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A Dissertation Presented to  
the Faculty of the  
Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching and Learning Program of  
Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirement for the Degree Education Doctorate

By Nicole M. Wack

March 29, 2021

This Dissertation for the Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching  
and Learning Degree

By Nicole M. Wack

has been approved on behalf of the College of Education

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March 29, 2021

Bridging barriers in inclusive classrooms: Avenues for communication between general  
education teachers and families

By

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Kutztown University of PA, 2021

Kutztown, Pennsylvania

Directed by Dr. Mark Wolfmeyer

Family-teacher communications have proven beneficial for the academic, social and behavioral success of students at all levels. Research studies have specifically examined this dynamic as it relates to general education teachers and general education families, teachers and families at the primary level, and special education teachers and special education families. However, there is minimal research regarding communication strategies between families of students with disabilities (FSWDs) and general education teachers of inclusive classrooms (GETINs) at the high school level. In order to address this gap in the literature, this action research study investigated the following research questions: 1) To what extent do the perspectives of GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level reflect the social and/or medical models of disability? 2) How do the dynamics of an inclusive classroom impact the communication barriers faced between teachers and families? 3) How can certain avenues and styles of communication foster positive collaboration between GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level? Using Disability Studies as the theoretical framework, this research was conducted using an interpretivist explanatory sequential mixed-methodology approach. Participants consisted of forty FSWDs and thirty-six GETINs. Data was collected using Likert scale surveys, open-ended response

questions, and focus group meetings. Both integrative and convergent methods were used to analyze the data. The results of the study confirmed that much of the literature regarding family-teacher communications is applicable and relevant to an area not previously studied, the high school inclusive classroom. This study filled a gap and added to the literature by identifying dynamics that are unique to the inclusive classroom and by providing steps to improve those dynamics. This study also determined specific styles and avenues of communication that GETINs and FSWDs can use to not only collaborate for students, but also with students.

*Keywords: Disability Studies, communication, inclusive classroom, high school, mixed-methods, general education teacher, families of students with disabilities, special education, interpretivist, disability narrative*

Signature of Investigator Nicole Mack Date 3/29/2021

**Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Sienna. I reached for my dreams. Always reach for yours, too. I love you more than life itself.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Puzzle of Practice .....	1
I Can't Find the Time.....	2
The Spark that Ignited this Study.....	4
Inclusion is a Hot Topic .....	5
The Move to Inclusion .....	8
Definition of Terms.....	10
Research Questions .....	11
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	12
Inclusion and the Growing Diversity of the General Education Classroom.....	13
A Strategy for General Educators .....	16
A Need for Time .....	17
Other Barriers to Communication.....	19
Personal barriers to communication.....	19
Accessibility barriers to communication. ....	21
The High School Challenge .....	22
The Disconnect between General Educators and FSWDs .....	23
Disability Models.....	24
Medical model of disabilities.....	24
Social model of disabilities. ....	25
A middle ground. ....	26
The Benefits of Family-Teacher Communication .....	27



Even in high school, collaboration matters.....	27
Inclusion and a new family-teacher dynamic.....	28
Chapter Three: Research Design .....	29
Research Setting.....	30
Research Methodology .....	30
Research paradigm.....	32
Quantitative data collection.....	34
Qualitative data collection.....	35
Validity and reliability of data collection.....	36
Chapter 4: Data Analysis .....	39
Research Problem .....	40
Research Participants .....	40
Quantitative Research Participatory Sample .....	41
Qualitative Research Participatory Sample .....	44
Data Collection & Analysis .....	46
Quantitative Data Collection & Analysis .....	48
Qualitative Data Collection & Analysis .....	52
Results of Data Analysis.....	56
Research Question 1: Disability Models in the Inclusive Classroom.....	57
Research Question 2: Dynamics of the Inclusive Classroom.....	63
Research Question 3: Fostering Positive Collaboration .....	77
Chapter 5-Discussion of Results.....	88

Results as they relate to the literature .....	90
How Disability Models Manifest in an Inclusive Classroom Setting.....	91
The Barriers that FSWDs and GETINs Face .....	94
Avenues that Traverse the Gaps to Communication in High School Inclusive Classrooms	96
The Path Forward.....	97
GETIN Education and Training .....	98
FSWD Workshops & Mentorships .....	99
Student Advocacy .....	101
Disability Narratives .....	103
Limitations of this Study.....	105
Further Research .....	106
Spreading the Message .....	107
Conclusion .....	108
References.....	111
Appendix A.....	123
Appendix B .....	129
Appendix C .....	134
Appendix D.....	136
Appendix E .....	137
Appendix F.....	138
Appendix G.....	140

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 .....	42
Table 2 .....	43
Table 3 .....	45
Table 4 .....	47
Table 5 .....	49
Table 6 .....	54
Table 7 .....	55
Table 8 .....	55
Table 9 .....	58
Table 10 .....	58
Table 11 .....	62
Table 12 .....	64
Table 13 .....	64
Table 14 .....	65
Table 15 .....	67
Table 16 .....	69
Table 17 .....	74
Table 18 .....	76
Table 19 .....	78
Table 20 .....	79
Table 21 .....	86

Table 22 ..... 87

Table 23 ..... 95

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 ..... 32

Figure 2 ..... 38

Figure 3 ..... 59

Figure 4 ..... 60

Figure 5 ..... 73

Figure 6 ..... 75

Figure 7 ..... 84

Figure 8 ..... 93

Figure 9 ..... 97

## **Chapter One: Puzzle of Practice**

With inclusion practices leading to growing numbers of special education students participating in the general education classroom, general education teachers are increasingly working with students with disabilities and their families. The goal of this action research study was to work, as a practitioner-scholar, towards a culture of collaboration between general education teachers and families of students with disabilities (FSWDs). This research examined current methods and barriers to teacher-family collaboration and explored effective avenues of communication between general education teachers and FSWDs. Though there is research on the barriers and importance of communication between parents and teachers, much of that research is focused at the primary level and researchers have yet to focus on the dynamic between general education teachers and FSWDs at the high school level.

In chapter one, I will provide an overview of my personal perspectives as a parent, teacher and charity board member, which have led me onto this pathway of study. The movement towards inclusion and the impact this movement currently has on students with disabilities, families of students with disabilities and general education teachers will be overviewed. The rationale for why I am investigating through the social model of disabilities using an interpretivist phenomenology will then be discussed. Additionally, I will reference the literature along with local, state and national initiatives that justify the need for the development of a culture of collaboration between general educators and FSWDs.

### **I Can't Find the Time**

As a teacher of 20 years, I recognize the numerous positive impacts that collaboration between families and teachers can have on a student's education. As an educator working for social justice, I find it important to follow the words of Baglieri & Shapiro (2017) and "take action in partnership with children, families, and communities" (p. 11). Unfortunately, there are many barriers faced, by both families and teachers, which limit these collaborations, often resulting in infrequent and ineffective communications. Research has produced strategies for overcoming these barriers at the primary level, but these may be difficult to manifest at a high school level where teachers are working with greater than 100 diverse students within a time-crunched schedule.

As a general educator in a high school setting, I admit that I am often pressed for time. Increasing numbers of students, increasing responsibilities and increasing expectations all require time. Work comes home with me nightly. Additionally, I am a teacher of inclusive classrooms, yet I have never been educated on the special education system. Because of this, I spend significant amounts of time researching best practices to use when teaching students with disabilities. The result is a minimal amount of time available for me to communicate with the families of my students. I acknowledge that family collaboration supports and expedites my ability to develop teaching techniques, strategies and methods that lead to a classroom learning environment that meets the needs of each of my students, however, I am challenged to find the time necessary to initiate these communications.

As a parent, I recognize that families may also be challenged to find time to collaborate with teachers. As a two-income family, competing time demands for both myself and my

husband are the main barriers for our ability to communicate with my daughter's teachers. Other families may also be challenged by inflexible work hours and having demands to meet for multiple children (Fialka, Feldman & Mikus, 2012; Porter, 2008). Additionally, poverty, transportation, family stresses, and a families' own negative attitudes about education and the educational system may act as added barriers to home-school communications (Fialka et. al, 2012; Porter, 2008).

Lastly, as a board member for a charity that advocates for children with vision impairments, I recognize that there may be added time and communication barriers that families of students with disabilities (FSWDs) face when engaging with teachers. Families may be stretched thin as they are working with not just a general education teacher, but also a special education teacher and, oftentimes, additional medical professionals. Families also discuss not fully understanding the educational system as it relates to their children with disabilities.

Regardless of all of these challenges, I think it is essential for families and teachers to find ways to collaborate, and more simply, communicate, as there is abundant research that has determined that when a student's family is involved, the student is more successful in school (Epstein, 2011; Kraft, 2012; Mapp & Kutner, 2013; Ozmen, Akuzum, Zincirli, & Selcuk, 2016; Simon, 2001; Simon, 2004; Spera, 2005). Studies have evidenced that students with involved families are more likely to earn higher grades, pass their classes, attend school regularly, behave better, and continue on with their education (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Therefore, I believe it is important to determine efficient and effective avenues of communication that I can use in my classroom to foster a culture of collaboration with the families of my students, specifically the families of my students with disabilities. Therefore, my



goal for this study was to determine effective avenues of communication to overcome the barriers that exist between general education teachers of inclusive classrooms and families of students with disabilities. These communications could lead to relationships that positively impact students within the inclusive general education classroom setting.

### **The Spark that Ignited this Study**

As a general education teacher in inclusive classrooms, I am often disconnected from pertinent information about my special education students. Parents often communicate either through the case manager or special education teacher, rarely calling or e-mailing me, resulting in the trickle-down effect of information. Research has evidenced that parents and teachers do not want to overwhelm each other with communications and that parents of students with disabilities already feel stressed by the amount of time they spend working with the special education department (Azad, Wolk, & Mandell, 2018; Lalvani, 2015). These disconnects create a challenge for me when teaching students with disabilities, as I often do not receive essential information regarding the student's needs or goals.

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, it was requested that I attend a meeting with a student with a disability and his mother. At this meeting, the student and mother identified his most important needs and provided information on what works best for him within the classroom. Having this simple meeting provided me, as the general education teacher, the information I needed to provide him a classroom experience that took into consideration his strengths, challenges and needs. This meeting brought to light an awareness of the many ways that a student with a disability can benefit from communications between their families and their general education teachers, even if it is just one simple communication. The benefits of these

family-teacher communications are also highlighted by the results of numerous studies which suggest that teachers and families are necessary supports for the academic success of students. Izzo & Horne (2016) state that the “presence of a supportive adult appears to be one of the strongest resilience factors for individuals with learning disabilities that is related to their success” (p. 94).

Yet even though it is evident that family and teacher support is essential for students to be empowered and achieve academic growth in the classroom, family-school collaboration consistently ranks in the top challenges facing American education. It is well researched that there are a number of obstacles to teacher-family collaboration, including lack of time and differences in perspectives regarding disabilities (Azad, Wolk & Mandell, 2018; Buchanan & Clark, 2017; Fialka, Feldman, & Mikus, 2012; Lalvani, 2015). Therefore, determining definitive strategies that can be used to overcome the communication barriers, such as preconceived perspectives and time constraints, is essential for developing inclusive classrooms that are supported by family-teacher collaboration.

### **Inclusion is a Hot Topic**

Working to develop strategies for developing communication between general education teachers and families of students with disabilities is a step towards not only meeting the needs of students, families and general education teachers but also towards addressing district, state and national legislation. The research for this study took place in a Suburban Secondary Public School setting in the Northeastern United States. According to the District Level Plan (2018), this school district has seen a steady increase in Special Education students, rising from 11.9% of the student population in 2009 to 17.5% in 2018. Fifty-six percent of these students spend 80%

or more of their time in inclusive settings. This reflects the growing national trend in the number of students with disabilities who are placed in inclusive classrooms. In 1990, only 34% of students with disabilities spent a percentage of their day in a regular education classroom while in 2016-2017, 63% of students with disabilities spent the majority of their day in regular education classrooms (LeDoux et al., 2012; Samuels, 2018). This means that there is an increasing need for general education teachers, as their classrooms become more populated with students with disabilities, to be provided information on how to better communicate with these students' families.

The school district of study is in the process of reviewing and expanding their inclusion practices. The high school is also, currently, evaluating their use of time, forming committees and subgroups of parents, teachers, administrators and students to discuss possible changes. As time constraints are consistently listed as a barrier to teacher-family collaboration (Fialka, 2012), research in this area could advise administration on how time can be better used to support this collaboration. Additionally, the school district's need for understanding how to better foster family-teacher collaboration is evidenced in the district's Comprehensive Plan (2018) which states that one district challenge is to "establish a district system that fully ensures each member of the district community promotes, enhances and sustains a shared vision of positive school climate and ensures family and community support of student participation in the learning process".

At the state level, the Optimized Inclusive Practices in Pennsylvania Framework [OIP] developed by the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network was written to provide schools with big ideas, concepts, competencies and practices to educate students in

inclusive classrooms (PaTTAN, 2017). Section E of the framework states, “Family and community involvement is essential in creating and sustaining effective inclusive educational practices” (PaTTAN, 2017, p. 21). Specifically, standard E.1.c.2 states that classroom educators are to “communicate frequently with families to ensure family members are engaged and informed partners in the education of their child” (PaTTAN, 2017, p. 21). Therefore, the state identifies family-teacher collaboration as a key component for educators preparing students for “college, career, and community readiness” (PaTTAN, 2017, p. 4).

At a national level, a key item under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) is that parent and family engagement needs to be made a priority for Title I schools to receive funds. Some of the requirements for districts and schools under ESSA are to build the school’s capacity to engage families, evaluate the school’s family engagement practices and to educate teachers on how to most effectively engage families (ESSA, 2015). Providing strategies to overcome communication barriers, could help these schools better meet the requirements of ESSA.

Additionally, the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide, developed by the national PTA Family-School Partnerships (2009) has two standards that specifically address family-school communication. The goal of Standard 2, Communicating Effectively, is to keep families informed by effectively communicating both formally and informally using a variety of interactive methods. One goal of Standard 3, Supporting Student Success, is for families and school staff to collaborate so that families are aware of their student’s success at school. An additional goal is to discuss student’s individual needs, strengths and experiences in order to support the student’s academic success.

### **The Move to Inclusion**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), most recently amended in 2004, requires that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Valle & Connor (2019) describe the main guidelines for LRE as follows:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are non-disabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the general education environment only occurs if the nature and severity of the disabilities are such that education in regular classes with the use of services and supplementary aids cannot be achieved satisfactorily (p. 253).

IDEA further suggests that there be a continuum of educational options for students with disabilities ranging from regular education to residential placement, and that the placement of the student be determined by the student's IEP team based on that student's own unique needs. Over the years, court decisions, parent groups and local education agencies have translated LRE into the concept of inclusion (Zera & Seitsinger, 2000). The intention of inclusion practice is to place students with disabilities into the general education classroom so that they can have social and curricular experiences that they may not otherwise experience in a special education or pull-out classroom.

Inclusive education is grounded in the social model of disabilities. The social model of disability studies identifies "disability experiences and identities as those that become embodied as people are enabled and disabled through their interactions in society" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 5). This model considers it the school's responsibility to remove barriers from the social and organizational structure of the school to enable students with disabilities and to work

to understand the cultural, physical and social aspects of disability (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). Inclusive education, through the social model of disability, is for “removing all barriers to access and learning for all children who are experiencing disadvantage” (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 7).

While inclusive classroom practices are rooted in the social model of disabilities, research evidences that general educators often view students with disabilities through the medical model of disabilities, while families of students with disabilities view their children through both the medical and social models of disabilities. Therefore, in order to understand how to improve communications between general education teachers and families of students with disabilities, it will be important to understand the lens through which each views students with disabilities and to develop strategies for all parties involved in inclusive education to respect and understand each other’s experiences and perspectives. Because this will involve understanding the participants’ views and perspectives, this study will be informed by an interpretivist paradigm. Though interpretivists typically use qualitative methodologies, this study will use a mixed-methods approach to understand the perceptions and views of the participants. In order to provide a snapshot of perceptions, quantitative data will be collected through likert-scale surveys distributed to both families of students with disabilities and general education teachers of inclusive classrooms. Focus groups will then be formed to “encourage discussion and the expression of varying opinions and viewpoints” with the goal of gaining a better understanding of the views and perspectives of both families of students with disabilities and general education teachers of inclusive classrooms (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, families of students with disabilities (FSWDs) are defined as any adults who are responsible for the care and education of a student with a disability. Students labeled as “itinerant” through the high school of study’s special education department were considered students with disabilities for this research. Families of students who have a gifted IEP, that are not also labeled as “itinerant”, were not considered for participation in this study.

The term “family” is being used instead of the term “parent” due to the diversity of the living environments of American children aged 0-17. Students may be living with biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, partners of parents, grandparents, other relatives or other nonrelatives (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2019). Additionally, limiting to the term “parents” does not consider other adult supports the student may have whom are working to positively influence the child’s education.

The term inclusive classroom refers to a general education classroom in which students with disabilities, identified as “itinerant” through the special education department, are enrolled. General education teacher of inclusive classrooms (GETIN) refers to any general education content teacher who teaches at least one student with a disability in a regular education classroom. This may include classes labeled as “inclusion” but does not include pull-out or support classes.

Avenues of communication are any methods, techniques or strategies of two-way communication. A culture of collaboration is defined as a partnership of mutual understanding

and respect between families and teachers which works to encourage student's academic or behavioral growth within the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

General education teachers and families of students with disabilities are experiencing new dynamics as inclusion practices increase the numbers of students with disabilities taking part in general education classrooms. By investigating the experiences and perspectives of GETINs and FSWDs, understandings about barriers and strategies to communication between these two groups could lead to increased family-teacher collaboration. An increase in family-teacher communications would benefit students as increased family-teacher collaboration has been evidenced to result in improved academic and behavioral student outcomes.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to determine effective avenues of communication that general education teachers and families of students with disabilities can follow in order to better develop a culture of collaboration which supports students with disabilities within inclusive classroom settings. As schools continue to move towards inclusion, it is necessary to bridge the gaps between schooling of the past, which traditionally followed the medical model of disability, and inclusion schooling of the present and future, which draws from the social model of disability. One way to do this is by determining how to improve communication between general education teachers, who the literature states oftentimes see through the lens of the medical model of disability, and FSWDs, who more likely see through the lenses of both the medical and social models of disability (Lalvani, 2015). Therefore, the following research questions are the focus of this study:



- 1) To what extent do the perspectives of GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level reflect the social and/or medical models of disability?
- 2) How do the dynamics of an inclusive classroom impact the communication barriers faced between teachers and families?
- 3) How can certain avenues and styles of communication foster positive collaboration between GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level?

The next chapter will present a literature review to support this study. The literature review includes a history of inclusion, barriers to family-teacher communications, benefits of family-teacher communications, and a comparison of the social and medical models of disability.

### **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Inclusion is not a term found in special education law, however, it is an educational practice that is now mandated at the local, state and national levels. In this chapter, I will begin with a discussion of how the “least restrictive environments” required by the Individuals with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act have evolved into the concept of inclusion. I will then reference the literature to detail the challenges general education teachers are facing as they transition to inclusive classrooms that often involve larger caseloads, increasing classroom diversity and increasing teacher responsibilities.

Communicating with families is one strategy general education teachers may be able to use to overcome these new challenges. I will provide a review of research that evidences the positive benefits of family-teacher communications. I will then discuss studies that have determined the barriers to bridging family-teacher communications which include time constraints, personal barriers and accessibility barriers. Additionally, I will reference studies that

specifically address barriers that manifest at the high school level. Differences in perspectives between families of students with disabilities and general education teachers regarding disability models will also be overviewed.

### **Inclusion and the Growing Diversity of the General Education Classroom**

Special education laws, including the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 mandate that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (Brock, 2018; Gilmour, 2018; Zera & Seitsinger, 2000). IDEA and IDEIA further require that students should be educated in regular education classrooms if their behavioral and academic needs are able to be met within these classroom learning environments (Brock, 2018; Gilmour, 2018). Over the years, court decisions, parent groups and local education agencies have translated the idea of a least restrictive learning environment into the concept of inclusion (Zera & Seitsinger, 2000).

Inclusion places students with disabilities into the general education classroom with the hopes of providing them with curricular and social experiences that they may not have access to within the special education or pull-out classroom (Gilmour, 2018). In much of the United States, students are considered inclusively educated when they spend 80% or more of their school day in general education classrooms (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2011).

The number of students with disabilities being placed into inclusive classrooms has changed dramatically in the past 30 years. In 1990, only 34% of students with disabilities spent a percentage of their day in a regular education classroom while in 2016-2017, 63% of students with disabilities spent the majority of their day in regular education classrooms (LeDoux et al.,

2012; Samuels, 2018). One study indicated that the number of students with intellectual disability educated in the general education classroom 40-79% of their day increased from 23% to 26.3% between 1990 and 2014, while students with intellectual disability educated in the general education classrooms more than 80% of their day increased from 7.4% to 16.9% over the same twenty-four year period (Brock, 2018). Increasing numbers of inclusive students correlates to an increasing student diversity within general education classrooms.

Though some gains have been made in special education since IDEA was enacted, as a whole, special education students are not evidencing overall success in U.S. schools. In 2015, only 8% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders with disabilities scored proficient in reading and math tests, 12% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders were proficient in reading and 6% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders were proficient in math (Alter, Gottlieb & Gottlieb, 2018). Research shows that just 69% of special education students graduate on time while 18% dropped out of school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Additionally, only one third of special education students attending four year colleges will graduate within 8 years (Mader & Butrymowicz, 2017).

One reason for this may be a lack of attention on the adjustments general educators must make as their general education, often ability-tracked classes, transition to inclusive classrooms containing students with a variety of diverse backgrounds and needs. As a result of increasingly diverse and growing classes, general education teachers in the inclusive classroom are being tasked with what seems like an insurmountable challenge—educating and meeting the individual needs of increasing numbers of students, both general education and special education. This is leading to frustrations among inclusion teachers as they feel they are unable to meet the

individual needs of their students in what is becoming a “dumping ground” of inclusion classes (Mulvey, Gagliardi, Accurso & Cooper, 2014).

The expectations for and responsibilities of general education teachers are increasing significantly as school districts work to increase their inclusion numbers. According to the “Optimized Inclusive Practices in Pennsylvania” Framework [OIP], the practice of inclusion is accompanied by ninety-eight different standards for the inclusion general educator to meet (PaTTAN, 2017).

The Optimized Inclusive Practice in Pennsylvania Framework is designed to ensure that school personnel implement the big ideas, concepts and competencies needed to leverage data, systems and practices to effectively educate students with disabilities, with a special focus on students with low incidence and significant cognitive disabilities, in inclusive educational settings (PaTTAN, 2017, p. 4).

The classroom educators’ standards include items such as supporting students with disabilities by communicating with the IEP teams, students, families and personnel, arranging physical space and monitoring the classroom climate (PaTTAN, 2017). Additionally, according to the OIP, classroom educators should be applying learned professional development to provide a range of instructional delivery methods and adaptations that reflects the students with disabilities needs, interests and college and career readiness (PaTTAN, 2017).

