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### Special Education in Hartford and Cape Town: What Policies and Programs Reveal About an Educational Culture's View of Students with Disabilities

Sara Barrett  
[sara.barrett@trincoll.edu](mailto:sara.barrett@trincoll.edu)

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Special Education in Hartford and Cape Town: What Policies and Programs Reveal About an  
Educational Culture's View of Students with Disabilities

Sara Barrett

Trinity College

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Daniel Douglas

## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes special education policy in Hartford, Connecticut and Cape Town, South Africa to see how different educational cultures view students with disabilities. The themes of teacher training, curriculum, and treatment of children in addition to language use are described and compared. Cape Town educational culture arguably has a more holistic view of students with disabilities as the policy commits to providing more resources and hiring confident and trained teachers committed to providing for the needs of their students. However, Hartford has more guidance on the treatment of children and more accepting language use in the policies. This research can be used to inform future revisions of special education policies by showing the strengths and weaknesses of the two locality's policies in providing for the needs of the students.

## ***I. Intro***

Special education and disability rights are rarely discussed in the news or among people; plus, little is known about special education approaches in different countries. While studying abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, I interned at Sibongile Night and Day Care Center which is a center and school for children with disabilities. The experience I had there expanded my view of special education and made me wonder how the different places approach creating those programs. Since many people believe the United States has one of the most comprehensive education systems—which literature often disproves—I was curious how that narrative would hold up when special education programs were compared. Based on my experiences abroad and observing classrooms in Hartford, Connecticut, analyzing the categories of curriculum, teacher training requirements, and the treatment of children seemed like the best categories to use as they were themes I felt were different based on my previous involvement. In addition to these

categories, the topic of language use and disability rights and identity are a debated topic, and the acceptable terms change constantly to acknowledge the person first and their abilities rather than their disabilities. This is also a problem of inequality as disability movements do not get the same attention and support that movements like “Black Lives Matter” or “Me Too,” but it is still a movement concerning human rights.

The special education systems in Cape Town and Hartford have their differences in part because Cape Town has 46% of its learners in special education programs where as Hartford only has 19% of student classified as needing an individualized education plan (IEP) (Education White Paper 6, 2001) (Hartford, 2018). This difference in percentages imply that Cape Town may have more programs and funding for special education programs since nearly half of the students there need the specialized resources. Moreover, it can be inferred that more people in the United States would qualify for special education programs using the South African guidelines. Also, it is more common to discuss special education and disability rights in Cape Town as there are many schools specialized to cater to certain disabilities, and it is a topic that spreads through the tourist filled, metropolitan area. Hartford has a stricter classification and testing procedure so it is up to the family to advocate for a student to get tested and have resources provided for which is part of the reason their percentage is so low. This also implies that Hartford provides less funding for special education programs as it is not seen as a need. Furthermore, special education and disability rights is rarely discussed outside of niche groups in Hartford unless it is about the American School for the Deaf (ASD) because the ASD is a historical site and school for disability rights and activism.

This paper seeks to analyze special education policy in Cape Town and Hartford and answer the question: Based on special education policy, programs, and diction, how have various

educational cultures expressed their views of students with disabilities? For this project, educational cultures refers to the ways education systems work to create inclusive programs and break away from possible stigmas surrounding disability that are widely known such as the use of outdated language. The themes presented earlier will be commented on in addition to the language use in each policy. I cannot comment on the implementation of the policy presented due to restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic, but discussion of the resources and protocols presented in the policies will initially be analyzed individually. In future research, participant observations and interviews would be used to compare the policy ideals to the special education reality and to obtain parent and teacher perspectives on the special education systems in both localities. A discussion portion at the end of the paper will compare to two special education policies in a direct manner in addition to suggesting changes to the policies. This paper argues that Cape Town's policies and programs reflect a more holistic view of students with disabilities and are easily accessible, but the language used puts the problem on the learner whereas Hartford's buried policies and selective programs indicate an incomprehensive view of students with disabilities though the language used puts the problem on the education system.

## ***II. Literature Review***

### *Spaces and Identity*

In order to review the policy, I needed to learn about inclusive spaces, the identification process of children in special education programs, and the way special education intersects with the locality. *Special Education's Changing Identity: Paradoxes and Dilemmas in Views of Culture and Space* discussed effective aims in designing special education programs consider culture, politics, and inclusion (Artiles, 2003). Artiles researches how those categories relate when

creating special education programs. Then, he moves to discuss current limitations on research that can be done within different cultures which I believe gives me insight on some of the things I should be looking for. Some of these limitations include financial resources, travel, access to schools, etcetera (Artiles, 2003). Finally, Artiles makes conclusions about the impact that special education has in bringing light to disabilities and to the influence of a certain type of education in affecting a child's development (Artiles, 2003). This information is primarily gathered from different sources and observations that Artiles collected and noticed from current events.

When analyzing how students in special education classroom worked outside of a specialized classroom, *The Social Development of Children in Special Schools* analyzed the effects of mainstream education verses specialized schools. This source was beneficial to this project as it commented on individualized instruction as seen in HPS policy and mainstream trends as seen in Cape Town's policy. An example is that many students in a special education program was the social maturity, most noticeable was "the duration and frequency of children working co-operatively at a set task" (Dew-Hughes, 1998). These two research projects informed the relationship between the classroom, the culture, and what I should look for in the policies regarding space both in terms of the locality and the classroom setting.

