 years of experience. Nearly 20% of the subjects indicated they had between six and ten years of experience. Approximately 10% have been principals for eleven to fifteen years. 8.8% selected the 16-20 years group. Three principals (5.3%) indicated they have twenty-one or more years of experience. Two subjects (3.5%) did not respond to this question.

Table 4.24 Years of Elementary Principal Experience

Descriptors	n	%
Years		
0-5	30	52.6
6-10	11	19.3
11-15	6	10.5
16-20	5	8.8
21 or more	3	5.3
No Response	2	3.5
Total	57	100

Next, the sample was asked about their formal training in special education. Each subject was directed to provide an approximate number of

credits received in this area. Table 4.25 shows the summary of frequencies for this question. The most frequent response was zero credits (40.4%). Approximately 21% of the subjects identified with the 1-9 credits selection. 12.3% of the sample chose 10-15 credits. 7% indicated it had 16-21 credits. A response of 22 or more credits was provided by 17.5% of the participants. One person did not respond to this question.

Table 4.25 Number of Special Education Credits in Formal Training

Descriptors	n	%
Credits		
0	23	40.4
1-9	12	21.1
10-15	7	12.3
16-21	4	7
22 or more	10	17.5
No Response	1	1.8
Total	57	100

In-service training is provided by most school districts in order to assist principals in furthering their skills and knowledge base. The PISMUE specifically asked the sample of principals to indicate the number of hours of in-service training they had received in the area of inclusive practices (Table 4.26). More than 10% indicated they had received zero hours of training. 26.3% stated they had received between one and eight hours of training. 17.5% selected the option of 9-16 hours. 8.8% chose 17-24 hours. The most frequent response, given by one third (33.3%) of the sample, was 25 or more hours. Two subjects did not respond to this item.

Table 4.26 Number of In-Service Training Hours on Inclusive Practices

Descriptors	n	%
Hours		
0	6	10.5
1-8	15	26.3
9-16	10	17.5
17-24	5	8.8
25 or more	19	33.3
No Response	2	3.5
Total	57	100

School administrators often choose to improve themselves through the attendance of training seminars and workshops. Question 13 of the PISMUE asked the subjects to provide an approximate number of hours spent in such training on the topic of inclusive practices (Table 4.27). More than 12% of respondents indicated they had zero hours. Nearly 30% had 1-8 hours or training. 17.5% responded with 9-16 hours. Slightly more than 12% chose 17-24 hours. 28.1% indicated they had received 25 or more training hours.

Table 4.27 Number of Other Training Hours in Inclusive Practices

Descriptors	n	%
Hours		
0	7	12.3
1-8	17	29.8
9-16	10	17.5
17-24	7	12.3
25 or more	16	28.1
Total	57	100

Question 14 of the survey provided the participants with a list of academic topics relating to special education. The subjects were asked to indicate which, if any, had been addressed in their formal training (Table 4.28). The subjects were directed to identify only topics which accounted for at least 10% of the content of

a course or workshop. Special Education Law was identified by more than 77% of the sample. Nearly 72% of the sample selected the topic Characteristics of Students with Disabilities. Over 63% of the sample received training on Behavior Management for Students with Disabilities. 61.4% indicated Academic Programming for Students with Disabilities. Almost 60% of the sample received formal training in crisis intervention.

Table 4.28 Topics Addressed in Formal Training

Descriptors	n	%
Academic programming for students with disabilities	35	61.4
Characteristics of students with disabilities	41	71.9
Behavior management for students with disabilities	36	63.2
Special education law	44	77.2
Crisis intervention	34	59.6

Table 4.29 shows the summary of responses to Question 15: Are you certified in special education? More than 80% of subjects stated they are not certified in special education. Eleven subjects (19.3%) stated they are certified in special education.

Table 4.29 Special Education Certification

Descriptors	n	%
Certified		
No	46	80.7
Yes	11	19.3
Total	57	100

The last question in Section II of the PISMUE asked the sample if their schools have a specific plan to deal with crises involving students with special needs. 87.7% of the participants responded affirmatively. Only 12.3% of the subjects' schools do not have a specific plan. Table 4.30 shows the results of this item.