Several studies indicate that general educators are unprepared for this new task. General education teachers are now teaching large caseloads of diverse student populations and they are struggling to create instruction that is best for all students given their limited time, resources and training (Brown & Babo, 2017; Fialka et al., 2012; Grant, 2014; LeDoux et al., 2012; Scanlon &

Baker, 2012). Many general education teachers assigned to inclusive classrooms are not informed of their placements, are not matched to their placements and are not trained in special education (Gilmour, 2018; LeDoux et al, 2012; St. John & Babo, 2015). Parents are also noticing that schools and the general education classrooms are unprepared for inclusion. This is displayed in a blog written by a mother of a child with autism who states, "...we are dumping our children with IEPs into a world that is illiterate to special education" (Murphy, 2019).

### **A Strategy for General Educators**

Analysis of the literature regarding improving students' academic successes in the classroom quickly reveals that family-teacher communication is a method that general educators can employ that may yield the positive results they are hoping for when working to make every student succeed. Federal, state and special education legislation are all mandating for increased family-teacher communication (Azad & Mandell, 2018; Jensen & Minke, 2017), as is the National PTA (PTA, 2009). Additionally, studies have evidenced that family-teacher communications are valued by both parents and teachers. Buchanan and Clark (2017), interviewed eight parents and seven teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders. This study revealed that parents and teachers both "identified parent-school communication as a critical factor to promote children's school success" (p. 122). Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) studied 770 parents of secondary school students in Quebec and found that parent involvement, which drew from a trust built from the development of family-teacher relationships, "appears to have lasting benefits even through high school" (p. 164). Thus, it is clear from the research that the need for greater family-teacher communication is felt at all levels, from the parent and teacher, to the federal government.

Unfortunately, general educators are not only lacking training in teaching special education students but are also not receiving professional learning opportunities from their school districts and places of study (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). This lack of training, as it pertains to teacher-family involvement, was evidenced in a study of 148 teachers in urban and suburban school districts in the Philadelphia area, done by Lazar, Broderick, Mastrilli and Slostad (1999). This study determined that only 45% of secondary teachers were provided education about parent involvement (Lazar et al., 1999). As a result, general educators repeatedly confirm that they do not know how to make communication and collaboration with families happen. Therefore, GETINs would benefit from the development of strategies for avenues of communication that they could use when working with FSWDs within their inclusive classrooms (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

### **A Need for Time**

The general education classroom is changing. Increasing class sizes coupled with greater diversity due to an ever-growing number of inclusion students results in several barriers that general education teachers face when working towards family-teacher communication and collaboration. Literature commonly cites time as a barrier to family communications with schools (Buchanan et al., 2017; Eptstein, 2011; Fialka, Feldman & Mikus, 2012; Lazar et al., 1999; Ozmen et al., 2016). General education teachers are experiencing a growing number of expectations and responsibilities leading them to a “too busy” feeling and a faltering work-life balance (Buchanan et al., 2017 ; Fialka et al., 2012; Lazar et al., 1999). Kraft (2016) references a detailed time-use study in Washington State that determined that approximately 8% of teachers’ non-instructional time is spent communicating with parents. In the study by Buchanan et al.

(2017), five of the seven teachers interviewed mentioned time constraints as a barrier to family-teacher communication, specifically citing “large class sizes, being over-worked, and not having adequate time to communicate with parents” (p. 127).

In the same study by Buchanan et al. (2017), five of the eight parents interviewed also mentioned time constraints as a barrier. Participants in a study by Williams and Sánchez (2012) also suggested that time is a constraint to parents’ school involvement. Parents often work full or part-time jobs and may have other children who have their own schedules or who require additional childcare (Fialka et al., 2012; Ozmen et al., 2016; Taub, 2006). Additionally, the schedules for school activities often conflict with family schedules (Ozmen et al., 2016). FSWDs may face even more time constraints due to their involvement with the special education department and the time they spend advocating for and protecting their children (Lalvani, 2015).

The time constraints faced by both parents and teachers leads to a key breakdown in communication, as neither party wants to create more burden for the other (Azad et al., 2018, Buchanan et al., 2017). Yet, research shows that both parents and teachers understand the need for and, therefore, want more communication between home and school (Buchanan et al., 2017; Lazar et al., 1999). Unfortunately, whether due to time or other constraints, family-teacher communications are lacking. Kraft (2016) presents research illustrating that parent-teacher-school communications are rare, with less than 60% of parents surveyed by the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey reporting receiving a phone call home in 2012. A study by Simon (2001) of 11,000 high school parents and greater than 1000 high school principals evidenced that parents and high school staff rarely communicated about academics,

attendance or behaviors (Simon, 2001). Additional research by Simon (2004), revealed that family involvement decreases as the students grade level increases.

### **Other Barriers to Communication**

Family-teacher communication involves partnerships. Epstein's (2011) work evidences that without partnerships, "educators segment students into the school child and the home child, ignoring the whole child" (p. 5). Though time constraints repeatedly present in literature as a major barrier challenging these partnerships, it is not the only. In fact, literature reveals numerous barriers to family-teacher communications, with a greater number at the secondary level and even more when working with families of students with disabilities. A study by Ozmen, Akuzum and Selcuk (2016) surveyed 350 elementary school teachers using a "Communication Barriers Assessment Scale" to determine teachers' opinions on the barriers they faced when communicating with families. The study results revealed that teachers with  $\leq 5$  years of experience encountered personal barriers the most while teachers with  $\geq 16$  years of experience were challenged most by accessibility-related barriers (Ozmen et al., 2016).

#### ***Personal barriers to communication.***

Personal barriers are consistently documented in literature as barriers to family-teacher communication. Several researchers have referenced the parents' own negative feelings about schooling as being a barrier to communication. These negative feelings may have been caused by the parents' own negative schooling experiences during childhood, by feelings of not being heard by school staff, by negative interactions with school staff, or by not feeling as if they are equal partners in their child's education (Azad et al., 2018; Fialka et al., 2012; Hsiao, Higgins, Pierce, Schaefer Whitby, & Tandy, 2017; Ozmen et al., 2016; Williams & Sánchez, 2012).



Parents' inability to communicate is also often listed as a personal barrier. This inability to communicate may be due to the illiteracy of the parents, language barriers between the family and the school, the parents' educational levels, a general lack of understanding of the educational system, or an income based communication gap (Epstein, 2011; Fialka et al., 2012; Kraft, 2016; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Ozmen et al., 2016).

Other personal barriers to family communication include the school's focus on negative communications or parents' disapproval of the organization and daily happenings of the school. In an interview in Buchanan and Clark's (2017) study, one teacher discussed how school communications with families are often only initiated to discuss the negative. Additionally, a longitudinal study by Simon (2004), determined that school contacts regarding attendance or behavior, made either no impact or a negative impact on parent involvement with the school. Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor & Valle (2011) reiterated this, pointing out that parent involvement decreased when parent-teacher interactions only occurred in response to negative behaviors and poor academics. In a study by Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent and Ball (2016), 77 Black-Caribbean families in the United Kingdom were interviewed. These interviews revealed that the parents felt that the schools' reactions to communications were slow, uncertain, sometimes hostile and uncooperative, which in some instances led to parents having feelings of broken promises and dismissal. Participants in Williams and Sánchez's (2012) study also described how their involvement in their child's schooling declined due to consistently negative situations between the school and their child or due to the parents viewing the school as "unhelpful or unorganized" (p. 645). Twenty percent of the parents in this study felt that though

they dedicated time to discuss their concerns, the school did not work on resolutions but instead sent them from “one person to the next” (Williams and Sánchez, 2012).

These personal barriers break the trust necessary for collaborations to develop between families and teachers. Data from the research from Gillborn et. al (2016) evidenced that only one of the 62 parent respondents did not feel some level of tension or mistrust between the home and the school. Without trust, collaborations between families and teachers cannot develop.

***Accessibility barriers to communication.***

Obvious barriers to family-teacher communications are accessibility barriers. The accessibility barriers of parents are strongly documented in the literature. Some of these barriers described are lack of transportation, illnesses, lack of technology, homelessness, physical distance from school, substance abuse, parental/spousal preoccupation and incarceration (Buchanan & Clark, 2017; Fialka et al., 2012; Ozmen et al., 2016, Taub, 2006; Williams & Sánchez, 2012). Teachers also face accessibility barriers, such as when family contact information is missing, outdated or difficult to access (Kraft, 2016).

Families of students with disabilities may face additional accessibility barriers. Ozmen et al. (2016) include “not stating the needs and opinions openly”, “insufficient amount of time devoted to the parents” and “not talking easily with the parents about their children at any time” (p. 35) in the accessibility category. Research shows that FSWDs feel stigmatized and blamed for their child’s behaviors which causes them to be nervous about expressing their opinions (Buchanan & Clark, 2017). Parents feel that when they advocate, schools focus on the child’s deficits and not their attributes (Buchanan & Clark, 2017). FSWDs reflected that their input was not valued which led to feelings of alienation, stress and conflict with the schools and teachers

(Buchanan & Clark, 2017; Hsiao et al., 2017). On the other side of the coin, Lalvani (2015) writes how general education teachers' reflections of communications did not consider the difficulties that FSWDs might face when negotiating with both the special education department and the school's other educational professionals. Fialka et al. (2012) illuminated the challenges faced by FSWDs when they wrote, "Even veteran special education teachers who unexpectedly become parents of a child with a disability will attest to how awkward they feel at their meeting as a parent" (p. 12). This literature all suggests that it is very likely that FSWDs of students in inclusive classes may face additional barriers to communication when working with general education teachers.

### **The High School Challenge**

Family-teacher communication is even more of a challenge at the high school level. Literature agrees that parent involvement decreases as students' progress through their years of schooling (Mac Iver, Sheldon, Epstein, Rice, Mac Iver & Simmons, 2018; Simon, 2001; Spera, 2005). A study by Simon (2001) found that communication between high school staff and parents was infrequent, with 2 out of 3 of the 11,000 parents surveyed reporting they had never been contacted by the school. Research suggests several reasons for this decline including the complexities of the high school, complicated curricula and parents allowing for more autonomy for their children (Simon, 2001; Simon, 2004). Educators may view this decrease in parental involvement as parent disinterest and unwillingness to be involved in their child's education (Simon, 2004). Unfortunately, research on how to overcome this barrier and encourage parental involvement at the high school level is weak. Strategies to communication have been researched for primary grade levels, and for school district administrators, PTAs, and special educators

working with FSWDs but strategies for general educators of high school inclusive classrooms are not found in the literature.

### **The Disconnect between General Educators and FSWDs**

Research demonstrates an additional barrier that is specific to general educators and FSWDs. FSWDs and general educators do not have the same view of students with disabilities. Lalvani (2015) used surveys to elicit narratives from thirty-two parents of students with disabilities, 20 general education teachers and 10 special education teachers. This study revealed several major differences between the beliefs of teachers and parents. First, teachers found, in alignment with the medical model of disabilities, that labels were helpful for the placement and instruction of students with disabilities and that students' difficulties in class coincided with the students' impairments and differences. On the other hand, the study determined that parents, following the social model of disability, resisted labels, saw less differences between their child and other children, and believed that their child's difficulties were grounded in the schools' culture and methods.

Lalvani's study (2015) also illuminated the differences in how families of students with disabilities are perceived. Teachers in the study used terms such as "burden", "struggle", "grief", "drain", and "loss" (p. 386) to describe parenting a child with a disability, while parents of students with disabilities considered their lives to be "normal" (p. 387). This study reveals major differences between the beliefs of general educators and families regarding students with disabilities and these differences could lead to additional complications as general education classrooms become more inclusive.

## **Disability Models**

As discussed, one of the disconnects between families and teachers is often how they view disability. Teachers and schools often only view disability through the medical model of disability while the families' perspective of their child's disability may have roots in both the medical and social models of disability.

### ***Medical model of disabilities.***

The medical model is and has been the dominant model of disability within our culture (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Dirth & Branscombe, 2017). This model of disability views the individual's impairment as a problem that requires treatment or a cure (Goering, 2015; Reiser, 2014). From the medical model perspective, any disadvantages and dependencies a person with a disability may encounter are due to the deficits in their own bodies or minds (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Goering, 2015; Reiser, 2014). The medical model views disability as a negative experience that is a definitive part of a person's identity (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). It identifies the disability as a problem at the individual level, and thus, creates isolated and undervalued feelings among people with disabilities that are verified by exclusive societal structures and attitudes (Dirth, 2017; Goering, 2015).

As the culturally dominant model of disabilities, the medical model is clearly present in schools (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Reiser, 2014). In fact, researchers have suggested that the medical model is the basis for special education (Jenson, 2018; Reiser, 2014). Dudley-Marling and Burns (2014) write, "The focus of special education is generally on those students situated on the lower reaches of the normal curve, students who are presumed deficient in one or more skills or abilities necessary for success in school and, often, the world outside of school. These

children have disabilities” (p. 18). This leads to students with disabilities being considered “deficient” students whose educations focus on the “remediation” of their disabilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 6). Research revealed that teachers viewing disability through the medical model look to the students’ disability label to provide guidance on placement, instruction, goals and differentiation (Lalvani, 2015).

*Social model of disabilities.*

In contrast, the social model of disabilities believes that disability is rooted in barriers created by a society that develops its structures and attitudes around a standard of normal that does not reflect the needs of people with disabilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Dirth & Branscombe, 2017; Goering, 2015; Jenson, 2018; Reiser, 2014). The aim of the social model is “to understand disability as a total experience of complex interactions between the body and physical, social and cultural environments” (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 21). The social model looks beyond the body and mind by considering the “lived experiences” of people with disabilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 23).

Inclusion practices in education are grounded in the social model of disabilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Jenson, 2018; Naraian & Schlessinger, 2017). Jenson (2018) writes:

The objective of inclusive education is to remove all barriers restricting access of students with impairments to equal education opportunities which corresponds with social model beliefs of changing the environment to accommodate these individuals and allow for participation and access to the community (p. 55).

Inclusion practices in education aim to provide barrier-free environments which result in equal access to curricular and social opportunities for all students (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Jenson,

2018). Inclusion practices “look at the individual holistically” (Jenson, 2018, p. 53). Inclusion focuses on teaching to the unique strengths, histories, cultures and experiences of students in order to provide each student with a meaningful education (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017; Reiser, 2014). Even as the number of students and general education teachers who are participating in inclusive classrooms continues to grow, the literature evidences that the medical model is still the predominant model in most school buildings, leaving general educators of inclusive classrooms working in between two very different models of disability.

*A middle ground.*

Though the social and medical models of disability seem to lie at opposite sides of the spectrum, they are not always exclusive. In a study involving 40 interviews of 43 parents at disability camps, Manago, Davis & Goar (2017) determined that families took on the perspectives of both the medical and social models of disability, dependent on the situation at hand. In this study, the researchers found that parents responded through the social model of disability most often when challenged with or when challenging disability stigma. However, the parents often referenced the medical model of disability as a tool to defend or legitimize that challenge. While it seems as if families have learned to use both models to work towards what is best for the child, general educators of inclusive classrooms are left tasked with learning to work between the two models of disability. Open avenues of communication between these families and general education teachers could enable educators to better transition to the inclusion model of teaching.

### **The Benefits of Family-Teacher Communication**

There is abundant research indicating that family-involvement positively impacts all students' academic and socio-behavioral success at school. Increased family involvement with school correlates to higher achievement test scores, decreased drop-out rates, greater homework completion, improved grades, more courses taken, more credits earned, better attendance and positive student behaviors (Epstein, 2011; Jensen & Minke, 2017; Kraft & Dougherty, 2012; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Simon, 2001, Spera, 2005). Trust is built when families and teachers have frequent communication affording families and teachers the opportunity to discuss student problems and issues in order to come to a common understanding of how to help the student succeed (Epstein, 2011; Fialka et al., 2012; Ozmen et al., 2016). Fialka et al. (2012) state, "We knew that when partnerships between families and professionals worked well, everyone felt confident, empowered, and energized...when these partnerships were not working well, everyone felt drained, stiff and waning in their sense of hope" (p. xiii). Simon's (2001) study evidenced that the importance of family-teacher collaboration is universal, as the study revealed that the positive impacts on the students' school achievements and behaviors were true "regardless of students' background and prior achievement" (p. 8).

#### ***Even in high school, collaboration matters.***

Research has evidenced that the positive impacts of family-teacher collaboration are present even at the high school level. Simon's (2001) study indicated that increased family involvement resulted in higher English and Math grades in addition to better behavior and attendance records, with positive impacts even through the last year of high school. Longitudinal data in this study also emphasized that, at the high school level, communication occurred more



frequently with struggling students than with students who were doing well. Additionally, this study revealed that when schools contacted families, families were more likely to interact with the student about their schooling.

A study by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) indicated that family involvement improved the academic performance of 10th graders and the “emotional functioning” of 11th graders (p. 619). However, the strongest correlation between improvement and involvement was connected to “academic socialization” from families who discussed the importance of education with their children. The study determined that the least impactful type of involvement was school based involvement, however, families also reported this as the area of which they had the lowest involvement. Thus, with research indicating that family collaboration is beneficial, but lacking at the high school level, work needs to be done to determine ways to improve communications between teachers and families of high school inclusion students.

***Inclusion and a new family-teacher dynamic.***

A review of the literature reveals ample studies regarding communication between special education teachers and families of students with disabilities and studies discussing general family involvement with schools. However, research dedicated to studying the inclusive classroom dynamic and the communications between the general education teacher and FSWDs is lacking. Understanding this dynamic is important to successful inclusion practices, for, as Salend and Garrick Duhaney (2002) state:

Family members can be an excellent source of information concerning the effect of the inclusion program on the academic, social, and behavioral development of their children, as well as their children’s feelings about being educated in inclusive classrooms (p. 62).

Baglieri and Shapiro (2017) emphasize the importance of learning about students from the students themselves, and from their families. They support the need for teachers to have conversations and partnerships with families in order to overcome the challenges families and teachers often face from having differing perspectives about disability. How to develop communication and partnerships between general education teachers and families of students with disabilities, however, is not addressed in the literature and, is therefore, a purposeful direction of study.

This literature review discussed the benefits and barriers of communication and collaboration between FSWDs and GETINs. Though research evidences solutions and strategies at the primary level and between special education teachers and families of students with disabilities, there is minimal research on strategies to be used between FSWDs and GETINs at the secondary level. Chapter three will provide the research design for a study that aims to determine strategies FSWDs and GETINs can implement to foster communication and, ultimately, collaboration, at the high school level.

### **Chapter Three: Research Design**

This action research study is informed by my positionality as a high school teacher of inclusive classrooms, a board member for a charity for children with disabilities, and a parent. Lack of research surrounding communications between FSWDs and GETINs justifies the need for such research. As the goal is to foster collaboration by determining strategies for communication to be used between FSWDs and GETINs, this research works to learn about experiences from both groups of participants through an interpretivist paradigm. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach was employed using qualitative data, collected through

focus group interviews and open-ended survey questions, in order to explain quantitative data, collected through Likert-scale surveys. This chapter will provide a detailed overview of the research design and paradigms chosen for this study.

### **Research Setting**

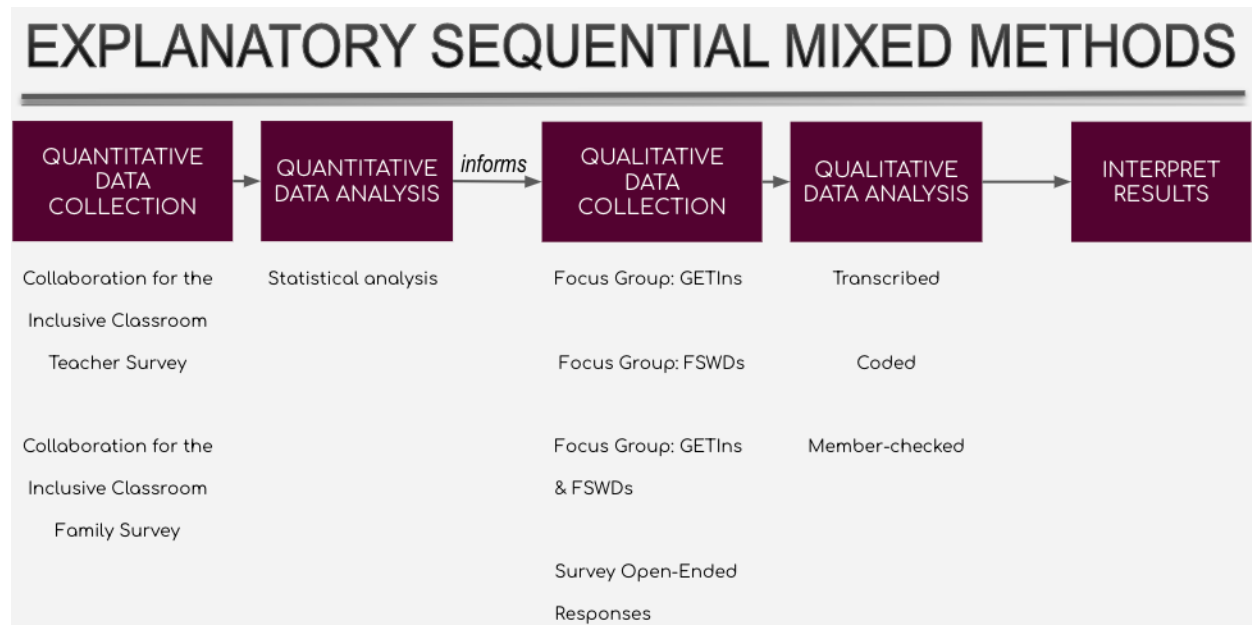
This study took place at a grades nine through twelve Suburban Public High School setting in the Northeastern United States. Per the district's website (2018), district enrollment has increased 24.33% from 1997-2018 with the school currently serving 2,654 students. The student population consists of 80% White students, 4% Black students, 9% Hispanic students, 6% Asian students and 1% Multi-racial students. The number of students qualifying for free-or-reduced lunch in this school district has increased 20.5% from 2000-2017. The number of English Language Learner students within the district has increased from 81 students in 2005 to 198 in 2018. Approximately 12% of the students at this high school are special education students who could be placed in pullout or inclusion classes in English, Math, Science or Social Studies. There are approximately 130 general education teachers and 26 special education teachers within the high school building.

### **Research Methodology**

As the goal of this study is to determine effective avenues of communication between FSWDs and GETINs, it is an action research study done, in collaboration with others, to solve problems and initiate change within the setting (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The research was conducted through a practical interest orientation of action research to achieve "understanding through interpretation" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 35).

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. Mixed-methods research combines both qualitative and quantitative instruments in order to obtain a thorough understanding of the process and problem (Ayiro, 2012; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Terrell & Edmonds, 2017). The use of quantitative instruments enables the researcher to efficiently and cost effectively collect and gather data from a large population of people in order to analyze relationships between variables within the study (Ayiro, 2012; Zohrabi, 2013). The use of qualitative instruments provides meaning to the study by allowing study participants to discuss their own personal experiences (Ayiro, 2012; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Terrell & Edmonds, 2017; Wisdom & Crewswell, 2013). The mixed-methods approach to research employs the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied (Ayiro, 2012; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Terrell & Edmonds, 2017).

This mixed-methods study followed an explanatory sequential design in which the quantitative data was collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data collection, as shown in Figure 1. Explanatory sequential designs are interactive, using the results of the quantitative data collection to influence and build the qualitative portion of the study (Ayiro, 2012; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Terrell & Edmonds, 2017; Wisdom & Crewswell, 2013). The focus of an explanatory sequential design is to use the personal experiences and perspectives obtained during the qualitative portion of the study to explain the quantitative data results (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Terrell & Edmonds, 2017; Wisdom & Crewswell, 2013).

**Figure 1***Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods Study Research Design****Research paradigm.***

This study was conducted through an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist research focuses on generating, through lived-experiences, an understanding of the participants' social world (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Interpretivist studies typically involve using qualitative data to develop an understanding of the perceptions and views of the study participants, however, this study instead followed a mixed-methods single-paradigm approach (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). Mixed-methods single-paradigm approaches tend to follow a positivist or post-positivist paradigm. Conducting research in this manner, through an interpretivist paradigm, is rare. A research study, conducted by McChesney & Aldridge (2019), demonstrated how an interpretivist paradigm mixed-methods approach can yield thorough conclusions. McChesney and Aldridge (2019) examined their participants lived experiences through quantitative questionnaires,

“developed to capture teachers” perceptions about professional development, followed by semi-structured interviews, used to capture teachers’ experiences with professional development (p. 231). Their study led to several “rich insights” regarding the teachers’ perceptions of professional development (p. 234).

Overall, the goal of this research was to determine strategies for effective communication between general education teachers and families of students with disabilities. Employment of these strategies will help foster a culture of collaboration that supports students with disabilities within inclusive classroom settings. The following research questions were the focus of this study:

- 1) To what extent do the perspectives of GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level reflect the social and/or medical models of disability?
- 2) How do the dynamics of an inclusive classroom impact the communication barriers faced between teachers and families?
- 3) How can certain avenues and styles of communication foster positive collaboration between GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level?

As the goal of this study was to identify effective avenues of communication between families of students with disabilities and general education teachers of inclusive classrooms, an interpretivist paradigm focused the research on gaining a true understanding of the lived experiences of both FSWDs and GETINs, which could ultimately provide insights about the reality of communications and collaborations between these two parties (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

***Quantitative data collection.***

Based on a review of the literature and following an interpretivist paradigm, two Likert-scale surveys were developed for this research. The first survey, Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom Teacher Survey (Appendix A), provides general education teachers of students with disabilities the opportunity to provide their perspectives regarding communicating and collaborating with families of students with disabilities. The second survey, Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom Family Survey (Appendix B), provides families of students with disabilities the opportunity to provide their perspectives regarding communicating and collaborating with their child's general education teachers.

**Quantitative research participants.**

Both surveys were transferred to Google Forms, which, for confidentiality and anonymity, were set to not collect any identifying information about the participants. A Consent Form (Appendix C) was linked to the survey and completion of the survey signified participant consent. A convenience sampling method was utilized as the researcher was selecting participants from groups conveniently connected to her own school building and the survey was open to anyone within each target population (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

As the interpretivist goal is to understand the experiences of the target population, all general education teachers in the high school of study who teach in inclusive classrooms were asked to participate in the survey portion of this study. The Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom Teacher Survey (Appendix A) was distributed through district e-mail to all high school teachers at the target school. The e-mail requested that only general education teachers of inclusive classrooms complete the survey.

Due to special education law and the need to respect the confidentiality of special education students, The Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom Family Survey (Appendix B) was distributed through e-mail, by the special education department, to all “itinerant” students’ families. The lead researcher did not have access to the e-mails or names of these families. Itinerant students’ families were selected at the recommendation of the head of the high school special education department as these are the special education students that are most typically included in the general education classroom. As the interpretivist goal is to understand the experiences of the target population, all families of students labeled as “itinerant” were asked to participate in the survey.

*Qualitative data collection.*

The quantitative data surveys provided researcher contact information for any families or teachers who wanted to continue in the study through focus groups. Following the interpretivist paradigm, the goal of the focus group was not to generalize, but to understand what is going on in regards to communications between FSWDs and GETINs. Three focus groups were developed; one for general education teachers of inclusive classrooms, one for families of students with disabilities and one mixed focus group of both FSWDs and GETINs. Focus groups were chosen as the method of collecting qualitative data because “the goal is for the group to generate new understandings or explanations as individuals react to and interact with others” (Rossman and Rallis, 2017, p. 167).

As the primary researcher, I served as a moderator and note-taker during the focus groups. I guided and observed the discussions. As the research is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, the focus groups were semi-structured to allow for conversation and discussion



between participants as “interaction among the participants is a critical characteristic” of focus groups (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 167). Focus groups were recorded and transcribed, by the researcher, for data analysis.

The focus group participants were asked to complete the focus group consent form (Appendix C). They were also asked to complete the Focus Group Participant Information sheet (Appendices D or E). The moderator then went through the Focus Group Interview Protocol (Appendix F). However, as this research followed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, in order to better understand how the lived experiences of the participants matched and explained the quantitative data, the interview questions may have deviated slightly in response to the results of the quantitative survey.

#### **Qualitative research participants.**

Teachers and families interested in continuing with the study after the quantitative survey were provided, within the quantitative survey, with both the phone and e-mail information to contact the lead researcher. A parallel convenience study sample of families and of teachers was selected to participate in two separate focus groups. From each group, the researcher asked for volunteers to participate in a mixed teacher-family focus group. This focus group was also formed through convenience sampling as participants who are willing to volunteer are most accessible to the researcher. Participants provided informed consent by signing the Focus Group Consent Form provided through a Google Form (Appendix C).

#### ***Validity and reliability of data collection.***

Validity refers to “the extent to which a concept is accurately measured in a quantitative study” (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Screening questions were included in both Collaboration for

the Inclusive Classroom surveys and the Focus Group Participant Information sheet in order to identify any participants who did not qualify for the study.

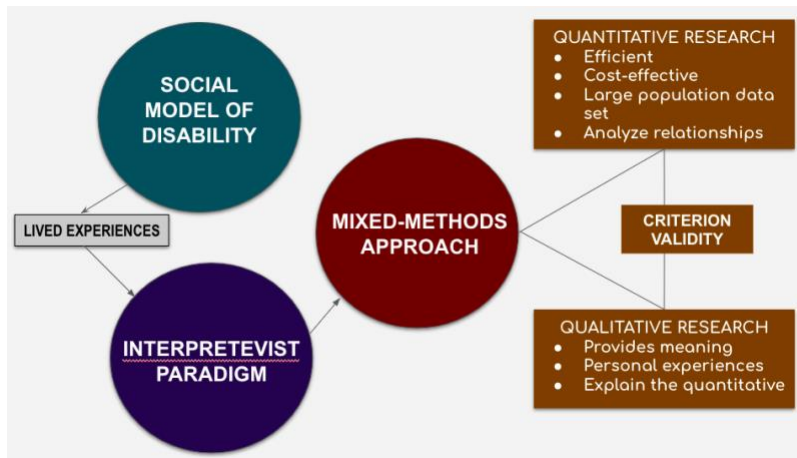
Face validity, or asking other experts on the topic whether or not the research thoroughly covers the intended content, was used to measure content validity (Heale & Twycross, 2015). The Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom Teacher Survey was peer-reviewed by a coworker who also teaches students with disabilities within her general education classes. She was asked to complete the “Survey Review Panel Questions” (Appendix G) after reflecting on the survey. Her feedback stated that the survey was clear, sensitive, appropriate and thoroughly addressed her perceptions of barriers and effective methods for communications between FSWDs and GETINs. She also advised that the survey took her approximately 30 minutes to complete. The Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom Family Survey was peer reviewed by a mother of a child with a disability who works in a different school district. She was asked to complete the “Survey Review Panel Questions” (Appendix G). She identified that Question 7 was worded incorrectly. She provided feedback that the survey was “good” and “sensitive” to families with disabilities. She also advised that the survey took her approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The mixed-methods approach to this research lends itself to criterion validity as shown in Figure 2. Criterion validity occurs when different instruments measure the same variable (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Criterion validity was accomplished by using qualitative focus groups to validate the information collected during quantitative surveys. Construct validity was confirmed through statistical analysis of the quantitative data. This study also used triangulation as both quantitative and qualitative research methods are being used. Triangulation was accomplished through the use of multiple sources of data including the quantitative surveys distributed to the

larger population, the open-ended survey responses, the focus groups of each population of participants, and the focus group which mixed the two populations of participants.

## Figure 2

### *An Overview of the Mixed-Methods Approach*



Reliability refers to the consistency or precision of the research study (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Using parallel sampling studies for the quantitative surveys and the qualitative focus groups produced data that was checked for reliability. Inter-rater reliability was used to confirm coding choices. The transcriptions of the focus groups were coded for categories and themes and were then member-checked by selected members of the focus groups.

Family-teacher communications have proven beneficial for the academic, social and behavioral success of students at all levels. Research studies have specifically examined this dynamic as it relates to general education teachers and families, teachers and families at the primary level and special education teachers and families of students with disabilities. However, a review of the literature shows minimal research regarding communication strategies between families of students with disabilities and general education teachers of inclusive classrooms. This research was conducted, through an interpretivist mixed-methods approach, in order to break

down barriers and provide strategies and avenues FSWDs and GETINs can use to communicate effectively. The ultimate goal of this research was to bridge gaps in collaboration between families of students with disabilities and general education teachers of inclusive classrooms in order to support both the general education teachers and students with disabilities as they transition to inclusive classroom settings.

#### **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

This research study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. Quantitative data was collected in the form of two Likert scale surveys distributed to convenience samples of FSWDs and GETINs. In addition to Likert scale questions, these surveys also contained open-ended questions which were analyzed as qualitative data. Additional qualitative data was collected during three focus groups consisting of purposeful voluntary and purposeful convenience samples of FSWDs and GETINs. Two methods of data analysis were employed. Integrative data analysis was conducted first. In this analysis approach the qualitative data results are used to explain the quantitative data results. Viewing the data through a different lens, a convergent data analysis approach was also conducted, during which comparisons were made between qualitative and quantitative data results.

Quantitative data was analyzed using two-tailed, two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variances and two-tailed, paired, two-sample t-tests for means. During integrative data analysis, concept codes, developed from the quantitative data analysis, were used to analyze the qualitative data. During convergent analysis, two cycles of coding were performed on the qualitative data. In vivo and descriptive codes were used for first cycle coding followed by a second cycle of coding using pattern codes. Categories that were common to both the integrative

and convergent data analyses were identified and overarching themes were developed from these categories as they pertained to the three research questions of this study. Chapter 4 will provide a detailed explanation of these data collection and analysis procedures. The results of the data analysis will then be discussed.

### **Research Problem**

This mixed-methods research study investigated the following three research questions:

- 1) To what extent do the perspectives of GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level reflect the social and/or medical models of disability?
- 2) How do the dynamics of an inclusive classroom impact the communication barriers faced between teachers and families?
- 3) How can certain avenues and styles of communication foster positive collaboration between GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level?

### **Research Participants**

Research participants were recruited using purposeful voluntary sampling and purposeful convenience sampling methods. Purposeful sampling involves selecting participants because they meet the criterion of the topic being studied (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Purposeful sampling was chosen as the study focused on two distinct study groups—families of students with disabilities and general education teachers of inclusive classrooms. A convenience sample was used as the research was done in the researcher's district of employment and the participant groups were easily accessible through district connections. Survey responses were completed on a voluntary basis by both GETINs and FSWDs and all focus group members volunteered to participate.

Though the initial methodology stated focus group sizes of 6-8 participants, the focus groups were smaller in number due to a lack of voluntary participation. The lack of participation was likely linked to increased demands on both families and teachers due to the coronavirus pandemic occurring while this research study was being conducted.

### ***Quantitative Research Participatory Sample***

Quantitative data was collected using a Google Form survey distributed through email to the target populations available through the research setting. This non-probability convenience sampling method was low-cost and easily accessible to the researcher. A probability sampling technique could not be used by the researcher due to special education law and the need to respect the confidentiality of special education students.

### **FSWD Survey Participants**

Research participation requests were sent by the district high school special education department, through district email, to all families of high school level itinerant students with disabilities attending the selected high school setting. Fifty survey responses were collected. Ten participant responses were considered invalid to the study due to missing information or due to screening questions indicating that they did not meet the required criteria of the study. This resulted in the analysis of a total of 40 family survey responses. The demographics of the families who responded can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1***Demographics of Families of Students with Disabilities-Quantitative Study Participants*

Variables	n (40)	Percentage
<i>Relationship to Student</i>		
Father	3	7.5
Mother	37	92.5
<i>Grade of Student</i>		
9	12	30.0
10	6	15.0
11	13	32.5
12	9	22.5
<i>Family Member Race/Ethnicity</i>		
American Indian/Alaskan	1	2.5
Black/African American	1	2.5
Hispanic American	3	7.5
Multiple Ethnicity/Other	2	5.0
White/Caucasian	33	82.5
<i>Student Race/Ethnicity</i>		
American Indian/Alaskan	1	2.5
Black/African American	1	2.5
Hispanic American	3	7.5
Multiple Ethnicity/Other	3	7.5
White/Caucasian	32	80.0
<i># of General Education Courses Student is Taking</i>		
1	0	0.0
2	3	7.5
3	4	10.0
4	5	12.5
5	5	12.5
6	3	7.5
7	11	27.5
>7	5	12.5
I don't know	4	10.0

**GETIN Survey Participants**

Research participation requests were sent directly through district email from the researcher to the general education faculty teaching at the high school level in the district of

study. Thirty-six survey responses were collected. Based on survey responses, all responses were deemed valid to the survey. The demographics of the 36 teachers who responded can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Demographics of General Education Teachers of Inclusive Classrooms-Quantitative Study*

*Participants*

Variables	n (36)	Percentage
<i># of Years Teaching</i>		
1-5	4	11.1
5-10	4	11.1
10-15	5	13.9
15-20	11	30.6
20-25	5	13.9
>25	7	19.4
<i>Teaching Subject Area</i>		
Art/Music	1	2.8
Computers/Business	1	2.8
English/ELL	4	11.1
FCS/Technology	1	2.8
Foreign Language	3	8.3
Math	8	22.2
Other	1	2.8
Science	12	33.3
Social Studies	4	11.1
Wellness/Fitness	1	2.8
<i># of IEP Students</i>		
0-5	3	8.3
5-10	14	38.9
10-15	9	25.0
15-20	4	11.1
20-25	1	2.8
More than 25	5	13.9
<i>% of IEP Students in Total Student Caseload</i>		
0-10	13	36.1
10-20	14	38.9
20-30	5	13.9
30-40	3	8.3
40-50	1	2.8



### ***Qualitative Research Participatory Sample***

Qualitative research was collected during three focus group meetings. Qualitative research participants were recruited in two ways. The first method of recruitment, purposeful voluntary sampling, resulted in three people volunteering to participate in the focus groups. This was then followed by purposeful convenience sampling in order to increase recruitment. Both voluntary sampling and convenience sampling are forms of nonprobabilistic sampling techniques which “involve selecting individuals who are available and can be studied” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 177).

#### **FSWD Focus Group Participants**

Through the FSWD Survey, families were provided the researcher’s email address to contact if they wished to volunteer to participate in the focus group meetings. Three families contacted the researcher to voluntarily participate. However, only one of the three families responded when contacted to schedule the focus group meeting date. In order to increase family participation, the researcher used convenience sampling and contacted families of past and current students with disabilities who were members of the researcher’s inclusive general education classroom. Two of these families volunteered to participate. However, one had an emergency on the date of the focus group and did not attend. The final FSWD focus group, therefore, consisted of two family members of students with disabilities. Both family members who participated in the focus group meetings (FSWD1 & FSWD2) were mothers of female upperclassmen students who were each taking at least five general education courses.

#### **GETIN Focus Group Participants**

Through the GETIN Survey, general education teachers were provided the researcher’s

email address to contact if they wished to volunteer to participate in the focus group meetings. No teachers reached out to voluntarily participate. One possible reason for the lack of response may be that the quantitative surveys were distributed at the end of the school year in which COVID shutdowns occurred. In order to recruit GETIN focus group members, qualitative research participation requests were sent through district email from the researcher to the general education faculty teaching at the high school level in the district of study. This resulted in a voluntary sample of five general education teachers of inclusive classrooms. The demographics of the five teachers who participated in the qualitative focus groups can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3***Demographics of General Education Teachers of Inclusive Classrooms-Qualitative Study**Participants (GETINI-5)*

Variables	n (5)	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	5	100.0
Male	0	0.0
<i>Teaching Subject Area</i>		
Foreign Language	1	20.0
Science	4	80.0
<i># of Years Teaching</i>		
11-15	1	20.0
16-20	3	60.0
21-25	1	20.0
<i># of IEP Students</i>		
11-15	3	
16-20	1	
21-25	1	
<i>% of IEP Students in Total Student Caseload</i>		
11-20	2	
21-30	2	
31-40	1	

### **GETIN/FSWD Focus Group Participants**

Both FSWDs who participated in the FSWD Focus Group volunteered to participate in the blended GETIN/FSWD focus group, however, only one responded to requests to schedule a meeting time. Though all five of the GETINs who participated in the GETIN Focus Group also volunteered to participate in the blended FSWD/GETIN focus group, two were available during the time that was convenient for the family member who was participating. This resulted in the blended GETIN/FSWD Focus Group consisting of two GETINs (GETIN1 and GETIN2) and one FSWD (FSWD2), all members of the two prior focus groups.

### **Data Collection & Analysis**

Data was collected using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design in which quantitative data was collected and reviewed prior to the collection of the qualitative data. The explanatory sequential design methodology focuses on using the quantitative results to inform the qualitative data. Creswell & Plano Clark (2018) describe, “In this design, the quantitative and qualitative data collections are related to each other and not independent” (p. 190). The data collection matrix used during this research study can be found in Table 4.

As the study followed an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, the initial method of data analysis involved an integrative approach. In an integrative data analysis approach, there are three phases: “the analysis of the initial quantitative data, an analysis of the follow-up qualitative data, and an analysis of how the qualitative data helps to explain the quantitative data to answer the mixed methods question” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 234-235). An integrative approach to data analysis for an explanatory sequential mixed methods study typically includes a purposeful sample of participants from the original study, often chosen

to represent the outliers of the quantitative analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). However, due to a lack of study volunteers, likely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus groups were not purposeful but instead a voluntary convenience sample. For this reason, a second method of data analysis was employed.

**Table 4***Data Collection Matrix*

Data Sources	Collection method	Data Analysis
<i>Quantitative Data</i>		
FSWD Survey-Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom	6/18-7/10/2020 Survey responses submitted through Google Forms	t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Likert Scale Questions</li> </ul>		
GETIN Survey-Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom	6/18-7/10/2020 Survey responses submitted through Google Forms	t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Likert Scale Questions</li> </ul>		
<i>Qualitative Data</i>		
FSWD Survey-Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom	6/18-7/10/2020 Survey responses submitted through Google Forms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open-ended Questions</li> </ul>		
GETIN Survey-Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom	6/18-7/10/2020 Survey responses submitted through Google Forms	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open-ended Questions</li> </ul>		
GETIN Focus Group	10/22/2020 Zoom Meeting 55.48 minutes 5 FSWD participants	<i>Integrative Data Analysis</i> Concept Coding
FSWD Focus Group	12/10/2020 Zoom Meeting 28.04 minutes 2 FSWD participants	<i>Convergent Data Analysis</i> 1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle: In Vivo & Descriptive Coding  2 <sup>nd</sup> Cycle: Pattern Coding
GETIN/FSWD Focus Group	1/16/2021 Zoom Meeting 55.28 minutes 1 FSWD participant 2 GETIN participants	

For the second round of data analysis, a convergent design was used to compare the results of both the quantitative and qualitative data. In a convergent design, the quantitative and qualitative results are compared to “look for common concepts across both sets of findings” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 224). During this second round of data analysis, the qualitative data was coded, codes were placed into categories and themes were determined. These coded qualitative data analyses were then compared to the quantitative data analyses.

### ***Quantitative Data Collection & Analysis***

Two Likert Scale surveys prepared using Google Forms were distributed for quantitative data analysis. The researcher directly emailed the surveys to general education teachers at the high school level, in the district of study, through district email. The high school special education department, in the district of study, distributed the surveys to the families of itinerant special education students at the high school level through district e-mail. These Likert scale surveys were analyzed using paired two-sample t-tests for means and two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variances.

### **Survey Data Responses**

Thirty-six responses were collected from the Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom Teacher Survey (Appendix A). All responses met the study requirements and were included in data analysis. Fifty survey responses were collected from the Collaboration for the Inclusive Classroom Family Survey (Appendix B). Data was missing from several participant responses. According to Martinez-Camblor, Corral, & de la Hera (2013), “Most of the times all subjects with all required information are used (available case analysis), that is, only the individuals without missing information involved in the analysis are considered” (p. 77). Using only the

responses containing all required information is also the norm in programs such as R, S, and SAS (Martinez-Cambolor, Corral, & de la Hera, 2013). As such, as described in Table 5, ten participant responses were considered invalid to the study due to missing data or due to screening questions indicating that they did not meet the required criteria of the study.

**Table 5**

*Participant responses not included in study*

Participant #	Reason for Removal from Study Data
31	Missing data on student grade level
41	Responded “none of the above” to 9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade level
43, 44, 45, 46	Responded “no” to child being enrolled in general education classes
47, 48, 49, 50	Responded “I don’t know” to child being enrolled in general education classes

### **Statistical Analysis of Likert Scale Surveys**

The Likert scale surveys distributed for this research were discrete visual analog scales as they consisted of response choices with “discrete opposites but no labels in between” (Uerversax, 2006). Labels were bivalent, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, following a 5-point rating scale and were symmetrical around a neutral center (Uerversax, 2006). Labeling only the endpoints is a common approach in Likert scale surveys (Robinson, 2017). The rating scale was assigned numerical values with a rating of strongly disagree being equal to a numerical value of 1 and a rating of strongly agree being equal to a numerical value of 5.

The Likert Scale surveys were analyzed using t-tests. Though Likert scale surveys are not normally distributed, the Central Limit Theorem states that, “given a sufficiently large sample size, the sampling distribution of the mean for a variable will approximate a normal

distribution regardless of that variable's distribution in the population" (Frost, 2020). According to Frost (2020), t-tests can safely be used for nonnormal data analysis if you have more than 20 observations per group. As this study included 36 participants in one group and 40 in the other, t-tests are an appropriate method of analysis for this collection of data. Though Likert scale surveys are considered nonparametric, t-tests have proven robust when analyzing five point Likert Scale surveys regardless of sample size (Derrick & White, 2017; de Winter & Dodou, 2010; Warachan, 2011). Additionally, as described by Adesoji & Babatunde (2009), "Unless the population distribution is quite distorted, you are probably safe choosing a parametric test when there are at least two dozen points in each group" (p. 9). Therefore, as there were over three dozen points for both participant groups in response to each survey question, the parametric t-test was chosen as the method to compare GETIN responses to FSWD responses.