Table 4.30 Specific Plan to Deal with Crises Involving Students with Special Needs

Descriptors	n	%
Plan		
No	7	12.3
Yes	50	87.7
Total	57	100

After descriptive statistics for Section II of the PISMUE were completed, the researcher attempted to determine if any of the independent variables addressed regarding principals' education and training could be used as predictors of attitude towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. The first ANOVA was performed using the independent variables: years of full-time regular education experience, years of full-time special education experience and years of elementary principal experience (Table 4.31). None of these variables showed a statistically significant relationship to the dependent variable, attitude.

Table 4.31: ANOVA Results for Experience & Attitude

Source	dF	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Years of full-time regular education experience	4	.279	.889	.048
Years of full-time special education experience	4	.899	.481	.140
Years of elementary principal experience	5	1.317	.293	.230

The next data analyzed were the independent variables of the approximate number of special education credits received in formal training, approximate number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices and the approximate number of other training hours in inclusive practices. An ANOVA was done to compare these variables to the dependent variable, attitude. None of these variables proved to be predictors of attitude. The summary of results in located in Table 4.32.

Table 4.32 ANOVA Results for Special Education Credits/Training Hours & Attitude

Source	dF	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Approximate number of special education credits received in formal training	5	.161	.974	.035
Approximate number of in-service training hours in inclusive practices	5	.724	.613	.141
Approximate number of other training hours in inclusive practices	4	.435	.782	.073

The researcher next performed an ANOVA to determine if topics addressed in the subjects' formal training could serve as predictors of attitude.

The summary of results is located in Table 4.33. None of the topics appear to be predictors of a principal's attitude towards inclusion.

Table 4.33 ANOVA Results for Topics Addressed in Formal Training & Attitude

Source	dF	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Academic programming for students with disabilities	1	.316	.577	.008
Characteristics of students with disabilities	1	.456	.503	.012
Behavior management for students with disabilities	1	.201	.656	.005
Special education law	1	1.130	.294	.028
Crisis intervention	1	.382	.540	.010

A linear regression analysis was then performed to see if there were any significant relationships among the topics addressed in formal training correspondent to attitude (Table 4.34). The results of this analysis did show significant relationships when the topics of behavior management and crisis intervention were reported in combination and also when special education law and crisis intervention were reported in combination. Within this sample, training in these areas appears to be a predictor of more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q14.1 * Q14.2	8.205	1	8.205	.369	.547
Q14.1 * Q14.3	1.108	1	1.108	.050	.825
Q14.1 * Q14.4	.000	0	.	.	.
Q14.1 * Q14.5	14.697	1	14.697	.660	.421
Q14.2 * Q14.3	12.019	1	12.019	.540	.467
Q14.2 * Q14.4	29.649	1	29.649	1.332	.255
Q14.2 * Q14.5	39.883	1	39.883	1.792	.188
Q14.3 * Q14.4	.492	1	.492	.022	.883
Q14.3 * Q14.5	124.163	1	124.163	5.577	.023
Q14.4 * Q14.5	149.056	1	149.056	6.696	.014

The last two variables that were analyzed were special education certification and plans to deal with crises involving students with special needs (Table 4.35). In reference to special education certification, the variable appeared not to have a significant effect on the principals' attitudes. The second independent variable, a plan for crises, was not considered to be statistically significant, but there was a tendency for principals with such plans to have more positive attitudes. However, the frequencies for the results in both of these items were both heavily weighted in one direction, making any generalizations unreliable.

Table 4.35 ANOVA Results for special Education Certification, Crisis Plan & Attitude

Source	dF	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Special education certification	1	.833	.365	.015
Plan for crises involving students with special needs	1	3.393	.071	.059

The third research question addressed the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude towards inclusion. After analyzing the data, the researcher was unable to identify any variables derived from the data in Section III of the PISMUE with a significant effect on the principals' attitudes.