More specifically, two-tailed, two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variances were used for analyses comparing GETIN responses to FSWD responses on like questions. Two-sample t-tests are used when determining if there is a significant difference between the means of two separate groups (Jovancic, 2019). In these analyses, the means of GETIN responses were compared to the means of FSWD responses to determine if there was a significant difference between their responses to survey questions. Unequal variance was used over equal variance as several researchers have reported that t-tests assuming unequal variances should be employed more frequently than t-tests assuming equal variances as the t-test assuming unequal variances has proven to perform as effectively (Delacre, Lakens & Leys, 2017; Ruxton, 2006). Two-tailed tests were used in order to determine if there were differences, in either direction, between GETIN responses and FSWD responses (One-tailed vs. two-tailed tests, 2015).

Microsoft Excel's "t-test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances" data analysis function was used to calculate the t-test data comparing GETIN and FSWD survey responses. Data was considered to evidence a statistically significant difference when the calculated p value was less than 0.05. Using  $p < 0.05$  as the significance level means that "there is a 5% or lower probability that the difference (...) found is attributable to sampling error" (Cooper, 2007, p. 541). In other words, a p value  $< 0.05$  designates that the mean differences between the two test groups would "occur by chance" only 5% of the time or less (Murphy & Goel, 2021, para. 4).

The Likert surveys also presented GETINs and FSWDs with questions regarding both special education and general education scenarios. The Teacher Survey included paired questions asking GETINs to respond about both families of students of regular education students and FSWDs. For instance, one survey prompt stated "I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with the families of my regular education students" while another prompt stated "I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with the families of my students with IEPs". The Family Survey included paired questions asking families to respond regarding both GETINs and special education teachers. For instance, one survey prompt stated, "My child's general education teachers respond positively to my efforts for communication", while another prompt read, "My child's special education teachers respond positively to my efforts for communication". The responses of participant #26 were not included in the paired Family Survey analysis as the participant did not respond to questions about special education teachers.

These paired survey questions were analyzed using two-tailed, paired, two-sample t-tests for mean. Paired t-tests were used because these t-tests were comparing "two measurements of the same group" (Research by Design, 2017). Though Likert scales are nonparametric, when the



sample size is greater than 20, the paired t-test is robust against Type 1 errors and shows little difference from nonparametric statistical analysis techniques, such as the Wilcoxon test (Derrick & White, 2017).

Microsoft Excel's "t-test: Paired Two Sample for Means" data analysis function was used to calculate the t-test data when comparing the data points between regular education and special education. Consistent with the two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variance, data was considered to evidence a statistically significant difference when the calculated p value was less than 0.05 or a greater than 95% confidence level. Two-tailed tests were, again, used in order to determine if there were differences, in either direction, between GETIN responses and FSWD responses (One-tailed vs. two-tailed tests, 2015).

### ***Qualitative Data Collection & Analysis***

Four sources of qualitative data were collected during this study. The Likert scale surveys included open-ended free-response questions to which FSWDs and GETINs could voluntarily write in their own responses. There were also three different focus groups. The first focus group consisted of five voluntary GETIN participants. The second focus group included two voluntary FSWD participants. The third focus group involved a combination of two voluntary GETIN participants from the original GETIN focus group and one voluntary FSWD participant from the original FSWD focus group. All focus groups took place on Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions. All focus group Zoom meetings were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### **Coding of Qualitative Data**

During the first round of data analysis, an integrative data analysis approach was used. Results from the quantitative data analysis were used to develop concept codes to be used for qualitative data analysis. Saldana (2016) describes concept codes as follows:

Concept Codes assign meso or macro levels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress (e.g., a series of codes or categories). A concept is a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action—a “bigger picture” beyond the tangible and apparent. A concept suggests an idea rather than an object or observable behavior (p. 119).

The concept codes for this round of data analysis are found in Table 6.

A convergent method was used during a second round of data analysis. During the second round of data analysis, the qualitative data was analyzed using two cycles of coding. The qualitative results were then compared to the quantitative data. During this convergent method of data analysis, the first cycle of coding involved both descriptive and in vivo coding techniques. Descriptive coding involves using words or short phrases to summarize a topic found in the qualitative data (Saldana, 2016). In vivo coding turns the participants’ verbatim words into codes (Saldana, 2016). For the second cycle of coding, pattern coding was used. Pattern coding brings “together a lot of material from first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Saldana, 2016, p. 236). An example of the two-cycle coding used in this round of data analysis can be found in Table 7. The results from these two rounds of coding were then analyzed to look for common categories and themes which are identified in Table 8.

**Table 6***Concept Codes used for Integrative Data Analysis*

Code	Definition	Example
Social/Medical	<p>The social model of disability believes that disability is rooted in barriers created by a society that develops its structures and attitudes around a standard of normal that does not reflect the needs of people with disabilities. The social model looks beyond the body and mind by considering the “lived experiences” of people with disabilities.</p> <p>The medical model of disability views the individual’s impairment as a problem that requires treatment or a cure. Any disadvantages and dependencies a person with a disability may encounter are due to the deficits in their own bodies or minds. The medical model views disability as a negative experience that is a definitive part of a person’s identity.</p>	<p>Um, I have to say that I tend to, even though you could just page through the IEP and say, okay, what are the SDIs for this particular student? I tend to read the background information to figure out a little bit more in some of the cases. And some it is little things that you don’t necessarily, um, think of offhand. And like one of the things I sometimes do before school starts, if I know I have a child coming in who has particular needs, I try to reach out to the parents and say, “Is there something that I need to do in the classroom to accommodate your child?”</p>
IEP	Perspectives regarding the role of the IEP/SDIs/accommodations in education.	<p>Like, that disrupted environment at the end was one of the things they wrote into the IEP that she can go take her test in a quiet room to have, and, and it’s something so small but that was making such a huge impact in how she was scoring in her testing.</p>
Inclusion Emotions	Emotions related to inclusion of students in a general education classroom	<p>And, I have seen how parents and administrators have gotten really frustrated with the general ed teacher, um, who believes that spelling is absolutely essential but on the IEP says you can’t grade spelling and the foreign language teachers chooses to ignore that because they think that foreign language is an exemption to that accommodation.</p>
FSWD/GETIN Reactions	A reaction to communication that is unique to the relationship between GETINs and FSWDs	<p>Um, just, it’s, I almost have PTSD from that, from that, from that one with, with, with the kid and the parents, and like, I did, everything I did was wrong and it was the end of the year.</p>
Role of Special Education	A communication that is made through the special education department	<p>I think that’s, that’s strong special ed teacher advocating I really do. I think that’s a huge part of your communication chain.</p>
Amount of Contact	References the amounts of contacts made	<p>I would say that those communications are certainly more frequent than the regular ed. kids. And I would say that they’re, um, more often initiated from the parent side then from the teacher side. I feel like they, they advocate for their, for their child a lot more frequently than the regular ed parent does. Um, and I feel like I can meet them more, like, I’m invited into meet, like, for IEPs or other things, way more frequently than I am with any regular ed kid. And in, um, 9<sup>th</sup> grade team also, we see, we tend to see those kids more frequently than the regular ed kids in 9<sup>th</sup> grade team.</p>
Communication Needed	Data that supports the need to foster communication.	<p>Um, so I just know that that definitely, definitely helped. Um, just bridging that gap. I didn’t realize just how big of a gap we were actually dealing with.</p>
Barrier	References a barrier that GETIN or FSWDs are facing.	<p>I feel that I do not have much time to send emails during the day. I almost always need to answer emails when I get home.</p>

**Table 7***Example of Two Cycle Coding used for Convergent Data Analysis*

1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle Codes (Descriptive & In Vivo Codes)		2 <sup>nd</sup> Cycle Code (Pattern Code)
Large # of IEP students	Teacher experience	Teachers Need Time
Large classes	Change	
Not enough time to communicate	Classroom experiences	
Teacher passion for subject	ED time	
Availability	Preservice training	
Communicate as necessary	Time	
Schedules	Encourage families to participate	
Train the teacher	IEP Need time	
What do I have to do?	More meetings with FSWDs	
What can I do?		

**Table 8***Resulting Categories and Themes from Qualitative Data Analyses*

Data Analysis Method	Concept Codes/ Pattern Codes	Categories	Themes
<i>Research Question #1</i> Integrative	Social/Medical IEP	Social/Medical	Disability Models in the Inclusive Classroom
Convergent	Learn about the student The IEP-A necessary support	The IEP	
<i>Research Question #2</i> Integrative	Teachers need time Causes of communication breakdowns Give us a chance	Emotions	Dynamics of the Inclusive Classroom
Convergent	Inclusion emotions FSWD/GETIN reactions to communication Role of special ed Differences in the amount of contacts	Essential Resources Communications	
<i>Research Question #3</i> Integrative	Communication is beneficial Communication chain Communication methods Fostering communication Fostering student independence	Benefits of Communication	Benefits of Communication
Convergent	Fostering communication Overcoming barriers Recommended strategies Methods of communication	Supports Student Advocacy Methods for communication Strategies for communication	Avenues for Communication Styles of Communication

### **Results of Data Analysis**

Data analysis indicates that though both GETINs and FSWDS implement both the social and medical models of disability when discussing the education of students with disabilities, GETINs tend to more frequently reference the social model of disabilities. Analysis of the data also highlights some of the unique dynamics of inclusive classroom settings. There is a general frustration seen in both GETINs and FSWDs due to a lack of understanding about the systematic functioning of the inclusive education system. Oftentimes, FSWDs and GETINs lack both training and experience in working within an inclusive classroom environment. Another frustration arises from schools steadily increasing both the number of regular education students and students with disabilities in these inclusive general education classes (Bender et al, 2008; LeDoux et al, 2012). These increasing numbers of students limit the amount of time that GETINs have available to communicate with FSWDs, leaving them wishing for more.

Though challenges to communication between GETINs and FSWDs are obvious, it is important that avenues for communication be open and maintained as GETINs and FSWDs both strongly advocate for the benefits of this communication. Emphasis is placed on the importance of early communications in order to open up the communication pathways. However, as the focus of this study is at the high school level, GETINs and FSWDs both suggest that, in order to promote student self-advocacy, all communications after that initial contact should channel directly through the student.

***Research Question 1: Disability Models in the Inclusive Classroom***

The focus of the data analyses for research question one was to determine the extent that the perspectives of GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level reflect the social and/or medical models of disability. Referencing Rieser (1994), key concepts such as labeling and diagnoses were correlated to the medical model of disability, while key concepts such as lived experiences, and individual “strengths and needs as defined by self and others” (p. 19) were correlated with the social model of disability. References to the IEP, or Individualized Education Program, were also included within the medical model perspectives as the IEP, as described by Baglieri & Shapiro (2017), is a “prescribed list of remediative or basic skills instruction designed to support their eventual participation in a content-based curriculum” (p. 146). Connor & Olander (2020) also reference the “quasi-medicalized terminology” of the IEP which “operationalizes disability as pathological deficit, disorder and dysfunction” (para. 8).

Quantitative data analysis evidenced that both GETINs and FSWDs acknowledge the importance of the social model of disability. As displayed in Tables 9 and 10, both sample groups agree that they communicate about student’s individual needs, strengths and challenges and that it is important for GETINs to learn about the lived experiences of their students. The quantitative data also evidenced that GETINs are mixed in their perceptions of the medical model of disability. Figure 3 illustrates that though GETINs responded with varying perspectives to the importance of knowing a student’s label, they agreed/strongly agreed that they need to read and understand the student’s IEP. The family quantitative survey did not pose questions that directly addressed the medical model of disability and for that reason the quantitative data was inconclusive on FSWDs perspectives about the medical model of disability.

**Table 9**

*Research Question #1: Comparison of FSWD survey responses to GETIN survey responses*

*using two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variances*

Survey Question	Sample Group	Mean ***	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t	p (2-tail)
I communicate with: ·teachers regarding my child's individual needs. ·families regarding student's individual needs	FSWD	3.625	-0.458	1.462	-1.660	0.102
	GETIN	4.083				
I communicate with: ·teachers about my child's strengths. ·families about student strengths.	FSWD	3.375	-0.014	1.564	-0.044	0.965
	GETIN	3.389				
I communicate with: ·teachers about my child's challenges. ·families about student challenges.	FSWD	3.897	-0.270	1.447	-1.015	0.314
	GETIN	4.167				
I believe it is important for general education teachers to learn about the lived experiences of: ·my child ·students with IEPs	FSWD	4.275	-0.114	0.933	-0.609	0.544
	GETIN	4.389				

\*Statistically significant

\*\*Mean Difference = Mean<sub>FSWD</sub> – Mean<sub>GETIN</sub>

\*\*\*Bivalent Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

**Table 10**

*Research Question #1: Quantitative data from paired, two sample t-tests for means*

Survey Question	Mean ***	Mean Difference**	Std. Deviation	t	p (2-tail)
<i>GETIN Survey</i>					
I believe it is important to learn about the lived experiences of my: ·regular education students. ·students with IEPs.	4.361	-0.028	0.723	-1.000	0.324
	4.389				
<i>FSWD Survey</i>					
I believe that my child's educational needs can be better met by communication with his/her: ·general education teachers. ·special education teachers.	4.359	0.128	0.932	1.044	0.303
	4.231				
I believe it is important for _____ to learn about the lived experiences of my child. ·general education teachers. ·special education teachers.	4.256	-0.154	0.938	-1.780	0.083
	4.410				

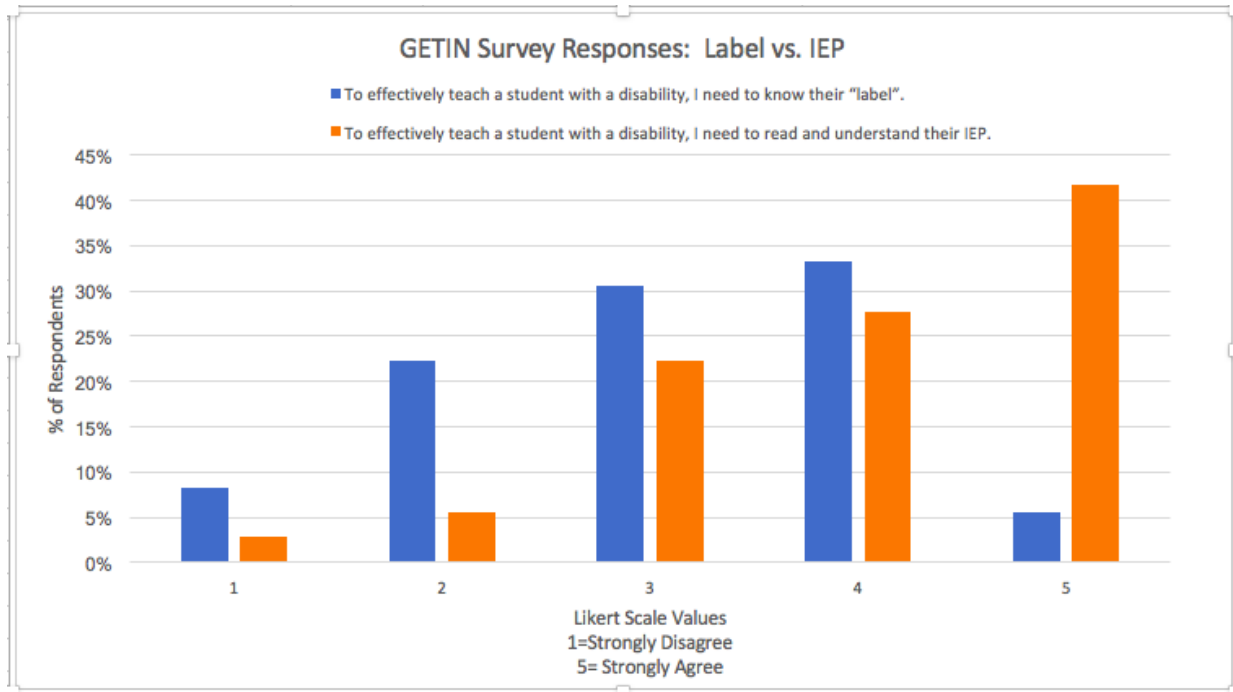
\*Statistically significant

\*\*Mean Difference = Mean<sub>RegEd</sub> – Mean<sub>SpEd</sub>

\*\*\*Bivalent Likert Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree

**Figure 3**

*Quantitative Results Analyzing GETINs and the Medical Model*



Qualitative data analyses evidenced that GETINs reference utilizing both the medical model and the social model of disability in their inclusive high school classrooms. FSWDs also discuss the need for both the medical and social models of disability in the education of their children with disabilities. To determine the frequency at which GETINs and FSWDs identified with each disability model, the frequency of codes categorized as social/medical, within the qualitative data, was counted. The results of this analysis can be found in Figure 4. The frequency of the codes is reflected in the size of the font, with larger fonts representing codes which appeared more often.



**Figure 4**

*Code frequency within the Social/Medical category.*



Though aspects of the social and medical models of disability are highlighted by both GETINs and FSWDs, Figure 4 clearly shows that GETINs more frequently associate aspects of their inclusive classrooms with the social model of disability, often only referencing the medical model when discussing the IEP as a guideline they must adhere to when teaching students with disabilities. For instance, GETIN2 stated, “Other than testing accommodations and that kind of stuff that are specified in the IEP and just making sure that I’m following all of those guidelines.

But other than that, we all have our strengths and weaknesses when it comes to learning something new.” GETIN1 also discussed, “I’ll need to pay attention to the IEP which I wouldn’t have to do otherwise, but...okay, I need to be more aware for the student.”

FSWDs identify the roles that both the social and medical models play in their child’s education. FSWD2 described this dynamic to teachers during the FSWD/GETIN focus group:

Honestly, having a label as learning support validates what we’ve been telling her all along which is, it’s just the wiring. And it’s okay and we’re going to help you in all these ways and you have all these supports and your teachers are going to see this label and they’re going to know, okay, she just learns a little differently and here’s a whole list of ways that we’re going to help you to learn.

This statement shows one family’s perspective on the importance of the “medicalized” label diagnosis and accompanying IEP accommodations in educating their child with disabilities; not as a cure, but instead, as a way for teachers to help students with proper supports.

### **The IEP**

Qualitative data collection regarding the IEP provide a second snapshot that shows that GETINs’ perspectives follow more closely with a social model of disability while FSWDs work with, and in, both the social and medical models of disability. Convergent analysis descriptive and in vivo codes and examples of integrative analysis phrases that contributed to the IEP coding category are shown in Table 11. In comparing the GETIN data to the FSWD data it is clear that FSWDs view the medical model, prescriptive, IEP as a necessary support for equitable learning or as FSWD2 stated, “for a level playing field”, a phrase that clearly correlates to the social model. They emphasize the importance of GETINs knowing, understanding and following the

IEP with one FSWD focus group participant describing the “huge impact” the IEP made on her child’s testing scores. FSWD#42 also emphasizes this in an open-ended survey response, writing, “How do we get the 1-2 teachers every year to learn and appreciate that children with IEPs learn differently and that making accommodations to help them learn is no different than putting in a ramp for a person in a wheelchair? Accommodations are “ramps” for the mind.” GETINs responses clearly evidenced the importance of knowing the IEP and SDIs, yet emphasized the importance of learning about the students, including their backgrounds and learning styles. They acknowledge that the IEP is something they “need to look at” while they highlight the importance of needing to look beyond it, again, confirming that GETINs perspectives tend to focus more on the social model of disability.

**Table 11**

*Coding within “The IEP” category*

Descriptive/In Vivo Codes GETINs	Descriptive/In Vivo Codes FSWDs	Coded Phrases GETINs	Coded Phrases FSWDs
Only IEP for information	Family frustration with not following the IEP	<i>I have to say that I tend, to, even though you could just page through the IEP and say, okay, what are the SDIs for this particular student, I tend to read the background information to figure out a little bit more in some of the cases</i>	<i>So, it’s really like all of her teachers really understanding what the IEP is for and working together to be on her side.</i>
SDIs	IEP has reasons		<i>Like, with making sure they know that IEP...it wouldn’t be in there if it wasn’t an issue</i>
IEP not on mind	SDIs		
Learning style	Teacher refuses to follow the IEP	<i>maybe the IEP didn’t tell me everything I needed to know, but luckily, dad kind of bridged that gap between myself, the IEP and the, and the student.</i>	<i>All these accommodations would not be, like you know, we’re not asking for the, for the world, we’re asking for a level playing field.</i>
People first language	Teacher understands the IEP		
	Following guidelines		
	Teacher forgets about disability	<i>I’m going to need to pay more attention to what’s going on with the student and yes I’ll need to pay attention to the IEP which I wouldn’t have to do otherwise.</i>	<i>That disrupted environment at the end was one of the things they wrote into the IEP that she can go take her test in a quiet room to have, and it’s something so small but that was making such a huge impact in how she was scoring in her testing.</i>
	IEP not followed		
	Evaluation		
	Alternate universe	<i>I need to go and look at the IEP and see what accommodations they need.</i>	
	Validation		<i>Teachers need to familiarize themselves with those IEPs. Even if it’s just the cheat sheet of SDIs.</i>
	Label		

***Research Question 2: Dynamics of the Inclusive Classroom***

The focus of research question two was understanding how the dynamics of an inclusive classroom impacts the communication barriers faced between teachers and families. The inclusive classroom presents unique opportunities and challenges. The inclusive classroom combines general education and special education into a unique setting which, if not understood fully, through either training, education or experience, often results in frustrations for both GETINs and FSWDs. These frustrations, in addition to time constraints and the unique dynamics of the inclusive classroom all influence communications between FSWDs and GETINs.

**Emotions**

At first, analysis of the data through an integrative approach seemed to show a disconnect between the quantitative and qualitative data. Though participant responses to survey questions, illustrated in Tables 12 and 13, evidenced that GETINs and FSWDs do not feel awkward nor frustrated when communicating with each other and that there were no statistically significant differences when comparing these feelings between regular education and special education scenarios, the focus group responses of both groups often referenced ideas of frustration. Through convergent analysis of the data, however, it was determined that the frustrations expressed by the participants during the focus groups were not in reference to the communications between GETINs and FSWDs, as confirmed in the quantitative data, but instead in reference to the dynamics of the system in which inclusive education resides.