Chapter 5

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study's findings, and discusses their implications. The chapter is organized to include a summary, an analysis and discussion of how the findings relate to the research questions and to the literature review. The researcher also discusses the implications of the findings for urban school districts and educational systems and makes recommendations for areas requiring further investigation.

Summary

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) prohibited discriminatory educational practices against the disabled. It guaranteed all children the right of equal access to a free, appropriate public education. Nearly forty years later, there is still debate over what is the appropriate educational environment for students with special needs. The law clearly states that it is the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) that dictates the placement, accommodations and modifications that are required for the proper education of the classified child, but various studies have indicated that the success of the educational program is contingent upon the school's climate and culture. Research dating back to the 1980s suggests that the principal is the single most influential person in shaping a school's climate and culture and

positive teacher attitude towards students and school practices (Washington III, 2006; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Praisner, 2000).

Special education issues and implementation of a successful inclusion program are added to an already extensive list of responsibilities principals have. It is the aim of this study to increase the body of knowledge that exists on which factors may be predictors of principals' attitudes and therefore contribute to the synthesis of climates and cultures which nurture students classified with disabilities in New Jersey's public elementary schools. This study identified the attitudes of a sample of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusive environment. School demographics, principal demographics, training and experience were all examined as variables that contribute to the formation of individual attitudes.

Analysis and Discussion of Research

The population examined in this study consisted of public elementary school principals in urban Hudson County, NJ. In a partial replication of studies by Praisner (2000), Ramirez (2006) and Vasquez (2010) on principals' attitudes towards inclusive school environments, the researcher modified Praisner's *Principals and Inclusion Survey* to better answer the research questions of this study and to mirror the educational jargon of NJ. Using the survey, the researcher collected information from fifty-eight principals and used the data address three main research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs?
2. How do various demographic indicators relate to urban elementary school principals' attitudes towards inclusion?
3. What is the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude towards inclusion?

Research Question One

Section III of the instrument was utilized to formulate a score that represented the principals' overall attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. The results indicate that in response to Question One, "What are the attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs?", the sample had very inclusive attitudes towards students with special needs. Over 96% of the principals self-reported moderate to strong positive attitudes, reaffirming prior research (Ramirez, 2006; Smith, 2011) in which the majority of subjects were also found to have positive attitudes.

Unlike other studies, however, this population did not include significant numbers of participants that had relatively neutral (Hunter, 2006; Praisner, 2000) or negative attitudes (Livingston, Reed, & Good, 2001; Choi, 2008) towards the inclusion of students with special needs. There were only two subjects in this sample who reported negative attitudes, and only one fell into the strong negative attitude range.

From a chronological standpoint, more recent studies have shown the development of more inclusive attitudes than their predecessors. This is not to say that negative attitudes have been erased, but as school districts become more accustomed to creating inclusive classroom environments, administrators appear to be adapting their leadership styles and knowledge to better support their teaching staff, students and parents. Praisner (2000), Ramirez (2006) and Smith (2011) correlated positive principal attitude with the promotion of inclusion; the success of an inclusive school is contingent upon the acts and attitudes of the adults charged with its management and implementation.

Since its inception, inclusion has been a topic that has many educators divided, some firmly supporting it and stating that it enhances the education of all children and others feeling it does not benefit either the general education or special education child. The results of this study indicate that almost 90% of this sample of urban principals firmly believed inclusive schools benefit all children. However, only 79% felt there were academic benefits. Salend describes inclusion "as an attempt to establish collaborative, supportive, and nurturing communities of learning that are based on giving all students the services and accommodations they need to learn, as well as respecting and learning for each other's individual differences" (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003 p24). This description of inclusion mirrors the general opinion of the study participants; while the exact academic benefits of heterogeneous grouping are questionable, there are positive psycho-social outcomes associated with inclusion. Supporters of inclusion emphasize the importance of students learning to accept diversity

among their peers and others in the community that they have to interact with on a daily basis.

Severity of disability seems to be a variable which heavily influences a principal's attitude towards the benefits of an inclusive setting. Supporters of inclusion have found inclusive programs to have a more positive impact on student achievement and learning for students with mild disabilities when compared to segregated settings (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003 p25). The results of this study indicate that the urban principals have similar perceptions of placement and academic expectations based on the child's classification. Although the survey was wholly quantitative, some of the subjects felt the need to qualify their Likert selections with notes next to various statements. The general theme of the comments was that attitude directly related to the disability and its severity.

Opponents of inclusion believe that general education teachers are not thoroughly or properly trained to handle children classified with disabilities. In response to the statement, "A good general educator can do a lot to help a student with special needs", almost 9% of the study sample was uncertain, and another 9% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Though more than 80% of the sample had positive responses to this item, it is questionable why an administrator would have a strong negative feeling about the interaction of a general education teacher and a child with special needs. In a 2011 study, Smith presented principals with the same statement and concluded almost 93% had positive responses and only 3% were negative. Without interviewing the subjects,

the motives behind their responses are unclear. Opponents of inclusion have verbalized that teachers have a difficult time working collaboratively, and that inclusion negatively impacts the time a teacher has to work with all the students in the class. Opponents also believe that there is a lack of evidence which confirms that inclusion benefits students with disabilities academically and socially. They do not view the relationship between administrators and teachers as one in which the teachers are provided with the support required to create successful inclusive environments (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003 p25).

There were two statements that were presented to the subjects, placement and policy, which produced relatively low Likert scores. One statement which provoked negative response said, "In general, students with special needs should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them". Out of 285 possible points, the principals gave this a raw score of 215, which translated into a 66% positive response. When presenting the same statement to a different population, Smith (2011) reported that his sample produced more than a 90% positive response. Comparing the overall 96% positive, inclusive attitude of Hudson County, NJ principals to the only 66% positive response to this item raises the question of how the principals interpreted "special classes/schools". A child's IEP dictates placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The IEP also sets forth the accommodations and modifications required for the child's success. In my opinion, principals in this sample may have interpreted "special classes" to

include inclusion rooms with a special educator present to make accommodations and modifications.

The most negatively scored statement in the study said, "It should be policy and/or law that students with special needs are integrated into general education programs and activities". Approximately 34% of the sample had a neutral or negative response. While this data is congruent to Smith's (2011) findings, the data stands out when compared to the total attitude scores of this study in which no one produced a neutral score, and less than 4% of the sample was negative. Accountability for complying with policies and laws means greater responsibilities for already overburdened school administrators. The Individuals with Disabilities Act protects children with special needs, but also calls for the inclusion of special education students in district and state level assessments. The punitive consequences associated with failure to comply with the requirements of No Child Left Behind have indubitably tarnished many educators' perceptions of students with special needs.

Research Question Two

The second research question measured how various demographic indicators relate to urban elementary school principals' attitudes towards inclusion. The demographics included information about the principals and information about their schools. Principals were asked to provide their gender, age range, years of general education and special education teaching

experience, and years of elementary principal experience. They were also asked the population size of their current school assignment, the percentage of students with IEPs, the percentage of students with IEPs in inclusion settings for at least 75% of the school day, which special education classifications are present in their school, and which special education programs or services are offered to their students with special needs.

The results of the analyses of these demographics indicators showed that there were no statistically significant relationships between the principals' gender, age, or professional experience and attitude. These findings support the results of studies by Praisner (2000), Ramirez (2006), Vazquez (2010) and Smith (2011) in which demographics were not found to be predictors of attitude towards the inclusion of students with special needs. Also in support of prior research, the results also failed to demonstrate a significant relationship between school population, percentage of students with IEPs, percentage of students in the inclusion setting for at least 75% of the day, or classifications present in the school and attitude.