**Table 12**

*Research Question #2-Emotions: Comparison of FSWD survey responses to GETIN survey*

*responses using two-sample t-tests assuming unequal variances*

Survey Question	Sample Group	Mean ***	Mean Difference* *	Std. Deviation	t	p (2-tail)
I feel awkward when communicating with: ·my child's general education teachers. ·the families of my students with IEPs.	FSWD	2.179	-0.432	1.430	-1.431	0.157
	GETIN	2.611		1.178		
I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with: ·my child's general education teachers. ·the families of my students with IEPs.	FSWD	2.800	0.229	1.340	0.810	0.421
	GETIN	2.571		1.037		

\*Statistically significant

\*\*Mean Difference = Mean<sub>FSWD</sub> – Mean<sub>GETIN</sub>

\*\*\*Bivalent Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

**Table 13**

*Research Question #2-Emotions: Quantitative data from paired, two sample t-tests for means*

Survey Question	Mean ***	Mean Difference** **	Std. Deviation	t	p (2-tail)
<i>GETIN Survey</i>					
I feel awkward when communicating with the families of my: ·regular education students. ·students with IEPs.	2.611	0	1.178	0	1
	2.611		1.178		
I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with the families of my: ·regular education students. ·students with IEPs.	2.400	-0.171	1.035	-1.234	0.226
	2.571		1.037		
<i>FSWD Survey</i>					
I feel awkward when communicating with my child's: ·general education teachers. ·special education teachers.	2.211	0.264	1.436	1.032	0.309
	1.947		1.272		
I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with my child's: ·general education teachers ·special education teachers	2.795	0.436	1.418	1.441	0.158
	2.359		1.547		

\*Statistically significant

\*\*Mean Difference = Mean<sub>RegEd</sub> – Mean<sub>SpEd</sub>

\*\*\*Bivalent Likert Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree

The qualitative data, shown in Table 14, provides several examples of GETINs and FSWDs referencing frustrations that they encounter within the inclusive classroom setting. Both groups' responses demonstrate the frustrations that may arise when there is not a clear understanding for the way the inclusive education system functions. Additionally, GETINs discuss frustrations in having "an IEP accommodation or something that maybe challenges something that as a regular ed teacher you worked so hard to learn" while FSWDs reference frustrations due to a lack of adaptation on the part of the GETINs.

**Table 14**

*Research Question #2-Emotions towards the system of inclusive education*

GETIN Statements	FSWD Statements
<p><i>Focus Groups</i></p> <p>T1: And I have seen how parents and administrators have gotten really frustrated with the general ed teacher who believes that spelling is absolutely essential but on the IEP says you can't grade spelling and the (subject) teacher chooses to ignore that because they think that (subject) is an exemption to that accommodation.</p> <p>T2: I just think the root of a lot of the frustrations come from the passion that we all have and it feels like that there's a roadblock for sharing that passion.</p> <p>T3: This year there's been a lot of frustration from the parents that they, they don't know what to do.</p> <p>T4: I feel like face-to-face conversations tend to happen because there's been some sort of breakdown or misunderstanding or frustration on the parent end and then they demand to meet in person.</p>	<p><i>Open-Ended Surveys</i></p> <p>Participant #20: Sometimes not knowing how the system works causes frustration on the parents part, and not fully understanding the process. The "jargon" is hard to understand.</p> <p>Participant #22: It always feels that during an IEP meeting, the general ed teachers do not want to be there and the parent is being a pain in the neck requesting them to adapt the schoolwork to my son's needs.</p> <p>Participant #32: Many times general education teacher have no idea this is an IEP student and they retain information differently than regular ED and become so pushy the child shuts down.</p> <p><i>Focus Groups</i></p> <p>F2: I have to read the book to her. Can...there has to be something better. There has to be another way. And, he was like lets figure it out. And found, you know, a recording whatever it is, a digital version where she could listen to it. And that made all the difference. So, you know, that communication, oh, and that frustration level, you know was great. He really responded, so it was great.</p>

### **Essential Resources for the Inclusive Classroom**

Data analysis determined that there are three resources, unique to the inclusive classroom, that may impact communications between GETINs and FSWDs. First, GETINs lack available time due to large caseloads of students, large numbers of IEP students and increasing daily tasks. Second, the special education teacher stands out as an advocate for students with disabilities within the inclusive classroom. The special education teacher also acts as an important “middle man” between GETINs and FSWDs. Third, though more and more teachers are being assigned to inclusive classroom settings, many have not been educated about the special education system nor teaching students with disabilities, nor have they received training on communicating with SWDs or FSWDs. As a result, many of the GETINs who participated in this survey do not feel prepared to teach students with disabilities.

#### ***Availability of Time***

Table 15 clearly illustrates that time is a barrier to GETINs ability to communicate with FSWDs. While the FSWDs agreed that they have time available to communicate with GETINs, GETINs disagreed that they have time available during their contractual day to communicate with FSWDs. Qualitative data analysis reveals possible reasons for this lack of time including increased numbers of daily tasks, large caseloads and large numbers of IEP students. Ninety-two percent of GETINs, who responded to the quantitative survey, teach five or more students with IEPs in their inclusive classes with 14% of the respondents stating that they have more than twenty-five students with IEPs on their caseload. Twenty-five percent of GETIN respondents stated that students with IEPs make up 20% or more of their total student caseload. Both GETINs and FSWDs acknowledge that students with disabilities may require extra supports and,

therefore, additional IEP students within an inclusive classroom greater limits a GETINs available time. As the literature says, GETINs teaching large caseloads of diverse student populations struggle to create instruction that is best for all students given their limited time and resources (Brown & Babo, 2017; Grant, 2014; LeDoux et al., 2013; Scanlon & Baker, 2012).

**Table 15***Research Question 2: Availability of Time in the Inclusive Classroom*

	GETIN Responses	FSWD Responses
<i>Quantitative Data</i> I have time available to communicate (p<0.001)*	n=36, m=2.028**, sd=0.810 during the contractual day	n=40, m=4.300**, sd=0.992
<i>Qualitative Open-Ended Questions</i>	<p><i>Participant #10:</i> It is difficult to find time to communicate with the families of my students due to a growing list of tasks that need to be completed by the teacher</p> <p><i>Participant #7:</i> I feel that I do not have much time to send emails during the school day. I almost always need to answer emails when I get home.</p>	<p><i>Participant #28:</i> I do understand and appreciate the large number of IEPs and challenges teachers are expected to deal with, so I do understand how they are prone to becoming overwhelmed.</p>
<i>Qualitative Focus Groups</i>	<p><i>T1:</i> And, sometimes I can make that time for one that I can tell looking at the SDIs and everything, that's going to be a little bit more high maintenance, I'll make time for that.</p> <p><i>T1:</i> I mean, like, this year I've got 140 students.</p> <p><i>T1:</i> Cause it's hard to actually have that full communication with every single IEP student.</p> <p><i>T2:</i> So whether it's flexibility on our end as a regular ed teacher to meet the needs of all of our students and in order to do that, it takes time. And time to get to know our kids on, you know, a different level, or more personal level, and time to contact parents, if that's necessary.</p> <p><i>T3:</i> My students with IEPs are the bulk of the people, students, utilizing my 1:30 zoom help and so I'm really glad we have that time.</p> <p><i>T4:</i> I don't think anyone would argue this in any educational realm, that time is a major barrier to this being better.</p> <p><i>T5:</i> And, we were in constant contact and what it came down to was I would spend extra time with this particular kid and we would just sit and work side-by-side, and go through the review. And then on test day, the child had extra time as an accommodation, so, you know, always had extra time.</p>	<p><i>F1:</i> I don't expect them to be emailing 35, I mean that's a lot of extra work on a teacher to be emailing 35 parents.</p> <p><i>F2:</i> So it, to me, now, it means that I have a child whose going to need a lot of support.</p>

\*Statistically significant

\*\*Bivalent Likert Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree



### *The Special Education Teacher*

An evident dynamic of the inclusive classroom is the role of the special education teacher. As seen in Table 16, quantitative and qualitative data analyses all show the significant role the special education teacher has in the education of students with disabilities within the inclusive classroom. Both FSWDs and GETINs rely on the special education teacher as a “middle man” when communicating about students with disabilities within the inclusive classroom. GETINs look to the special education teacher as a source of information beyond the IEP. They look to the special education teacher to learn about a student’s background and needs. FSWDs emphasize the advocacy role that special education teachers play for their children. FSWDs know who their child’s special education teachers are more than they know who their child’s regular education teachers are and they feel they have made stronger partnerships with their child’s special education teachers. FSWDs also find it easier to communicate with their child’s special education teachers than with their child’s regular education teachers.

**Table 16***Research Question 2: The Special Education Teacher*

Data Source	Participant Responses
Quantitative Surveys	<p>FSWDs know who their child's special education is (<math>m=4.000</math>, <math>sd=1.414</math>) more than they know who their child's general education teacher (<math>m=3.421</math>, <math>sd=1.500</math>), <math>t(37)=-2.869</math>, <math>p=0.007</math>.</p> <p>FSWDs feeling they have made stronger partnerships with their child's special education teachers (<math>m=3.149</math>, <math>sd=1.668</math>) versus their child's general education teachers (<math>m=2.462</math>, <math>sd=1.374</math>), <math>t(38)=-2.738</math>, <math>p=0.009</math>.</p> <p>FSWDs find it easier to communicate with their child's special education teachers (<math>m=3.615</math>, <math>sd=1.498</math>) than their child's general education teachers (<math>m=2.949</math>, <math>sd=1.432</math>), <math>t(38)=-2.105</math>, <math>p=0.042</math>.</p>
GETIN Open-Ended Survey	<p>Participant #34: I rely heavily on special ed case managers as a middle man for communication with families of students with IEPs bc they are more familiar with the family's dynamic and the student's needs.</p>
GETIN Focus Groups	<p>GETIN1: But that case manager, what a great middle person. Cause they have all the context from what the kids going through in all their classes and communicating with the parent a little bit more regularly.</p>
FSWD Open-Ended Survey	<p>Participant #1: I prefer to funnel most information through the special education teacher so that they can provide a consistent message to the general education teachers.</p> <p>Participant #22: Our communication is so much better with the special education teacher. I rely on her to communicate with the regular ed teachers for my son's needs.</p> <p>Participant #23: My daughter reported any issues that she couldn't resolve to her caseworker and they worked together with her regular ed teachers to resolve them.</p> <p>Participant #41: If I have a question regarding something happening in the regular education room, I contact the special education teacher.</p> <p>Participant #42: We have been given an amazing case manager who truly advocates for my son when we have issues surface.</p>
FSWD Focus Groups	<p>FSWD2: Even like little things like that where the special ed teacher can go over it with the regular ed teachers. Those little things are so hugely important.</p> <p>FSWD2: And I need that special education teacher to really advocate for her with the regular ed teachers before the year starts, so that they know ahead of time that, you know, you're going to not understand it and you're going to be like what is wrong with you and that's gonna, everything is going to explode.</p>

### *Training and Experience*

One FSWD open-ended survey response stated the need for GETINs to receive special education training prior to becoming a teacher of an inclusive classroom. FSWD #32 wrote, “Many times general education teachers have no idea this is an IEP student and they retain information differently than regular Ed and become so pushy the child shuts down I believe all teachers should be mandatory to get training on special education to have a better understanding”. Though thirty-six GETINs responded to the survey and are, therefore, already teaching within the inclusive classroom, quantitative data shows that many of these GETINs have not received education on teaching students with disabilities. Only 33.3% of the GETIN survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that they have received education on teaching students with disabilities. Only 38.9% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel prepared to teach students with disabilities and only 30.5% agreed or strongly agreed that they understood how the special education system works. Additionally, though GETINs disagree that they have had training on communicating with families overall ( $m=2.083$ ,  $sd=1.131$ ), they disagree even more that they have had specific training on communicating with the families of their students with disabilities ( $m=1.750$ ,  $sd=0.996$ ),  $t(35)=3.162$ ,  $p=0.003$ .

Data suggest that, for GETINs, experience may compensate for education and training. This is reflected in GETIN #12’s open-ended survey response which states, “Having spent 15 of my 30 years in special education before moving on, I feel I have a solid footing where this is concerned.”. GETIN2, during a focus group, stated, “And then I think you just kind of, over time, accumulate life experiences and you do see what works with some students and what doesn’t work with other students.” GETIN2 also stated, “I was inexperienced and it takes time

to build that tool set so that you cannot run or repeat problems or run into something similar and now you have a completely different outlook or different approach and a lot of the stuff that we're talking about they don't really teach you in your classes. You just have to learn through experience and, sadly, sure, mistakes are made along the way." However, as no correlation seems to exist between collected data regarding the GETINs years of experience and their response to feeling prepared to teach students with disabilities, more data would need to be collected to confirm a correlation between a teacher's experience levels and their feelings of comfort in teaching inclusive classrooms.

### **Communication and the Inclusive Classroom**

Though responses to survey questions indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the amount of communications occurring between GETINs and FSWDs versus families of regular education students nor between FSWDs and GETINs versus special education teachers, qualitative data shows that the perception is otherwise. Open-ended survey and focus group responses indicate that GETINs suggested that they are communicating more frequently with FSWDs than with the families of their regular education students and that FSWDs want to communicate with them more often than the families of their regular education students. The qualitative results also indicate that FSWDs are communicating with the special education teacher more often than they are communicating with the general education teacher. Regardless of the amount of communication, both groups indicate that they typically receive a positive response to these communications.

### *Amount of Communication*

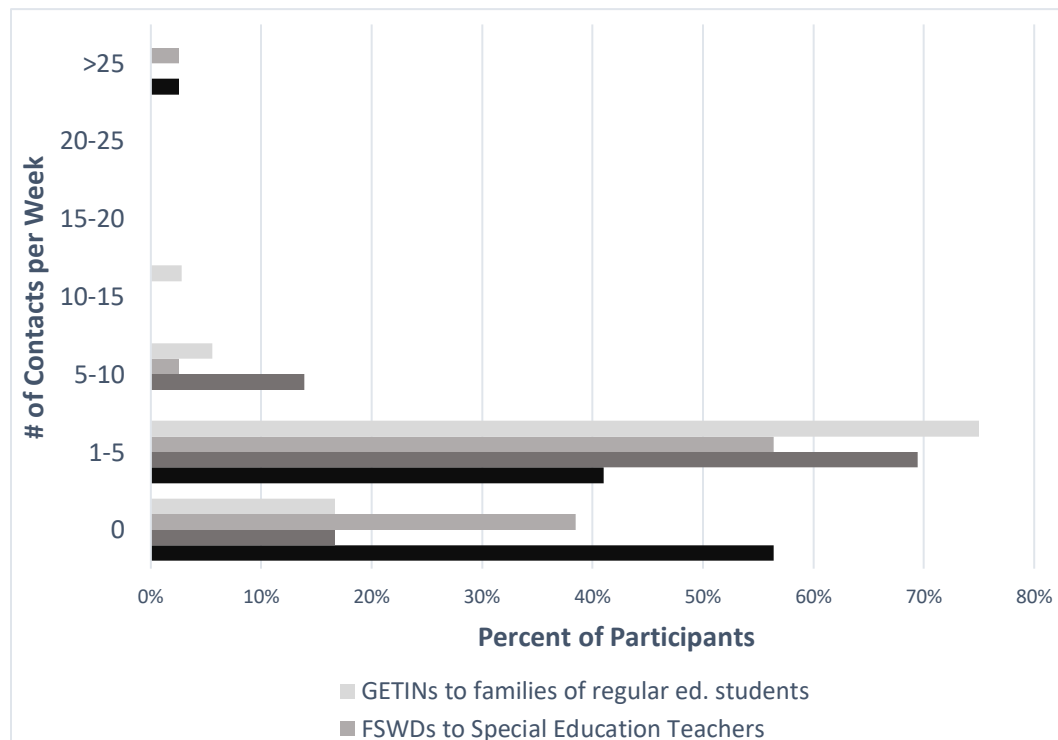
Though there was no statistically significant difference in the frequency with which FSWDs communicate with their child's special education teachers ( $m=3.077$ ,  $sd=1.562$ ) compared to their child's general education teachers ( $m=2.692$ ,  $sd=1.280$ ),  $t(38)=-1.379$ ,  $p=0.176$ , the means as well as the reported number of contacts, shown in Figure 5, do suggest that FSWDs contact their child's special education teachers slightly more frequently than FSWDs contact their child's general education teachers. Fifty-six percent of FSWDs reported having zero weekly contacts with their child's GETINs while only 38.5% reported having zero weekly contacts with their child's special education teachers. As FSWD#8 wrote in the open-ended surveys, "Communication with gen ed teachers is low because I go through the sp ed teacher about his classes."

GETINs communicate as frequently with the families of their regular education students ( $m=3.167$ ,  $sd=1.159$ ) as they do with their FSWDs ( $m=3.33$ ,  $1.195$ ),  $t(35)=-0.529$ ,  $p=0.600$ . As seen in Figure 4, GETINs have a similar number of contacts each week to both FSWDs and families of their regular education students, with 69% of GETINs reporting that they have contact with FSWDs one to five times a week and 75% of GETINs reporting that they have contact with families of their regular education students one to five times a week. However, qualitative responses from GETINs do not support this data. GETIN1 stated in a focus group, "I have more communication with students who have IEPs." GETIN4 explained in the same focus group, "I would say that those communications are certainly more frequent than the regular ed kids."

GETIN4 continued, “And I would say that they’re more often initiated from the parent side than from the teacher side”. GETINs report that FSWDs want to communicate about their child’s progress in class ( $m=3.778$ ,  $sd=0.832$ ) more than families of their regular education students ( $m=3.139$ ,  $sd=0.961$ ),  $t(35)=-4.263$ ,  $p<0.001$ . Yet, GETINs reported that they communicate more frequently with FSWDs ( $m=3.333$ ,  $sd=1.046$ ) than FSWDs reported communicating with GETINs ( $m=2.650$ ,  $sd=1.292$ ),  $t(74)=-2.395$ ,  $p=0.019$ . Figure 5 also shows that GETINs report more contacts per week than FSWDs report. Additionally, though GETINs reported communicating more frequently than FSWDs, responses to the open-ended survey, shown in Table 17, evidence that FSWDs feel that there is still a lack in communication from GETINs.

### Figure 5

*Research Question #2: Amount of weekly contacts by FSWDs and GETINs*



**Table 17**

*Research Question #2: FSWD Qualitative Data Regarding Number of Contacts*

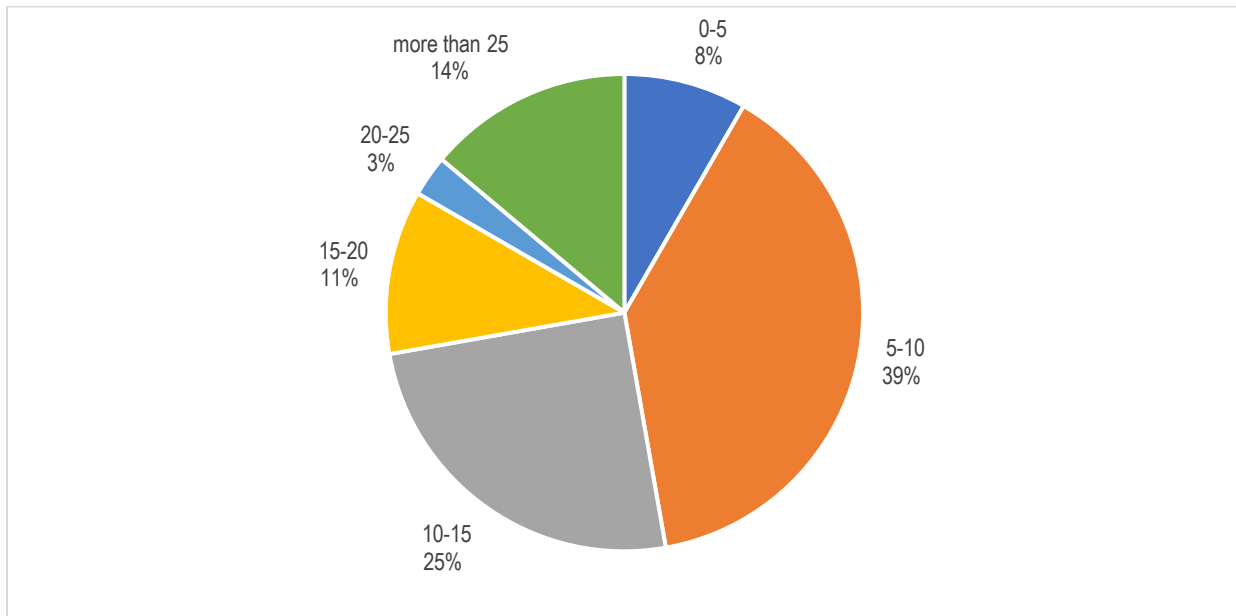
FSWD Open-Ended Survey Participant	Qualitative Response
#3	I have asked the teachers to let me know if there is a concern with my child. However, very few of them do. Most times the teachers don't reach out at all even if my child seems to be doing poorly. It is usually me reaching out first when I note a problem...
#6	I would have to extend myself, they only reach out when he is failing.
#9	Teachers do not want to talk to parents...
#11	I've only heard from her case manager about her IEP. Not one individual teacher communication from her teachers.
#14	I have had no problems communicating with my son's special education teachers. During the stay at home order; I had some difficulty getting in touch with my son's general education teachers.

This difference in perceptions is likely due to the student caseloads and numbers of IEP students that GETINs teach within their inclusive classrooms. Most GETINs, 83%, indicated that they make between one and ten contacts per week to FSWDs. Referencing Figure 6, most GETINs, 92%, teach more than five students with IEPs, with 28% teaching more than 15 students with IEPs. Therefore, if the majority of GETINs are making one to ten contacts per week with FSWDs, then there will be many families who are not receiving contacts. For instance, 14% of GETINs report having more than 25 students with IEPs. If we assume they make, on average, 5 contacts a week, and they have 25 IEP students, 20% of the FSWDs would receive a contact by a GETIN each week with 80% not receiving contact, likely leaving several FSWDs feeling as if GETINs are not reaching out to them as often as they would expect. Yet, the GETINs, especially with their available amounts of time, and several different contacts a week, feel as if they are in frequent contact with the FSWDs. In simpler terms, stated by GETIN1 during the FSWD/GETIN focus group, "I mean, like, this year, I've got 140 students, not all at

the same time, thankfully, this year. And the parents have 1-ish, you know, in their brood, maybe more but not 145.”

### Figure 6

*Approximate # of IEPs enrolled in GETIN classes*



### ***Responses to Contacts***

Differences in perceptions regarding the amounts of contacts could also be due to how GETINs and FSWDs respond to communications from each other. Though quantitative data was not collected regarding the response rate to communications, qualitative data analysis, as seen in Table 18, identified several instances where GETINs referenced a lack of response to their communications from FSWDs. A lack in FSWD response would result in FSWDs reporting less contacts with GETINs. FSWDs reference a lack of response from GETINs less frequently which would correlate to the data that GETINs feel they are making more frequent contacts than FSWDs.



**Table 18***GETIN and FSWD Descriptions of Communication Responses*

	GETINs	FSWDs
Open-Ended Survey Responses	<p>Participant #7: I find that the response rate from parents of general education vs. IEP students differs. I think that there are some parents that will respond immediately if their child has an IEP because they are willing to be a partner, but many ignore any contact. I feel that I get a slightly higher response rate from the parents of my general education students.</p> <p>Participant #8: Often the family does not confirm receipt or acknowledge receipt of information</p> <p>Participant #19: I do not hear back from all families who have been emailed.</p>	<p>Participant #18: There was a general education teacher this year who had to be reminded several times about implementing accommodations for my son. There were no responses to certain emails sent by me to this particular teacher. My son sometimes did not receive responses when he reached out to the teacher.</p> <p>Participant #42: The majority of the teachers we have been fortunate to work with are always willing to work with us.</p>
Focus Group Responses	<p>T1: But generally, I have, I've had the nicest interactions with parents. I've been lucky I think. I haven't had a negative parent call in probably 5 or 6 years.</p> <p>T3: When I call home, the parents seem very supportive. This year, there's been a lot of frustration from the parents that they, they don't know what to do if the child is not doing any work. Um, so it's kind of unsettling.</p> <p>T4: I've had some pretty contentious IEP meetings where the parents throw other teachers that had that kid under the bus in front of me.</p> <p>T5: But I would have to say when I've contacted home I would say 80% of the time it's been a supportive, really good conversation. Um, there's only that small percentage where you're sitting there going, what just happened on that call?</p>	<p>F1: Anytime I've ever reached out I've always had teachers reach right back out to me...everyone always emails me right back. We always get a positive response and everyone is always usually really willing to work with us and with (student) if there is an issue.</p> <p>F2: And reaching out to the teacher and saying, like, I am reading this to her every night. I have to read the book to her. There has to be something better. There has to be another way. And he was like, let's figure it out. And found you know a, not recording, whatever it is, a digital version where she could listen to it. And that made all the difference.</p>

Though the rate of response seems to differ, quantitative survey responses along with a majority of the qualitative data, regarding responses to communication, demonstrate that positive responses are the norm for communications between families and teachers for both regular education environments and inclusive classroom environments. GETINs agree that families of their regular education students ( $m=3.8889$ ,  $sd=0.887$ ) and FSWDs ( $m=4.056$ ,  $sd=0.583$ ) both respond positively to their efforts for communication,  $t(35)=-1.099$ ,  $p=0.279$ . FSWDs agree that both GETINs ( $m=3.718$ ,  $sd=1.146$ ) and special education teachers ( $m=3.974$ ,  $sd=1.181$ ) respond positively to their efforts for communication,  $t(38)=-0.944$ ,  $p=0.351$ . Also, when reflecting on communicating with each other, FSWDs ( $m=3.700$ ,  $sd=1.137$ ) and GETINs ( $m=4.056$ ,  $sd=0.583$ ) both agree that they receive positive responses,  $t(74)=0.7301$ ,  $p=0.087$ .

### ***Research Question 3: Fostering Positive Collaboration***

Fostering positive collaboration is essential as there are many benefits to communication as it relates to the inclusive classroom. One of the main benefits of these communications is that it helps “bridge the gap between teacher, IEP and student”, as was stated by GETIN4 during the Teacher Focus Group. Early contacts between GETINs and FSWDs can build rapport and lay the groundwork for an environment of open communications. This leaves a pathway open that can be traversed if direct communications with students do not result in positive outcomes.

#### **Benefits of FSWD/GETIN Communication**

Table 19 provides supporting data that confirms that GETINs and FSWDs consider communication to be beneficial. Quantitative data analyses clearly indicate that communication is valuable to both GETINs and FSWDS. GETINs and FSWDs agree that it is important to form partnerships with each other and to have a shared vision for a student. Communication is also

valued as a way to better meet the educational needs of students. Though the importance of communication is evident in survey responses from both FSWDs and GETINs, FSWDs indicate, with statistical significance, that they place a stronger value on the importance of these communications than GETINs. This is also evident in the number of qualitative data responses by FSWDs, versus GETINs, coded as “benefits” of communication.

**Table 19**

*Research Question 3: Benefits of Communication*

Quantitative Data**	Mean Diff. ( $m_{\text{FSWD}} - m_{\text{GETIN}}$ )	p	Qualitative Data-FSWD	Qualitative Data-GETIN
FSWDs strongly agree ( $m=4.725$ , $sd=0.599$ ) while GETINs agree ( $m=4.028$ , $sd=1.158$ ) that they value family-teacher communications	0.697	0.002*	OES#20: Communication is a great tool, different ideas can be brought to the table by parents and teachers.	OES#7***: I almost always find out additional information about the student when I contact home.
Both FSWDs ( $m=4.375$ , $sd=0.925$ ) and GETINs ( $m=4.222$ , $sd=0.898$ ) agree that the child’s educational needs can be better met by communication	0.153	0.468	OES#24: Communication is the key.	
Both FSWDs and GETINs strongly agree that it is important for families and teachers to support each other. FSWDs ( $m=4.875$ , $sd=0.404$ ) more strongly than GETINs ( $m=4.583$ , $sd=0.604$ ).	0.292	0.017*	OES#33: Communicating honestly with the teachers to set real expectations “off the record” and being honest that my child is not an angel was helped move things forward.	
FSWDs strongly agree ( $m=4.800$ , $sd=0.516$ ) while GETINs agree ( $m=4.314$ , $sd=0.867$ ) that it is important for families and teachers to have a shared vision for the student.	0.486	0.005*	OES#36: I am a huge advocate for open communication.	
FSWDs strongly agree ( $m=4.675$ , $sd=0.730$ ) while GETINs agree ( $m=4.028$ , $sd=1.158$ ) that it is important to form partnerships with each other.	0.647	0.006*	FSWD2: You know, anytime you can establish an open line of communication with your child’s educator, can only benefit what’s, you know, touching base on what’s happening at home, what’s happening in the classroom, where the needs are, what they’re seeing.	

\*Statistically significant

\*\*Bivalent Likert Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree

\*\*\*OES = Open-ended survey participant

### Styles of Communication

Convergent data analysis reveals styles of communication that support and foster collaboration between GETINs and FSWDs at the high school level. GETINs and FSWDs should first work to create open lines of communication. GETINs and FSWDs who have successfully created these open lines of communication should then work to mentor or share their experiences with other FSWDs and GETINs. Then, with these supports in place, and with all parties being in partnership to support the student, collaboration between GETINs and FSWDs can be reduced in favor of greater student self-advocacy. A stronger understanding of how to move towards this style of collaboration was gained through analysis of the in vivo and descriptive codes associated with each of these categories, as illustrated in Table 20.

**Table 20**

*Research Question 3: In Vivo and Descriptive Codes associated with the Style Category*

Category	Descriptive and In Vivo Codes		
Open Communication	Compassion Flexibility Reach out early Honesty	Start with the good Empathy Initiate contact	Home life Parent input Clean slate
Supports	Experience Help other parents Mentor	What works Encourage other parents Reach our colleagues	Always learning Challenge yourself Build a tool set
Student Advocacy	Make someone thrive Know their interests Background info Talk to students Not just an IEP kid Clean slate Know kids on a personal level	Build a bond Establish a rapport Look out for students Meet all students' needs Give kids agency Meet the needs of all students Teach kids to advocate for themselves	Get to know them Learning style People first Challenge them Work with student

### *Open Communication*

As previously seen in the quantitative data, both FSWDs and GETINs recognize the benefits of open communication. Family focus group member FSWD2 best summarizes a possible style of communication that could lead to this open communication. FSWD2 stated:

Don't be afraid to reach out to the parent and say, 'So what does this look like, or how am I going to, this is what this class is, like, how this class is running, how can I meet your child's needs?' I think that's huge for teachers to figure that out early on and then, again, keep that communication open as needed.

Communicating early in the year is a concept seen in seventeen different coded responses within the qualitative data. This proactive style of communication is recognized by FSWDs and GETINs as a style of communication that can improve collaboration. GETIN1 stated, "I wish I had the time to make the first contact at the beginning of the year based on, on what I have before I even see them so that the parent knows that I'm ready, and I'm looking and I'll take any information they have." A conversation between FSWDs also demonstrates the importance of communicating early:

FSWD2: Absolutely reaching out early. Cause once they're drowning like

FSWD1: It's too hard to pull them back.

FSWD2: Yeah, absolutely.

FSWD1: Not like a regular education student. They can't, they just don't bounce back to another test. It takes time sometimes to build them back.

FSWD1 recognizes that these early communications should not just be from the GETINs but also can be from the FSWDs stating, "You know that you're reaching out early and saying if there is

a problem don't hesitate." Thus, there is a running suggestion throughout the qualitative data that communications should begin early in the school year between GETINs and FSWDs, regardless of who initiates that first contact.

GETIN#33 provides one example of why these open lines of communication are important in an open-ended survey response. This research participant writes, "With most, not all, I have found that making a connection with a challenging student/parent in regards to special education goes a long way." In a focus group, GETIN2 also discussed, "I think so many misconceptions and bumps sometimes arise along the way throughout the year could be avoided if there were just more open, candid, hey, we're in this together, let's just talk as adults." Some methods to maintain these open lines of communication that were suggested within the data include exercising compassion and empathy, remaining flexible, inviting input, emphasizing the good, and learning about the student.

### *Supports to Increase Open Communication*

However, as discussed within the data analysis of research question two, GETINs and FSWDs are both facing challenges when working within the inclusive setting. GETINs lack time and both GETINs and FSWDs evidence frustrations due to a lack of understanding and a lack of experience within the inclusive classroom setting. Therefore, in order to foster an open line of communication these barriers need to be overcome.

Qualitative data suggest some common ways to support FSWDs and GETINs on their paths to greater collaboration. GETIN2 often discusses experience as a way to improve the inclusive classroom setting. In one discussion, she commented, "But we're always learning and most of us continue to grow and change and become better at it. But it, it really does take

experience.” As previously stated, GETINs are often not educated in inclusive practices.

Therefore, both professional learning and experience are necessary for GETINs and FSWDs to overcome their frustrations with the inclusive classroom setting.

To further encourage open communications, GETIN2 and FSWD2 both suggest the idea of reaching out to colleagues who are not fostering these collaborations. FSWD2 stated:

Encouraging the other parents. Like make sure you make this a partnership. Make sure that you have that open line of communication and if you feel like it’s not open, it’s okay for you to take that step as the parent and reach out and, in fact, it’s welcomed. So, that’s my takeaway as the parent, and as someone who’s kind of mentoring other parents.

GETIN2 also addresses the need to work with other GETINs saying:

And how do you reach our colleagues that maybe...what is that awkwardness? What is holding them back? What are they afraid of? Could we address that with our colleagues that we could move everybody forward because I wholeheartedly believe they’re in education, they’re a good person, they want to do the right thing, but that tool set of those skills that you filled with experience, something prevented that from progressing or changing over time.

These two statements, in themselves, suggest that opportunities for professional learning regarding inclusive settings and experienced mentorships should be offered to both GETINs and FSWDs to foster greater collaboration.

### ***Student Advocacy***

Though both GETINs and FSWDs acknowledge the positive benefits of their collaboration, both also emphasize the importance of high school students learning to advocate

for themselves. As FSWD1 states, “You know, I can’t constantly be there all the time so I, we, need to teach them to advocate for themselves somewhat as well.” FSWD2 says, “It’s she and her case manager and the teachers and then I am like the last to be contacted now. And that’s what I want. That’s where you absolutely want that to get so that when she goes to college, like she can work with the student services department and her professors and like mom’s not going to be, you know.” GETIN4 also emphasizes the need for students to develop self-advocacy stating, “I very often also work with the kid first and if that fixes or remedies whatever is going on, then, I don’t feel like I need to bring the parents in because I feel like part of my job as a high-school teacher is to, kind of remove some training wheels a little bit because you know they’re going to be independent adults very soon and we would like them to be, you know, resourceful and responsible and all that good stuff.”

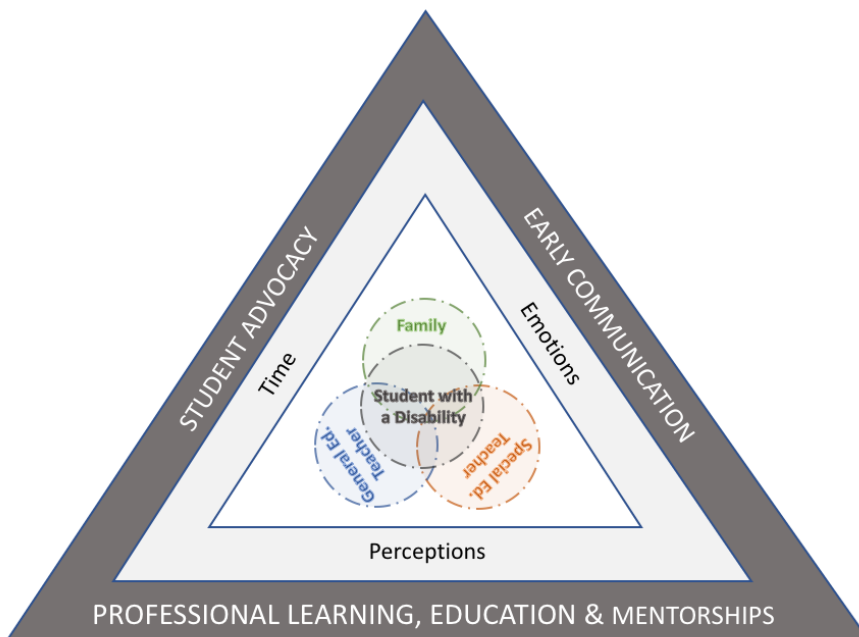
Qualitative data analysis identified several styles of communication that teachers can exercise to help support students on their path to self-advocacy. Developing a rapport with students was identified in the data as an important step. GETINs can build this rapport by getting to know their students. Some suggestions to accomplish this, from the qualitative data, are to talk to the students, to learn about the students’ backgrounds, lived experiences and learning styles, and to get to know the students on a personal level. FSWDs also emphasize the importance of challenging the students, helping them thrive in the classroom, and recognizing that as a member of an inclusive classroom the student wants to be an active participant in that classroom. In essence, teachers should build a bond with their students and offer them agency in their own learning.



Figure 7 demonstrates how the styles of communication discussed can be used to address the unique dynamics of the inclusive classroom. Early communications would lead to open communications that would help to reduce the frustrations experienced by GETINs and FSWDs working within the inclusive education system. Professional learning, preservice education, mentorships and experiences would lead to a greater understanding of the inclusive education system, potentially reducing any misperceptions that may exist between GETINs and FSWDs. Students who self-advocate have more self-confidence, take greater ownership in their own education and are often able to work to solve their own problems (Lee, 2021). Therefore, increased student advocacy would not only foster stronger communications between GETINs and students with disabilities, but also could result in teachers needing less time to communicate through a “middle man” to solve problems or resolve issues.

### Figure 7

#### *Triangle of Inclusive Classrooms*



### **Avenues for Communication**

Table 21 highlights the details of communications between FSWDs and GETINs including the methods used to communicate, the reasons for that communication, and the outcomes of those communications. GETINs and FSWDs communicate using a variety of methods, with email being the most frequent method used. GETINs and FSWDs are more often communicating about problems and challenges than communicating to discuss strengths or provide positive feedback. However, regardless of the method or reason for the communication, the result is typically a positive outcome from both FSWDs and GETINs.

Though direct student contact is the preferred method of communication to encourage student advocacy, students may not always respond to this approach. As GETIN1 stated:

Because we can expect students to advocate for themselves but if they just aren't in a position where they're ready to do that yet, we can't really hold them to that... You know, so it's the advocacy piece that the families can sometimes bring if the kid's just not ready. 'Cause a fifteen-year old might not be able to, at that moment, to advocate for themselves.'

Thus, avenues for communications between GETINs and FSWDs still need to be available.

Built from coded data, which can be found in Table 21, Table 22 illustrates when certain forms of communication should be employed and the benefits and disadvantages of each.

**Table 21***Research Question 3: FSWD and GETIN current avenues for communication*

Data Source	Methods Used to Communicate	Reasons for Communication	Outcomes from Communication	
Quantitative	<i>FSWDs</i>	<i>Strengths*</i>	<i>Positive Response*</i>	
	Email	95.0% FSWD: m=3.375, sd=1.564	FSWD: m=3.700, sd=1.137	
	Face-to-face	2.50% GETIN: m=3.389, sd=1.153	GETIN: m=4.056, sd=0.583	
	Phone/email/text/face-to face	2.50%		
	<i>GETINs</i>			
		<i>Challenges*</i>		
		FSWD: m=3.897, sd=1.447		
		GETIN: m=4.167, sd=0.775		
	Email	97.2%		
	Google Classroom	2.8%		
Qualitative	<i>70 Referenced Methods</i>	<i>64 Referenced Reasons</i>	<i>50 Referenced Outcomes</i>	
	Direct student contact	12.9%	Positive Reasons 31.3%	Positive Outcomes 78.0%
	Email	32.9%	Amazing work	Student advocacy
	Face-to-face	8.6%	Progress or strength	Responsible/resourceful
	IEP meeting	1.4%	Info on disability	Problems resolved
	Phone call	20.0%	Advocating for student	Appropriate placement
	Power School	4.3%	Navigating the year	Motivates student
	Special ed. teacher	10.0%	Improvement	Support
	Team meeting	4.3%	Background on student	Better rapport
	Zoom	5.7%	Removing barriers	Good conversation
			Check-ins	Opened communication
			Asking questions	Learn about student
			Student support	Bridged the gap
			Negative Reasons 68.8%	Appreciation
			Remedy a situation	Whole picture
			Missing work	Avoids miscommunication
			Student misplaced	Parents put at ease
			Invoke the IEP	Awareness
			Behavioral issues	Student didn't shut down
			Needs	Consistent messages
			Accommodations concerns	Immediate information
			Breakdown	Student independence
			Misunderstanding	Work turned in
			Frustration	Everyone on same page
			Disconnecting	Negative Outcomes 22.0%
			Lack of response	Lost the point
			Poorly done work	Wrong impression
		Cognitive issues	Misread	
		Attendance	Tone	
		Academic dishonesty	Nerve-wracking	
		Student stuck	Not supportive	
		Student overwhelmed	No response	
		Technical issues	Disregards accommodations	
			Verbally assaulted	
			Refused input	
			Phone tag	

\*Bivalent Likert Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree

**Table 22***Research Question 3: Inclusive Classroom Guide for Avenues of Communication*

When	Type of Communication	Positives	Negatives
Beginning of Year	FSWD ↔ GETIN	Opens Communications	None identified
	FSWD ↔ Special Education Teacher	Consistent message of special ed. teacher	None identified
On-Going	GETIN ↔ Student	Promotes self-advocacy of student	Student may not respond
	FSWD ↔ LMS (Power School)	Immediate Information	None identified
As Needed	FSWD ↔ GETIN Email	Can resolve issues quickly	Tone/Email may be misread
	FSWD ↔ GETIN Phone Calls	Avoids miscommunications	Time consuming
	FSWD ↔ GETIN Face-to-Face	Avoids miscommunications	Frustrations may already be high
	Team Meetings	Information readily available	Scheduling challenges
	FSWD ↔ Special Education Teacher	Consistent message of special ed. teacher	None identified

Table 22 demonstrates that communications for the inclusive classroom should not just be limited to communications between FSWDs and GETINs. Communication should begin with the student in order to promote student self-advocacy. The first communication should take place at the beginning of the year to encourage open communication between all parties who are part of a student being educated in the inclusive classroom. This includes the regular education teacher, the special education teacher, the student and their family. Teachers can build rapport with their students by providing on-going feedback to them daily during class. Teachers can also provide additional on-going feedback to families and students through the school's learning management system (LMS). Communications beyond the GETIN and student should occur on

an as-needed basis. These communications can occur in a variety of ways and may involve different stakeholders depending on the situation.

To summarize, while both the social and medical models of disability are evident in the perspectives of GETINs and FSWDs, GETINs put a greater emphasis on the social model of disability. Inexperience and lack of training and education around inclusive classroom environments creates a dynamic in which GETINs and FSWDs feel frustration with the system. GETINs and FSWDs also may misperceive each other's intentions and needs. Ultimately, however, both GETINs and FSWDs have the same end goal—fostering student self-advocacy. Direct contact through and with the student can encourage students to develop advocacy for themselves. Student communications should first occur at the beginning of the year with the support of GETINs, FSWDs and special education teachers. Communications with the student should remain on-going throughout the course with FSWDs, GETINs and special education teachers collaborating, through open communication, as necessary, when additional supports are needed for the student.

### **Chapter 5-Discussion of Results**

The goal of this study was to find ways to bridge communications between families of students with disabilities and general education teachers of inclusive classrooms. Inclusive classrooms are a construct of the social model of disability, yet, inclusion functions within a special education system that has been designed through the medical model of disability. In order to understand the perspectives that FSWDs and GETINs bring to the table, the first step of this research was to determine where FSWDs and GETINs reside on this spectrum of disability models. Data evidenced that though both GETINs and FSWDs referenced both the medical and

social models of disabilities, GETINs more frequently relay concepts specific to the social model of disability. This may be due to GETINs lack of training, education, and experience in the special education system, and, therefore, preservice education and on-going professional learning is necessary for general education teachers assigned to inclusive classrooms.

The second goal was to identify any classroom dynamics that are unique to the inclusive classroom environment. Understanding the dynamics of the inclusive classroom is necessary to reflect on any barriers that may exist between families and general education teachers involved in this inclusive setting. One barrier highlighted misperceptions FSWDs have surrounding the inclusive education system. These misperceptions can be addressed by educating and supporting FSWDs through family workshops and mentorships. Other barriers were emotions, such as frustration, that FSWDs and GETINs face when discussing the inclusive education system and the lack of time available to GETINs. Student disability narratives could provide a much-needed early communication that would open lines of communication between students, families and teachers while not taking additional time from teachers.

The last goal was to listen and learn from the general education teachers and families of students with disabilities about their expectations and suggestions for what communications should look like when students are educated in the inclusive classroom. Through this interpretivist paradigm, avenues of communication were defined to foster the main goal for SWDs highlighted by both FSWDs and GETINs during this study—student self-advocacy.

Chapter 5 will provide more detail into each of the strategies suggested for bridging the barriers to communications in inclusive classrooms. The chapter begins with a discussion comparing and contrasting the results of this study with the literature. In context with the study

results, specific strategies for improving communications within an inclusive classroom environment will then be addressed. The limitations of the study will then be discussed followed by further research suggestions, several of which are based on participant feedback. Lastly, I will discuss my next steps, as an action researcher, for putting my research into practice.

### **Results as they relate to the literature**

Though there is abundant literature in regards to family-teacher communications, the majority of the research focuses on inclusion at the primary level versus the secondary level. Collaborations between general education teachers with families of regular education students or special education teachers with families of special education students are the primary focus of these studies, with little research found regarding the dynamic between the general education teacher of inclusive classrooms and families of students with disabilities. Though many correlations were found between the literature and the conclusions of this study, the dynamic of an inclusive classroom at the secondary level creates unique barriers to family-teacher communication that have not been previously highlighted. Much of the research found in the literature suggests school wide initiatives to improve communications at the primary level. This research study, in contrast, resulted in a more specific and detailed roadmap for communications between families, teachers and students at the high school level. Thus, this research adds to the literature by addressing the specific dynamics of inclusive classrooms and by providing detailed avenues of communication that teachers, students and families can take to increase their communication and collaboration.