The one variable which showed a statistically significant relationship with attitude was special education programs and services. This finding supports the studies of Ramirez (2006) who found two programs and services with significant relationships to attitude. In Ramirez' study, it was determined that Texas principals with knowledge of a program called Content Mastery (CM) and of "other inclusion" reported more positive attitudes than those principals without

knowledge of those programs. CM is an educational program that is widely used in Texas in order to provide support and modification to struggling students. "Other inclusion" was an option provided by Ramirez to refer to any programs or services that were not specially identified by the survey. Neither CM nor "other inclusion" were options provided to the subjects in this study of NJ principals.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the programs and services showed there was a relationship between principals whose schools offered speech-language services and services for the deaf/hard of hearing and less inclusive attitude. After further analysis of these services, it was noted that fifty-five of the fifty-seven principals (96.5% of the sample) were charged with schools in which speech/language services are offered. 100% of the principals with negative attitudes reported having speech-language services. There were only nine principals out of fifty-seven (15.8% of the sample) who reported having services for the deaf/hard of hearing. 50% of the principals with negative attitudes offered these services. This sample was relatively homogeneous, as there were only two principals in the entire sample who reported negative attitudes. Due to the underrepresentation of negative attitudes in this sample, it cannot be conclusively stated that either one of these services is a predictor of attitude.

The data did allow for some generalizations to be made about the sample. The participants in this study were an equal distribution of males and females with a mean age between the 41-50 and 51-60 year old age groups. The student populations for the schools described by this sample ranged from under 250 to

more than 1000 students. However, the mean was a school population of 501 to 750 students. In regard to the percentage of students with IEPs, the range was from 0-100%, with a mean identified as 6-10% of the student population. This sample indicated the presence of every classification recognized by NJ within their schools. The most prevalent classification was Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Programs and services provided by this sample also included all of those recognized by NJ, with the most frequent being Individual Student Aides, Inclusion Classrooms, Speech-Language Services, Occupational Therapy and Classroom Aides.

There were common demographic factors that were shared by all participants, but not specifically addressed by the survey questions. All participants were urban, public elementary school principals from Hudson County, NJ. When selecting the sample, the researcher made no exclusions and sent the survey to each of the county's eighty-seven principals. Fifty-seven surveys with usable data were returned, meaning that 65.5% of the county's principals were represented in this study. The overall attitude scores indicate that 96% of the sample had a positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting. Using this information, it was determined that 63.2% of Hudson County principals self-reported positive attitudes towards inclusion, 2.3% self-reported negative attitudes and 34.5% of the county elected not to participate. Although 34.5% of the county did not report a score, the majority of the county's principals (63.2%) do hold positive attitudes towards inclusion. Due to a lack of prior research on the differences among the

attitudes of urban, rural and suburban principals towards the inclusion of students with special needs, the researcher cannot generalize about the attitudes of all urban principals, but can simply note the inclusive nature of this sample.

Research Question Three

In response to Research Question Three, "What is the relationship between an urban elementary school principal's training and experience and his attitude towards inclusion?", the results indicate that there are no significant relationships between principals' professional experience and attitude, but there are significant relationships between specific facets of training and attitude in the sample. The data corroborates the findings of Smith (2011), but contrast with those of earlier studies by Praisner (200) and Ramirez (2006) in which there was a positive correlation between principals' years of experience as a teacher of special education and attitude towards inclusion.

In this study, there was a notable trend relating to years of general education teaching experience, special education teaching experience and years of experience as an elementary principal. In reference to the two areas of teaching experience, the most positive attitudes for both general and special education experience were associated with the thirteen to eighteen year range, which was then followed by a drop in the attitude reported by principals with nineteen of more years of teaching experience. Similarly, the most positive attitudes in

relation to years of elementary principal experience were demonstrated by those who indicated they had between sixteen and twenty years of experience. This was again followed by a drop in the attitudes of those who reported twenty-one or more years of experience. This trend may be attributed to the loss of idealism associated with burnout after years of coping with the high-stress academic environment (Kyriakou, 2001; Esteve, 2000).