*How Disability Models Manifest in an Inclusive Classroom Setting*

Inclusion is closely tied to the special education system, however, each is rooted in a different model of disability. As described by the literature, special education has been grounded in the medical model of disability for more than four decades (Valle & Connor, 2019). Valle & Connor (2019) paint a clear picture of how special education is rooted in the medical model of disability, describing it as follows:

The patient (student) presents with symptoms (educational problems). The scientific expert (school psychologist) performs an examination (psycho-educational assessment) in order to confirm or rule out a diagnosis (disability). Once a diagnosis (disability) is identified, a prescription (Individual Education Plan, or IEP) is written, with recommendations for a course of treatment (special education placement and individualized instruction) intended to cure (remediate) the patient (student). A follow up appointment (annual IEP review) is scheduled to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment plan (special education services) (pp. 51-52).

Inclusive classrooms, on the other hand, are rooted in the social model of disability. Connor and Olander (2020) describe inclusive classrooms as being designed in a “sociocultural lens” that “do not try to assimilate children or seek to mold them into ‘normal’ people, but rather build in opportunities for flexibility and customization of knowledge and skills being taught, welcoming students’ wide range of abilities and interests as an inherent part of the classroom community” (para. 10).

Figure 8 illustrates the key components of the social and medical models of disability as explained in the literature and as determined in this study. The diagram on the left represents



disability models as described by the literature. The diagram on the right represents the FSWD and GETIN perspectives as related to the disability models during this study. As Figure 8 highlights, both the literature and this study suggest that GETINs and FSWDs perspectives are positioned between the medical and social models of disability. However, in the left diagram, GETINs are positioned closer to the medical model, as the literature suggests that schools still largely operate within a medical model of disability, even with increasing numbers of inclusive classes. In this diagram, families are also positioned between the two models of disability yet closer to the social model, for the literature describes that families often respond through a social model lens when challenged with or when challenging disability stigma but through a medical lens when defending that challenge. In the diagram on the right, representing this study, there is a different positioning of the GETINs and FSWDs between the two models of disability. FSWDs are positioned in the center between the social and medical models. Throughout this study FSWDs discussed perspectives related to both models of disability, often discussing how the medical aspects of special education work to create an “equal playing field”, representative of the social model, for their children. In the diagram on the right, it is seen that the GETINs are now positioned near the social model of disability. This is in contrast to their position as described in the literature. The results of this research evidenced that GETINs more frequently took the perspective of the social model of disability.

Quantitative data analysis provides one possible reason for this difference between this study and the literature. All GETINs participating in this study were teachers of inclusive classrooms, with 78% of those teachers having more than 10 years of teaching experience. Yet, only 33% of those teachers stated that they agreed that they have received education or training

on teaching students with disabilities and only 31% stated that they agreed that they understand how the special education system works. It is likely that though the general education teachers are working along-side the special education department when teaching inclusive classrooms, they are not aware of the role that the medical model plays in developing IEPs and in the assigning the “labels” that accompany their students with disabilities.

## Figure 8

*Disability Models as Described by the Literature, FSWDs and GETINs*

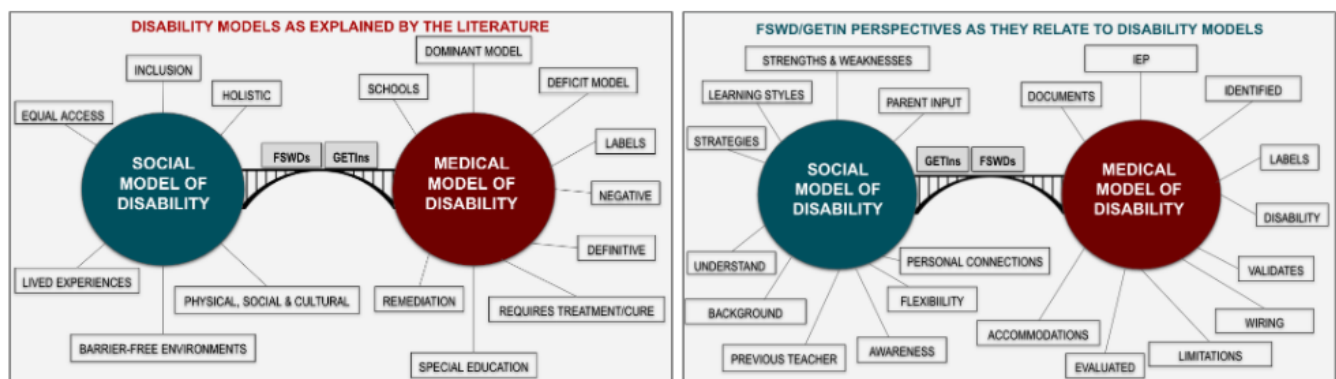


Figure 8 also compares the words associated with the disability models found throughout the literature versus the words associated with the models found throughout the qualitative data of this study. The left diagram, the references from the literature, show more generalized descriptors and overarching ideas for each of the disability models. Though there is obvious correlation between the two diagrams, the diagram on the right, from the study, provides a more detailed picture of how the disability models present within an inclusive classroom. In many ways, the right diagram illustrates the paths taken, in an inclusive classroom, to reach those overarching ideas presented within the literature. For instance, where the literature discusses lived experiences as an important part of the social model of disability, the right diagram, from

this study, shows that this is achieved, in the inclusive classroom, through parent and previous teacher inputs, personal connections, and learning style inventories. The diagram on the left also shows how the literature makes the more general connection between schools and special education with the medical model of disability, while the diagram on the right, from this study, shows how that manifests within an inclusive classroom through IEPs, documents and accommodations.

Figure 8 also shows how inclusive classrooms may challenge the perspectives regarding the disability models presented within the literature. For instance, the literature often discusses the medical model of disability as a negative experience focused on deficits, remediation and treatment. In contrast, the results of this study showed more positive perceptions of medical model concepts. FSWDs discuss students' evaluations and labels as validating while GETINs identify the outcomes of student labels, such as the IEP and accommodations, as required supports necessary for the SWDs within their classrooms. The diagram on the right also highlights the GETINs own reflections of their roles in supporting SWDs through the social model of disability, showing their perspectives that awareness, flexibility, understanding and strategies are all necessary parts of their inclusive classrooms.

### ***The Barriers that FSWDs and GETINs Face***

Table 23 shows a comparison of the barriers associated with inclusive classrooms that were referenced in the literature review versus the barriers that were identified during this study. This study took an interpretative snapshot of the perspectives of GETINs and FSWDs through focus groups and open-ended questions, yet did not specifically address any particular barriers. Therefore, barriers discussed in the literature regarding inclusive classrooms may not be evident

in this study due to the methods of data collection. Perceptions and frustrations were barriers experienced by both GETINs and FSWDs with similar barriers evidenced in the literature. The other main barriers revealed through this study were challenges faced primarily by GETINs. Time was a barrier that was identified both in this study and within the literature. Though the literature states that time is a barrier for both families and teacher, the results of this study identified time as a barrier specifically for GETINs, likely linked to the other barriers identified such as large caseloads and increased daily tasks. This study also suggested additional barriers that should be explored further. One of these is the lack of experience, education and training, for both GETINs and FSWDs, in inclusive classrooms. A future study could work to determine if there are any correlations between this lack of training and experience and the frustrations that FSWDs and GETINs feel towards the inclusive education system. Other barriers that presented in this study such as large caseloads, the number of IEP students and the daily tasks and schedules of GETINs could be further studied to determine if there are any relationships between these barriers and the ability of GETINs to communicate with FSWDs, SWDs and special education teachers.

**Table 23**

*Comparisons of Barriers to Inclusion Determined in the Literature and this Study*

Barriers Identified in the Literature		Barriers Identified in this Study	
Lack of time	Negative feelings	Lack of time	Lack of training
Stigma and blame	Negotiating with too many parties	Frustration with system	Lack of experience
Input not valued	Accessibility	Large caseloads	#s of IEP students
Ability to communicate	Negative communications	Increased daily tasks	Perceptions
Differing views of disability			

*Avenues that Traverse the Gaps to Communication in High School Inclusive Classrooms*

The benefits of family-teacher communication are discussed at length in the literature and there is a clear connection between family-teacher communication and the academic and socio-behavioral successes of students regardless of student background or prior achievements. This study confirmed that open communications between families and teachers are valued as a way to better meet the educational needs of students. Though both participant groups acknowledge the importance of family-teacher communications, FSWDs placed a greater emphasis on the role of these communications in the inclusive classroom.

Review of the literature revealed a lack of research specific to family teacher communications at the high school level and an absence of research regarding the communications specifically between general education teachers of inclusive classrooms and families of students with disabilities within those classrooms. This research filled this gap in the literature by specifically addressing the communications at the high school level between general education teachers of inclusive classrooms and families of students with disabilities. This research also added to the literature by producing a vision of the avenues to follow when communicating for the inclusive classroom at the high school level as diagrammed in Figure 9.

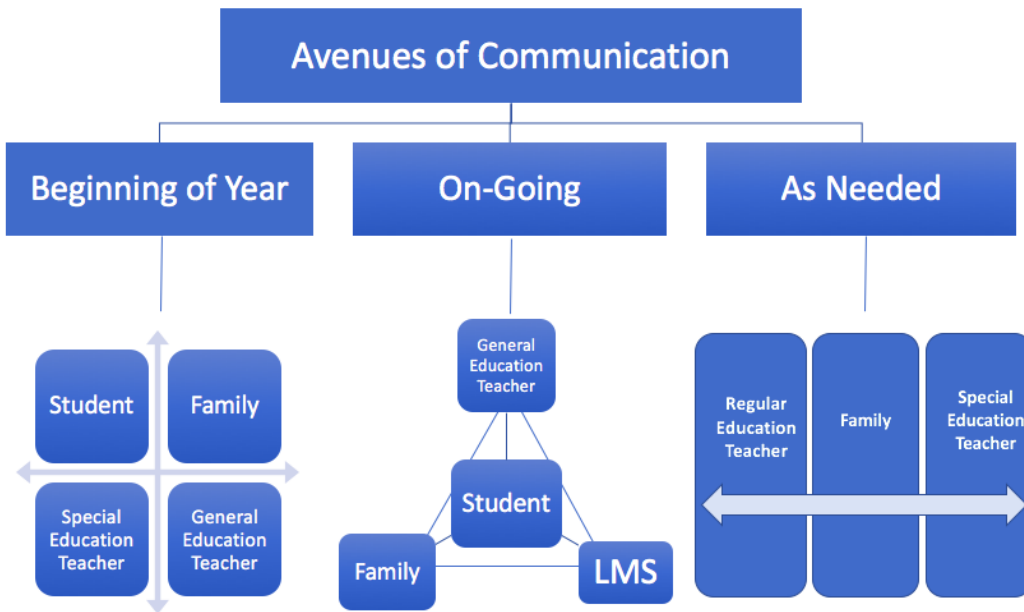
**Figure 9***Avenues of Communication*

Figure 9 shows three avenues of communication. Both FSWDs and GETINs agree that there should be an initial, beginning of the year communication in which the student's disability can be openly discussed. This beginning of the year communication is emphasized by both FSWDs and GETINs as a way to create open pathways of communication. Communications through and with the student should be an on-going process for both FSWDS and GETINs. The learning management system is a way to use technology to maintain this on-going communication. Communications with students will promote student advocacy and independence. Communications directly between GETINs, FSWDs and special education teachers, should then, only be made on an as needed basis.

**The Path Forward**

Teachers, families, schools, districts and those working with students with disabilities all have a role in improving communications within an inclusive classroom setting. Students in

inclusive classrooms should be encouraged to advocate for themselves. One way this could be initiated is by encouraging students to write their own disability narratives to be distributed to their teachers at the start of the school year. This could be managed through the school's special education department. GETINs and FSWDs can also foster and encourage student self-advocacy through their communications and interactions with the student. Inclusive classrooms bring special education and regular education together into one unique educational environment. Unfortunately, it is likely that GETINs and FSWDS may not fully understand all of the characteristics of these inclusive classrooms. Therefore, schools, districts and organizations working for students with disabilities should offer professional learning, experiences and mentorships to afford GETINs and FSWDs opportunities to learn about special education, regular education and the inclusive classroom. Thus, the path forward is a path of opportunity, advocacy and education for FSWDs, GETINs and SWDs.

### ***Professional Learning Opportunities for GETINs***

GETINs and FSWDs often cite frustrations that arise due to the IEP. GETINs voiced worry in not following the IEP fully. GETIN1 stated, "You know, I'm providing all the accommodations, and then they think that I'm not...it's always nerve-wracking when that happens, like, oh my gosh, am I not doing everything?" FSWDs noted upset at the IEP not being followed, such as FSWD#3 who wrote in the open-ended survey, "Many times it seems that the general education teacher hasn't really read the IEP and tries to make things more difficult or to fight me on suggestions on how to better help my child." FSWDs clearly highlight the importance of the accommodations listed in the IEP and the role that those accommodations play

in providing students with disabilities the supports they need to be an active player in the inclusive classroom.

However, though FSWDs see these accommodations as “ramps”, as written by FSWD#42, GETINs may see them as “crutches” as pointed out by GETIN4. GETINs often reference having to “follow the IEP”, but with little training in special education, it is likely that GETINs do not fully understand why those IEPs are necessary for a student in their general education classroom. Therefore, the results suggest that all GETINs should be provided professional learning opportunities regarding the operations and processes of the special education system and communicating with SWDs and FSWDs. This should also be included in all preservice teacher education programs.

### ***FSWD Workshops & Mentorships***

As frustrations with the inclusive education system were evident not just in the responses of GETINs but also in the responses of FSWDs, learning opportunities for the families of students in inclusive classrooms would also be beneficial. As FSWD#20 wrote in the open-ended surveys, “Sometimes not knowing how the system works causes frustration on the parent’s part, and not fully understanding the process. The “jargon” is hard to understand.”

Workshops for families to learn about the inclusive education system could be provided by school districts. During the GETIN/FSWD focus group FSWD2 suggested that parents act as mentors to other parents in the special education system in order to “help each other”. Therefore, these workshops could be led by both parents and teachers who are experienced in the inclusive education system. Furger (2000) writes about Louise Dodson, a parent in the ABC Unified



School District, who benefited from a family mentor program:

As a confident Louise Dodson guides a roomful of parents through the steps toward becoming advocates for their children and leaders in their schools, it's hard to believe that just a few years ago she was an angry, frustrated mom struggling to obtain services for her young son. The transformation from irate parent to school—and school district—leader didn't happen overnight. But through the support of more experienced parents and a school district committed to developing partnerships with all its stakeholders, Dodson developed both the skills and the confidence to be able to stand in front of a packed room and talk about her own journey to becoming a parent advocate (para. 2-3).

Family and teacher mentors could be trained to facilitate these workshops by the school district. These workshops could then be offered at regular intervals throughout the school year to provide families with guidance on topics such as the special education system, the inclusive education system and promoting student advocacy. A mentoring program not only reduced Louise Dodson's frustrations with the educational system, but also enabled her to advocate not only for her own child but also for the other students in the district. Workshops, which provide similar mentorships, could not only educate families on the "process" and the "jargon" that they do not understand, but also empower FSWDs, creating a more connected and cohesive school community.

Charities working for children with disabilities could also incorporate these workshops as events in order to reach families who may be less willing to join a workshop through the school district. There are a number of reasons that families may not want to engage directly with the school. Possible personal barriers to family-school engagement include negative school

experiences, negative interactions with the school, and a lack of understanding of the system—a frustration seen throughout this study. Many of these personal barriers are not attributable to organizations outside of the school district. Additional accessibility barriers include lack of child care, lack of transportation, differing schedules and the distance from the school. Charity organizations would likely have more flexibility with scheduling than school districts, which would decrease the number of accessibility barriers. One way to initiate family involvement in this area would be to hold a book club, hosted by an inclusion expert, surrounding inclusion. This would provide a first interaction to bring families together in a fun and engaging environment. This could then be further supplemented by brunch workshop sessions which could improve understandings surrounding special education and inclusive education.

### ***Student Advocacy***

Not only do teachers and families need to understand the special education and inclusion systems, but so do students. Both GETINs and FSWDs frequently cited the importance of high school students learning self-advocacy skills. Therefore, creating inclusive classroom environments that encourage student self-advocacy is a step all general educators of inclusive classrooms can take.

Lee (2021) writes that there are three key elements to student self-advocacy:

- Understanding specific needs
- Knowing what help or support will address those needs, like tutoring or classroom accommodations
- Communicating those needs to teachers and others

One way teachers can support these key elements in their inclusive classrooms is by developing a rapport with their students. Developing student-teacher rapport increases the comfort levels of students which enhances communication, develops self-regulation, self-determination and autonomy and increases motivation (Weimer, 2010; “Why strong”, 2019). Gonzalez (2016) writes, “The student/teacher relationship is a cornerstone in a student’s social maturation process. Cultivating a positive rapport with a non-parental authority figure allows students to define themselves, adapt to their environment and grow their emotional and social intelligence” (para. 3). By developing relationships with students, GETINs create an inclusive classroom environment in which students are willing to communicate and learn self-advocacy skills. However, it cannot be assumed that teachers have a strong toolbox of rapport-building techniques. Therefore, teachers should be provided professional learning on strategies that are effective to building a rapport with their students. Valle and Connor (2019) describe a variety of ways that teachers can build rapport with their students in an inclusive classroom. They write:

...when students recognize that a teacher prepares lessons by respectfully taking into consideration individual levels of knowledge, likes/dislikes, interests, abilities, and areas of need in order to provide an interesting, engaging, challenging lesson that helps students progress, then a mutual sense of respect develops (p.114).

Buskist and Saville (2021) describe additional rapport-building teacher behaviors which they determined in a study conducted with a sample group of several hundred undergraduates at Auburn University. They write:

These students told us that the most common teacher behaviors contributing to the

development of rapport were, in order: showing a sense of humor; availability before, after, or outside of class; encouraging class discussion; showing interest in them, knowing students' names; sharing personal insights and experiences with the class; relating course material in everyday terms and examples; and understanding that students occasionally have problems arise that inadvertently hinder their progress in their courses (para. 3).

Through the use of these strategies, teachers are able to create a classroom learning environment where students feel they are valued and connected, and a place where they feel comfortable advocating for themselves.

### *Disability Narratives*

An initial contact at the beginning of the year to inform or learn about the student was a steady suggestion from both GETINs and FSWDs throughout the research. GETIN1 stated, "At the beginning of the year, I would love to have like a good chunk of time to just go through my IEPs, contact the parents and initiate the first contact and say let me know. I wish I had that time." FSWD#23, in the open-ended surveys, wrote, "I touched base with each regular Ed teacher at meet the teacher night. We established a rapport quickly and I ascertained that they knew what my daughter's needs were and were able to meet them." One suggestion, specific to the district of study, would be for time to be allotted to general education teachers at the start of the school year, during the opening in-service week, for faculty to make that initial contact with their inclusion students and FSWDs. Another suggestion would be to have designated time, during the high school of study's flex block, for teachers to initiate these communications. However, schedules, beginning of the school year preparations, required professional

development, required daily tasks and district events may make it challenging to set aside this time.

As an alternate method for beginning of year communications, it is suggested that a disability narrative, written by the student, be included with the IEP when it is distributed to teachers at the beginning of the school year. Valle & Connor (2019) write, “Having presented explanations of the medical model of disability and the social model of disability for your consideration, we must point out that neither of these frameworks includes the individual and embodied experience of disability” (p. 63). As such, students should write their own disability narratives. Garland-Thomson (as cited in Valle & Connor, 2019) discusses the role of disability narratives stating, “First-person narratives ‘frame our understandings of raw, unorganized experience, giving it coherent meaning and making it accessible to us through story’” (p. 63). Valle & Connor (2019) continue, “...disability narratives offer stories of lived experiences, most of which include personal commentaries about schooling” (p. 64). By distributing their own personal narratives at the beginning of the school year to the GETINs whose classes they will be in, students begin the year advocating for their own needs. These disability narratives will also raise disability awareness in teachers, which is “especially relevant” for those teachers who may not have had prior experiences with disability (Valle & Connor, 2019, p 64). Additionally, this would provide teachers with a stronger knowledge base at the start of the year regarding instructional models that benefit their students, as informed by the students themselves. This information is valuable to all teachers working to create a classroom climate of student self-advocacy.

### **Limitations of this Study**

This study began three months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Surveys were distributed the last week of a very challenging school year for teachers and families. This likely led to lower numbers of GETIN and FSWD survey responses and also is a probable cause for a lack of participants voluntarily contacting the researcher to participate in the focus group meetings. Focus groups were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Select participants who volunteered to take part in the focus groups were unable to attend due to “emergency” situations and scheduling conflicts, two situations that were common to many during the COVID crisis. This resulted in focus groups that did not represent the outliers of the surveys, as is typical in an explanatory sequential, mixed-methods study, but instead consisted of a voluntary convenience sample of participants.

The ethnicity/race demographics of the FSWD survey participants were representative of the school population as a whole, with a difference of +/-4% to the actual demographic percentages of the high school of study. Though the study had the goal of viewing the perspectives of families of students with disabilities, the family sample group consisted only of mothers and fathers of students with disabilities, no other family members, with 93% of those participants being mothers. Aligned with this, both FSWD focus group members were mothers of upperclassmen, white/caucasian, female students, and thus represented a very specific population of students. One of the FSWD participant members was also a middle school inclusive classroom teacher and her child had both a learning disability and a GIEP. Therefore, the small, homogeneous sample of the FSWD focus group could have resulted in sample bias and qualitative data that is not generalizable to a larger population.

GETIN subject demographics were heavily weighted towards the science department. The science department makes up approximately 19% of the high school teaching population, yet, 33% of the survey respondents were science teachers and 80% of the teacher focus group members were science department members. This is likely due to the researcher of this study being a member of this science department. This could create sample bias in participant responses.

### **Further Research**

There are several suggested areas for further research, many of which were the suggestions of the focus group participants. FSWD2 suggested three future areas of study. First, how do concerns about the IEP impact the effectiveness of teachers in an inclusive classroom. Second, would the perspectives of elementary and middle school families and teachers differ from those of the high school families and teachers who participated in this study. Third, what impact could family mentorships have on the inclusive education experience. GETIN1 also suggested a future study to determine if there is a correlation between the amount of communication that is occurring between GETINs and FSWDs and their perceptions of their experiences in the inclusive classroom setting.

An additional area of study would be to analyze inequities in the placement of students with disabilities. Several participants during this study mentioned that it was not typical for a student with a disability to be a member of an advanced placement class. GETIN#4 said, "I have this interesting thing that happens sometimes where I have kids in the AP class that have IEPs that aren't gifted. Once in a while it happens." GETIN#2 discusses how she did not have much exposure to students with IEPs at the beginning of her career as she taught primarily advanced

placement and honors levels courses. FSWD#2 expands on this stating, “I’m sure when those AP teachers look at this, like, how you were saying, like, you taught AP and like, you didn’t have like...she’s in AP classes or honors and AP and they get this document and they’re like, how do I even follow this, in this course?” These statements are motivation for a study that determines how student placements into high school courses are impacted by their special education designation. This research could build off of a previous professional learning community conducted by the researcher which analyzed how tracking and prerequisites can limit a student’s academic path.