While there were no significant relationships found to exist between the number of education credits, hours of training or area of certification and attitude, the results indicated that there was a relationship between the topics studied and attitude. The subjects were asked to indicate which of the following topics had been included as at least 10% of the content of their formal training:

(1) Academic programming for students with disabilities

(2) Characteristics of students with disabilities

(3) Behavior management class for students with disabilities

(4) Special education law

(5) Crisis intervention

Alone, none of the topics was a predictor of attitude. The results for the linear regression model showed that in combination, behavior management and crisis intervention, and special education law and crisis intervention were shown to be predictors of positive attitude. Neither being certified in special education nor having a crisis intervention plan in place were predictors of attitude. These findings differ from other studies in which the topic that was found to have a

relationship to attitude was interventions to assist teachers with academic programming in the inclusive environment (Ramirez, 2006).

Implications

The main objective of this study was to identify the attitudes of urban elementary school principals towards the inclusion of student with special needs in the general education setting. Positive, inclusive attitudes are prevalent in Hudson County, NJ. Even though the sample of this study represented a broad range of demographic indicators, the common thread binding these principals was the urbanicity of the schools with which they are charged. As there were no other demographic indicators that proved to be predictors of attitude, it is implicit that this urban center either attracts or cultivates administrators who are accepting of students with special needs.

In other studies, the findings showed significant relationships between specific training topics and positive attitude. The researcher in this study found the combinations of training in the areas of behavior management and crisis intervention or special education law and crisis intervention to be predictors of positive attitude. There is no doubt that urban principals are routinely challenged by issues of behavior management and crises involving students with special needs. Being able to handle such matters quickly, effectively and with confidence would explain the more positive attitudes associated with principals who received such training. Every educator will inevitably come in contact with

students with special needs. The study results imply the need for colleges and universities to be proactive through the integration of special education topics into the curriculum of teacher and administrator training programs.

Although the total hours of training appear to have no effect on attitude, the researcher noted that generally, principals who had received little or no training in special education related topics tended to have negative or lower positive attitude scores than those who had received training in a greater variety of topics. The majority of subjects reported having received training in various topics, with the most popular being the characteristics of students with disabilities and special education law. Knowledge of these two areas would most likely reduce the stress related to principals' insecurities about their abilities to judge the proper placement of students with special needs and the services which are required by federal law. By not having to defer to their schools' Child Study Teams for this type of information, the principals would appear more competent in the eyes of the staff and could make decisions with greater levels of confidence.

This study showed no relationship between attitude and special education certification, educational credits in special education, the quantity of training hours, years of experience nor the presence of various special education services within the schools. Principals who had training that directly related to practices that improve job performance and lead to the smoother daily operation of the school had more inclusive attitudes towards students with special needs. As special needs populations within urban centers continue to increase,

principals will continue to require training sessions on the practical application of techniques for working with this population.

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study focused solely on the attitudes of a small demographic of urban principals, future research should be done to expand upon the findings of this study. Not only is there a lack of data on the attitudes of urban principals towards inclusion across NJ, but also nationwide. Furthermore, there have been no studies comparing the attitudes of principals or the successful implementation of inclusive programs among urban, suburban and rural schools.

Having received various unsolicited comments from the participants in this study, it was acknowledged that there is a need to expand upon this study with qualitative measures. Whether the best format would be follow-up interviews, the provision of space on the instrument in which subjects can comment or explain their selections, or case studies of urban administrators is unclear. Special education is a topic that causes emotional responses from many educators and it is difficult to accurately judge a broad range of emotion with a Likert scale.

An area that was not taken into account by this study was the variables within the individual school districts in relationship to the principals' attitudes. School populations and other building demographics were recorded through this research, but district population, the number of schools, the number of

supervisors of special education and the relationship between central office staff and principals were not addressed. Furthermore, this study was limited to public elementary schools. Charter schools, parochial and private institutions and high schools were not included in this study. Analysis of all of these variables could potentially provide further insight into attitudes towards special education.

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Appendix: Instrument

Principals and Inclusion Survey Modified for Urban Educators

The purpose of this survey is to determine the opinions of urban principals toward the inclusive environment and to gather information about the types of training and experience that principals have. There are no right or wrong answers so please address the questions to the best of your knowledge and provide us with what **you believe**.

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SECTION I- Demographic Information

The following information will only be used to describe the population being studied (*Do not include gifted*).

Please circle the appropriate answer.

1. Your age:

(1) 20-30 (2) 31-40 (3) 41-50 (4) 51-60 (5) 61 or older

2. Gender:

(1) Male (2) Female

3. Approximate number of students in your building:

(1) 0-250 (2) 251-500 (3) 501-750 (4) 751-1000 (5) 1000 or more

4. Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building:

(1) 0-5% (2) 6-10% (3) 11-15% (4) 16-20% (5) 21% or more

5. Approximate number of students with IEPs in your building that are included in regular education classrooms for at least 75% of their school day:

(1) 0-20% (2) 21-40% (3) 41-60% (4) 61-80% (5) 81-100%

6. Please check the boxes which indicate the following classifications represented in your current school assignment.

- □ Auditorily Impaired
- □ Autistic
- □ Mild Cognitive Impairment
- □ Moderate Cognitive Impairment
- □ Severe Cognitive Impairment
- □ Preschool Child with a Disability
- □ Other Health Impairment
- □ Traumatic Brain Injury
- □ Communication Impaired
- □ Emotionally Disturbed
- □ Multiply Disabled
- □ Deaf/Blindness
- □ Orthopedically Impaired
- □ Social Maladjustment
- □ Specific Learning Disability
- □ Visually Impaired

7. Please check the boxes which indicate the following special education programs and services currently present at your current school assignment.

- □ Counseling Services for Students
- □ Speech-Language Services
- □ Counseling Services for Parents
- □ Services for the Blind/Visually Impaired

□ Occupational Therapy	□ Physical Therapy
□ Classroom Aides	□ Individual Student Aides
□ Inclusion Classrooms	□ Self-contained Classrooms
□ Pull-out Resource Services	□ Services for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing

SECTION II- Training and Experience

Please circle the appropriate answer.

8. Years of full-time regular education teaching experience:

(1) 0 (2) 1-6 (3) 7-12 (4) 13-18 (5) 19 or more

9. Years of full-time special education teaching experience:

(1) 0 (2) 1-6 (3) 7-12 (4) 13-18 (5) 19 or more

10. Years of elementary principal experience:

(1) 0-5 (2) 6-10 (3) 11-15 (4) 16-20 (5) 21 or more

11. Approximate number of special education **credits** in your formal training:

(1) 0 (2) 1-9 (3) 10-15 (4) 16-21 (5) 22 or more

12. Approximate number of in-service training **hours** in inclusive practices:

(1) 0 (2) 1-8 (3) 9-16 (4) 17-24 (5) 25 or more

13. Approximate number of other training **hours** in inclusive practices:

(1) 0 (2) 1-8 (3) 9-16 (4) 17-24 (5) 25 or more

14. Please check the boxes that indicate which items were included in your formal training such as courses, workshops, and/or significant portions of courses **(10% of content or more)**.

□ (1) Academic programming for students with disabilities
□ (2) Characteristics of students with disabilities
□ (3) Behavior management class for students with disabilities
□ (4) Special education law
□ (5) Crisis intervention

15. Are you certified in special education?

(1) No (2) Yes

16. Does your school have a specific plan to deal with crises involving students with special needs?

(1) No (2) Yes

SECTION III- Attitudes toward Inclusion of Students with Special Needs

Please mark your response to each item using the following scale:

(1) Strongly Agree (2) Agree (3) Uncertain (4) Disagree (5) Strongly Disagree

17. Only teachers with extensive special education experience can be expected to deal with students with special needs in a school setting. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐
18. Inclusive schools enhance the learning experiences of all students. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐
19. A good general educator can do a lot to help a student with special needs. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐
20. In general, students with special needs should be placed in special classes/schools specifically designed for them. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐
21. Students without disabilities can benefit from contact with students with special needs. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐
22. General education classes should be modified to meet the needs of all students including students with special needs. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐
23. It is unfair to ask/expect general education teachers to accept students with special needs. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐
24. Discretionary financial resources should be allocated for the integration of students with special needs. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐
25. It should be policy and/or law that students with special needs are integrated into general education programs and activities. 1☐ 2☐ 3☐ 4☐ 5☐