### **Spreading the Message**

As an action researcher, it is not enough to just complete a study and present a dissertation. It is now my role to act as a change agent based on my findings. This begins with my own classroom. Though I am a teacher who typically builds a strong rapport with many of my students, this year has been a challenge due to the on-line learning environment that is in place due to COVID restrictions. However, this study emphasizes the need to continue to build this rapport. In order to do so, I take the time to ask a daily question to all students to learn more about each of them, and I set aside time to meet one-on-one in Zoom breakout rooms with my SWDs.

I have also begun my travels down the Avenues of Communication highlighted in Figure 9 of this study. My first point of contact for all communications is now the student, which has proven effective in many situations. I maintain ongoing communications through the district learning management systems by posting all lessons and plans on Schoology and all grades on



PowerSchool. Additionally, I, now, only include the families and special education teachers when necessary, as suggested by the results of this study.

Disseminating the results of this research directly to the district of study's general education teachers of inclusive classrooms can provide these teachers with strategies to use for a teaching situation in which, the research shows, they do not feel trained. I have begun this process by relaying to other teachers some of the positive results I have seen from following the Avenues of Communication. I also plan to email a communication of the study results to the science department, of which I am a member, as many of the science department GETINs participated in this study. As participants, they had an active role in the data and have already expressed interest in the results. The findings of this study would also benefit families of students with disabilities and could be brought to families through mentorships arranged through school districts or through charities that work directly with students with disabilities.

It is also important for me to present the results of this study to a broader population, as there is an increasing number of students and general education teachers entering into inclusive classrooms. I have begun this process by presenting preliminary results of this study at Kutztown University's 2021 Human Diversity Conference. I will request to present this research to the principal and the head of special education at the high school of study. I will also be advocating for the charity, on which I am a board member, to hold a zoom or brunch session book study in order to initiate conversations with families around inclusive education.

## **Conclusion**

This research study originated with a situation in which a simple beginning of the year communication between a GETIN, an FSWD and an SWD yielded large classroom benefits for

both a general education teacher and a student with a disability enrolled in her inclusive classroom. That early communication led to open and honest communications between the student, teacher and family, that created strong relationships that continue today, almost two years later. This student still advocates strongly for himself, has pushed himself to take challenging classes and has been offered college scholarships. The results of this study provide a definitive pathway to encourage collaborations like this within all inclusive classrooms.

The results of this study confirmed that much of the literature regarding family-teacher communications is applicable and relevant to an area not previously studied, the high school inclusive classroom. In addition, this study filled a gap in the research by addressing the specific dynamics of inclusive classrooms and communications between FSWDs and GETINs. This research also added to the literature by providing more detailed and specific avenues for how GETINs and FSWDs can approach that communication with each other, versus the more frequently suggested broad school-wide strategies.

Ultimately the steps to improving the dynamics of an inclusive classroom involve the following:

- 1) GETINs should promote a classroom culture of student self-advocacy.
- 2) Students should be encouraged to write disability narratives.
- 3) High schools should support special education professional learning for general education teachers of inclusive classrooms.
- 4) Preservice teacher education regarding the special education system and how to communicate with SWDs and FSWDs should be required.

5) Family mentorships and inclusive education training for families should be promoted either through school districts or through charities who work for children with disabilities.

Though this study's original focus was bridging a gap in communication between FSWDs and GETINs, it is clear, that at the high school level, this is not just a partnership but, more importantly a collaboration that involves not only the teachers and families, but also, and more importantly, the students.

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**Appendix A**  
**COLLABORATION FOR THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM**  
**TEACHER SURVEY**

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You are invited to participate in a research study titled *Bridging Barriers in Inclusive Classrooms: Avenues for Communication Between General Education Teachers and Families* being conducted through Kutztown University. We ask that you read this information and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether or not you want to participate in this study. The University requires that you give your consent if you choose to participate.

This on-line survey should take 15-30 minutes to complete. The purpose of this on-line survey is to determine strategies to improve communication between general education teachers of inclusive classrooms and the families of their students with disabilities. Your responses to this survey may help us learn more about effective communication strategies that can be used by general education teachers and families of students participating in inclusive classroom settings at the secondary level. Your participation in this study is voluntary. No compensation will be provided to any participants in this study. The survey tool will not collect identifying information and your responses will remain anonymous. You may refuse to take part in the study, decline to answer any particular question or exit the survey at any time without penalty. As such, there are no known risks to participating in this survey other than those encountered in daily life. Your information collected as part of the research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

**Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is:

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If you have any questions or concerns regarding the rights of research participants, please contact the IRB Committee at Kutztown University at 484-646-4167.

I have read the information described above. I have asked questions I had regarding the research study and have received answers to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

- Agree
- Disagree



CONTINUE TO SURVEY
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**SECTION 1: STUDENT CASELOAD**

Please answer these questions based on the 2019-2020 school year to date. The term “family” is used in place of “parent” due to the diverse living situations of our students.

1. I teach students with IEPs in my general education classroom     Yes                     No
2. Approximately how many students with IEPs are enrolled in your classes?  
 0-5                     5-10     10-15                     15-20                     20-25                     More than 25
3. Approximately what percent of your total caseload of students are students with IEPs?  
 0-10%                     10-20%                     20-30%                     30-40%                     40-50%                     Greater than 50%

**SECTION 2: CURRENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

Choose the answer that best represents your reflections about the 2019-2020 school year to date.

4. I communicate most frequently with families  
 by phone     through e-mail     through a texting service     in-person     other
5. I communicate frequently with the families of my regular education students.  
 Strongly Agree                     Agree                     Neutral                     Disagree                     Strongly Disagree
6. Approximately how many times a week do you have contact with families of your regular education students?  
 0     1-5     5-10     10-15     15-20     20-25                     More than 25
7. I communicate frequently with the families of my students with IEPs.  
 Strongly Agree                     Agree                     Neutral                     Disagree                     Strongly Disagree
8. Approximately how many times a week do you have contact with the families of your students with IEPs?  
 0     1-5     5-10     10-15     15-20     20-25                     More than 25
9. I feel that I have made strong partnerships with the families of my regular education students.  
 Strongly Agree                     Agree                     Neutral                     Disagree                     Strongly Disagree
10. I feel that I have made strong partnerships with the families of my students with IEPs.  
 Strongly Agree                     Agree                     Neutral                     Disagree                     Strongly Disagree
11. I find it easy to communicate with the families of my regular education students.  
 Strongly Agree                     Agree                     Neutral                     Disagree                     Strongly Disagree

12. I find it easy to communicate with the families of my students with IEPs.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

13. I communicate with families about student strengths.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

14. I communicate with families about student challenges.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

15. I communicate with families regarding students' individual needs.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

### **SECTION 3: VALUE OF COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION**

Select the answer that most reflects your opinions regarding family-teacher communications.

16. I value family-teacher communications.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

17. I think it is important for families and teachers to support each other.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

18. I believe it is important for families and teachers to have a shared vision for the student.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

19. I believe it is important to form partnerships with the families of my students.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

20. I believe that communications with families can help me meet the needs of my regular education students.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

21. I believe that communications with families can help me meet the needs of my students with IEPs.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

22. I believe it is important to learn about the lived experiences of my regular education students.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

23. I believe it is important to learn about the lived experiences of my students with IEPs.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

### **SECTION 4: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY**

Select the answer that most reflects your opinions regarding family-teacher communications.

24. I have time available to communicate with the families of my students during my contractual school day.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

25. I am happy with the amount of contact I have with my students' families.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

26. I wish I could spend more time communicating with the families of my students.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

27. I feel awkward when communicating with the families of my regular education students.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

28. I feel awkward when communicating with the families of my students with IEPs.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

29. The families of my regular education students respond positively to my efforts for communication.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

30. The families of my students with IEPs respond positively to my efforts for communication.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

31. The families of my regular education students seem to trust me.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

32. The families of my students with IEPs seem to trust me.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

33. Families of regular education students want to communicate about their child's progress in my classroom.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

34. Families of students with IEPs want to communicate about their child's progress in my classroom.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

35. I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with the families of my regular education students.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

36. I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with the families of my students with IEPs.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

## **SECTION 5: TRAINING IN COMMUNICATION**

37. I have received training on communicating with the families of my students.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

38. I have received specific training on communicating with the families of students with disabilities.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

39. I have received education or training on teaching students with disabilities.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

40. I feel prepared to teach students with disabilities.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

41. I understand how the special education system works.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

42. To effectively teach a student with a disability, I need to know their “label”.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

43. To effectively teach a student with a disability, I need to read and understand their IEP.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

44. To effectively teach a student with a disability, I need to talk to the student.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

45. To effectively teach a student with a disability, I need to collaborate with the student’s family.

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

## **SECTION 6: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

46. What is your gender?

- Female     Male

47. What subject area do you teach?

- Art/Music     Computers/Business     English/ELL     FCS/Technology  
 Math     Science     Social Studies     Foreign Language  
 Wellness/Fitness

48. How many school years have you taught (including this year)?

- 1-5 years     5-10 years     10-15 years     15-20 years     20-25 years     >25 years

49. What race/ethnicity best describes you?

- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic American
- Black or African American
- Multiple Ethnicity/Other

**Appendix B**  
**COLLABORATION FOR THE INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM**  
**FAMILY SURVEY**

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You are invited to participate in a research study titled *Bridging Barriers in Inclusive Classrooms: Avenues for Communication Between General Education Teachers and Families* being conducted through Kutztown University. We ask that you read this information and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether or not you want to participate in this study. The University requires that you give your consent if you choose to participate.

This on-line survey should take 15-30 minutes to complete. The purpose of this on-line survey is to determine strategies to improve communication between general education teachers of inclusive classrooms and the families of their students with disabilities. Your responses to this survey may help us learn more about effective communication strategies that can be used by general education teachers and families of students participating in inclusive classroom settings at the secondary level. Your participation in this study is voluntary. No compensation will be provided to any participants in this study. The survey tool will not collect identifying information and your responses will remain anonymous. You may refuse to take part in the study, decline to answer any particular question or exit the survey at any time without penalty. As such, there are no known risks to participating in this survey other than those encountered in daily life. Your information collected as part of the research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

**Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is:

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Beekey Building Room 234

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the rights of research participants, please contact the IRB Committee at Kutztown University at 484-646-4167.

I have read the information described above. I have asked questions I had regarding the research study and have received answers to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

- Agree
- Disagree

CONTINUE TO SURVEY
--------------------

**SECTION 1: MY STUDENT**

Please answer these questions based on the 2019-2020 school year.

1. My child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)     Yes     No     I don't know
2. My child is enrolled in general education classes (this does not include pull-out/study/instructional support classes)     Yes     No     I don't know
3. How many general education courses is your child taking this year?  
 1     2     3     4     5     6     7     I don't know
4. I know who my child's general education teachers are.  
 Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree
5. I know who my child's special education teachers are.  
 Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**SECTION 2: CURRENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

Choose the answer that best represents your reflections about the 2019-2020 school year to date. The term "family" is used in place of "parent" due to the diverse living situations of our students. General education teachers refer to content area teachers who are not special education teachers.

6. I communicate most frequently with families  
 by phone     through e-mail     through a texting service     in-person     other
7. I communicate frequently with my child's general education teachers.  
 Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree
8. Approximately how many times a week do you have contact with your child's general education teachers?  
 0     1-5     5-10     10-15     15-20     20-25     More than 25
9. I communicate frequently with my child's special education teachers.  
 Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree
10. Approximately how many times a week do you have contact with your child's special education teachers?  
 0     1-5     5-10     10-15     15-20     20-25     More than 25
11. I feel that I have made strong partnerships with my child's general education teachers.  
 Strongly Agree     Agree     Neutral     Disagree     Strongly Disagree
12. I feel that I have made strong partnerships with my child's special education teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

13. I find it easy to communicate with my child's general education teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

14. I find it easy to communicate with my child's special education teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

15. I communicate with teachers about my child's strengths.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

16. I communicate with teachers about my child's challenges.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

17. I communicate with teachers regarding my child's individual needs.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

### **SECTION 3: VALUE OF COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION**

Select the answer that most reflects your opinions regarding family-teacher communications. The term "family" is used in place of "parent" due to the diverse living situations of our students. General education teachers refer to content area teachers who are not special education teachers.

18. I value family-teacher communications.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

19. I think it is important for families and teachers to support each other.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

20. I believe it is important for families and teachers to have a shared vision for the student.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

21. I believe it is important to form partnerships with my child's teachers

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

22. I believe that my child's educational needs can be better met by communication with his/her general education teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

23. I believe that my child's educational needs can be better met by communication with his/her special education teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

24. I believe it is important for general education teachers to learn about the lived experiences of my child.



Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

25. I believe it is important for special education teachers to learn about the lived experiences of my child.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

#### **SECTION 4: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY**

Select the answer that most reflects your opinions regarding family-teacher communications. The term “family” is used in place of “parent” due to the diverse living situations of our students. General education teachers refer to content area teachers who are not special education teachers.

26. I have time available to communicate with my child’s teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

27. I am happy with the amount of contact I have with my child’s teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

28. I wish I could spend more time communicating with my child’s teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

29. I feel awkward when communicating with my child’s general education teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

30. I feel awkward when communicating with my child’s special education teachers.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

31. My child’s general education teachers respond positively to my efforts for communication.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

32. My child’s special education teachers respond positively to my efforts for communication.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

33. My child’s general education teachers seem to trust me.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

34. My child’s special education teachers seem to trust me.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

35. My child’s general education teachers want to communicate with me about my child’s progress in my classroom.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

36. My child's special education teachers want to communicate with me about my child's progress in my classroom.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

37. I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with my child's general education teachers.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

38. I often feel frustrated when trying to communicate with my child's special education teachers.

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

**SECTION 5: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

39. What is your gender?       Female       Male

40. What race/ethnicity best describes you (please choose only one)?

- American Indian/Alaskan Native       Hispanic American  
 Asian/Pacific Islander       Black or African American  
 White/Caucasian       Multiple Ethnicity/Other

41. What is your child's gender?       Female       Male

42. What race/ethnicity best describes your child (please choose only one)?

- American Indian/Alaskan Native       Hispanic American  
 Asian/Pacific Islander       Black or African American  
 White/Caucasian       Multiple Ethnicity/Other

43. What grade is your child in?

- 9th       10th       11th       12th

44. What is your relationship to your child?

- Mother       Father       Stepmother       Stepfather  
 Grandmother       Grandfather       Aunt       Uncle  
 Guardian       Other

## **Appendix C**

### **Consent Form**

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#### **Purpose**

You are invited to participate in a focus group for a research study being conducted through Kutztown University. The purpose of this focus group is to determine strategies to improve communication between general education teachers of inclusive classrooms and the families of their students with disabilities. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether or not you want to participate in this study. The University requires that you give your signed agreement if you choose to participate.

This study is being conducted by Nicole Wack, Doctoral Candidate at Kutztown University.

#### **Title of Study**

Bridging barriers in inclusive classrooms: Avenues for communication between general education teachers and families

#### **Procedure**

Each focus group will consist of 6-8 people. A moderator, who will also serve as note taker, will facilitate the discussion by asking several guiding questions. As approved by Kutztown University's International Review Board, the focus groups will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

The goal of the focus group is to hear the voices and perspectives of all members of the group. For this reason, it is requested that you respect the contributions of all focus group members and refrain from interruptions during the meetings.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Your responses may help us learn more about effective communication strategies that can be used by general education teachers and families of students participating in inclusive classroom settings at the secondary level. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the study, decline to answer any particular question or exit the focus group at any time without penalty.

#### **Confidentiality, Benefits and Risks**

Your participation in this study is confidential. As a participant, you will be asked to respect the confidentiality and privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any information discussed during the meeting(s). Participants will be asked not to use names during the focus group discussion. Though the researcher will take every measure to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus group research prevents the researcher from guaranteeing confidentiality. Researchers will analyze the data recorded during the meeting and no names will be included in the final report. The researcher will keep all records private.

#### **Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is:

Nicole M. Wack  
Doctoral Student, Kutztown University  
College of Education at Kutztown University

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Kutztown, PA 19530  
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610-683-4763  
Beekey Building Room 234

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the rights of research participants, please contact the IRB Committee at Kutztown University at 484-646-4167.

Compensation

No compensation will be provided to any participants in this study.

Future Research Studies

Your information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

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Statement of Consent:

I have read the information described above and have received a copy of this information. I have asked questions I had regarding the research study and have received answers to my satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**Focus Group Participant Information-Families**

- 
1. What grade is your child in?  
 9th       10th       11th       12th
2. My child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)       Yes       No       I don't know
3. My child is enrolled in general education classes (this does not include pull-out/study/instructional support classes)       Yes       No       I don't know
4. How many general education courses is your child taking this year?  
 1       2       3       4       5       6       7       I don't know
5. I know who my child's general education teachers are.  
 Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree
6. I know who my child's special education teachers are.  
 Strongly Agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly Disagree
7. Approximately how many times a week do you have contact with your child's general education teachers?  
 0       1-5       5-10       10-15       15-20       20-25       More than 25
8. Approximately how many times a week do you have contact with your child's special education teachers?  
 0       1-5       5-10       10-15       15-20       20-25       More than 25
9. What is your gender?       Female       Male
10. What is your child's gender?       Female       Male
11. What is your relationship to your child?  
 Mother       Father       Stepmother       Stepfather  
 Grandmother       Grandfather       Aunt       Uncle  
 Guardian       Other

**Appendix E**  
**Focus Group Participant Information-Teachers**

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Please answer these questions based on the 2019-2020 school year to date. The term “family” is used in place of “parent” due to the diverse living situations of our students.

1. I teach students with IEPs in my general education classroom     Yes                       No
  
2. Approximately how many students with IEPs are enrolled in your classes?  
 0-5                       5-10                       10-15                       15-20                       20-25                       More than 25
  
3. Approximately what percent of your total caseload of students are students with IEPs?  
 0-10%                       10-20%                       20-30%                       30-40%                       40-50%                       Greater than 50%
  
4. Approximately how many inclusion classes have you taught?  
 0-5                       5-10                       10-15                       15-20                       20-25                       More than 25
  
5. How many school years have you taught (including this year)?  
 1-5 years     5-10 years     10-15 years     15-20 years     20-25 years                       >25 years
  
6. Approximately how many times a week do you have contact with the families of your students with IEPs?  
 0     1-5     5-10     10-15     15-20     20-25                       More than 25
  
7. Approximately how many times a week do you have contact with families of your regular education students?  
 0     1-5     5-10     10-15     15-20     20-25                       More than 25

## Appendix F

### Focus Group Interview Protocol (adapted from Krueger, 2002)

1. Welcome
  - a. Introduction of Moderator
  - b. Introductions of Focus Group Members-Name cards, first name basis, however, names will not be recorded in the study. Confidentiality will be maintained.
  - c. Quick Ice Breaker to get participants talking
2. Our Topic Is
  - a. Purpose of Focus Group
  - b. Topic of Study
  - c. Why they were selected to be part of the focus group
  - d. Definitions of Key Terms
3. Guidelines
  - a. There are no correct answers
  - b. I am audio recording the focus group, so please speak one at a time so we can hear each group members voice.
  - c. Please respect and listen to the other participants' perspectives. Do not interrupt.
  - d. For confidentiality purposes please silence and put your cell phones away. If you must take a call, please leave the room to do so and rejoin us as quickly as you can.
  - e. My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion and take notes. Please talk to each other and not just to me during this focus group.
4. Possible Questions (Explanatory Sequential study could lead to varying questions after quantitative data analysis.

<b>Teacher Focus Group</b>	<b>Family Focus Group</b>	<b>Family-Teacher Group</b>
*What would you like to know about a regular education student who is enrolled in your general education course?	*What do you want your special education teacher to know about your child?	
*What would you like to know about a student with a disability who is enrolled in your general education course?	*What do you want your general education teacher to know about your child?	
How would you describe your communications with the families of your students with disabilities.?	How would you describe your communications with your child's general education (content) teachers?	How comfortable do you feel speaking openly within this group?
What are some reasons that you would initiate communications with the families of your students with disabilities?	What are some reasons that you would initiate communications with your child's general education (content) teachers?	Why would you initiate communications with each other?
What are the benefits and/or	What are the benefits and/or	What challenges do you face when

disadvantages of having open communications with the families of your students with disabilities?	disadvantages of having open communications with your child's general education (content) teachers?	trying to communicate with each other?
<b>Teacher Focus Group</b>	<b>Family Focus Group</b>	<b>Family-Teacher Group</b>
How easy is it for you to communicate with the families of your students with disabilities? What challenges do you face when trying to communicate?	How easy is it for you to communicate with your child's general education (content) teachers? What challenges do you face when trying to communicate?	How easy is it for you to communicate with each other?
How do the families of your students with disabilities respond to your attempts at communication?	How do your child's general education (content) teachers respond to your attempts at communication?	When and how often would you like to hear from each other?
Describe a time when you felt that communicating with the family of a student with a disability was beneficial to the student's success in your classroom.	Describe a time when you felt that communicating with your child's general education (content) teacher was beneficial to the student's success in your classroom.	How is the student impacted when you openly communicate with each other?
Describe a time when you felt that communicating with the family of a student with a disability was not beneficial to the student's success in your classroom.	Describe a time when you felt that communicating with your child's general education (content) teacher was not beneficial to the student's success in your classroom.	If you could communicate with each other frequently, what would you communicate about?
Describe positive interactions you have had with the families of your students with disabilities. What led to these positive interactions?	Describe positive interactions you have had with your child's general education (content) teacher. What led to these positive interactions?	What would you like the other party to consider before contacting you?
Of all the things talked about in this focus group, what is most important to you or what stands out the most?	Of all the things talked about in this focus group, what is most important to you or what stands out the most?	Of all the things talked about in this focus group, what is most important to you or what stands out the most?

\*explanatory sequential model = modify questions based on survey results

5. Provide a brief summary of focus group. Ask "Is this an adequate summary?"
6. Review purpose of the study and ask participants if anything was missed during the discussion.



**Appendix G**  
**Survey Review Panel Questions**

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- 1) Were any of the directions unclear? If so, please explain.
  
- 2) Are there any questions on the survey that were not clear? If so, which numbers?
  
- 3) Did you feel the survey addressed your perceptions of communications between general education teachers and families of students with disabilities?
  
- 4) Did you feel that the survey addressed possible barriers to communications between general education teachers and families of students with disabilities?
  
- 5) Did you feel that the survey addressed effective methods for communications between general education teachers and families of students with disabilities?
  
- 6) Were there any questions that you thought were insensitive or inappropriate?
  
- 7) Approximately how long did it take you to complete this survey?