### *Cross-Cultural Perspectives*

As this project is comparing the special education policies of two different localities, it was important to do research on cross-cultural perspectives and see what other studies have already been done in this field of research. To begin, parts one and two of *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the Classification of Children with Disabilities* look at both the classification systems in different places in addition to commenting on the issues that come with classifying students with disabilities and the implementation of such classification systems. For example,

classification systems “reinforce cultural narratives” which means that whatever the culture says is acceptable also appears in the education system which further establishes the idea of students in need of special education programs in “being identified as different” (Florian et al., 2006) Yet, part two argues that “the problems with classification really concern those students who are mostly at the margins of general education” which minimizes the problem while still acknowledging that there is an issue at hand (McLaughlin et al., 2006). This study looked at both the United States and the United Kingdom in this analysis which was beneficial in forming ideas as to how different places decide to classify students within an education system.

Moreover, another cross-cultural project, *Special Education in Australia and the United States: A Cross-Cultural Analysis* gave insight in how to look at policy in different countries with the view that one is not better than the other. The research also analyzes how “legal and political considerations have differently effected” special education policies because of the different court cases and moments of activism within each respective place (Safran, 1989). While this source is older in nature, the information was still valuable in gaining advice in how to analyze the data gathered to see what is going on in the locality. These three articles provided insight on how to conduct a cross-cultural analysis in an ethical manner.

### *Legislation/Policy*

Due to this project becoming a policy review, there was a need to read how other researchers have analyzed policy as well as reading some about how policy has changed over time based on events in a place. *From Policy to Practice: A South-African Perspective On Implementing Inclusive Education Policy* expanded on how the education system in South Africa changed post-apartheid in 1994. This research stressed the “importance of curriculum change” to include people of different races and adding in special education guidelines (Naicker, 2006). It

also discussed the importance of school accessibility in a child getting a comprehensive education. *The implementation of inclusive education in South Africa after ten years of democracy* further built on the points Naicker made. Moreover, the research provided a policy review in the beginning of the article followed by some limitations commonly seen when analyzing special education in South Africa like gaining access to the schools as a researcher is difficult. This is why they provided teachers with surveys and parents and students with questionnaires to attempt to gain a well-rounded perspective on special education programs (Englebrecht, 2006). Since both of these articles were focused on South Africa, I read *The Legislative and Litigation History of Special Education* to gain a policy perspective from the United States this source informed my reading of the policies for this project by providing me with a historical background of special education policy and court cases in the United States. I learned that “between the mid 1960s and 1975, state legislatures, the federal courts, and the U.S. Congress spelled out strong education rights for children with disabilities” which is much earlier than Cape Town did (Martin et al., 1996). These sources were extremely beneficial in providing historical background needed to inform and underpin the special education policies in Cape Town and Hartford.

#### *Family Involvement*

This category of the project was aimed to get some insight on what the families of students with disabilities think about the policy and implementation of the policy as this was a goal of the original observation and interview based project. *View of Inclusion: A Comparative Study of Parents' Perceptions in South Africa and the United States* was an obvious source for this project because it directly compares South Africa and the United States. This research states that “parent participation is considered to be a vital component in the education of students with



disabilities” in the sense that parents are both advocates for their students and must continue the education at home (Yssel et al., 2007). Generally, this meant that parents desired to be part of the education and decision-making process, but they often felt ignored in meetings or disenfranchised when decisions were made (Yssel et al., 2007). *Where Differences Matter: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Family Voice in Special Education* built upon the idea of family involvement. This study focused on the idea of race in special education as both South Africa and the United States have been/are divided by race as seen in the education system. Yet, based on focus groups, this research examines “the ways in which school personnel and families negotiate differences in how children are viewed, assessed, and offered support for learning needs” (Kozleski et al., 2008). The efforts of parents and advocates had to be sustained and consistent in order for the family voice to be heard when creating policy and education plans for the students. These studies specifically gave insight to how families in both South Africa and the United States play a role in designing a student with a disability’s education and the role they play in advocating for their children and disability rights in general to improve the surrounding culture.

After reading the previous sources for the literature review, I wanted more background information on the role of race in special education systems which lead to the reading of *Achieving Equity in Special Education: History, Status, and Current Challenges*. This article reviews “the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs” by looking at testing bias, socioeconomic status, racism, and culture (Skiba et al., 2008). The argument of race can go two ways: students who identify with a minority group may be placed in special education classrooms simply due to stigmas surrounding their race and intelligences, especially for Black students or White students’ families may have more resources and can ask

for the extra aid and resources that come from special education classrooms. Essentially, the information in this article gave insight on the historical roots of special education programs and how the stigmas formed in the past still prevail today. This shaped the lens of my research because it reminded me to consider the predominant races in each area in consideration to the make-up of the special education classes and availability of resources.

### ***III. Methods***

This project is a qualitative document analysis that utilizes constructivist techniques to form the argument. For my research project, I chose to analyze special education policy in Cape Town and Hartford as the two localities are places I have studied special education and have done participant observation. Cape Town and Hartford also have different stigmas surrounding special education and people with disabilities. It is a more widely discussed topic of discussion in Cape Town compared to Hartford; furthermore, many people assume that the United States will have a more complete and encompassing special education program based on the country's status. A cross-cultural special education policy analysis of both localities can offer an alternative perspective to the more common comparisons seen between the United States and European education systems. I wanted to look in-depth at the different policies in these two places to see that framework behind the two special education systems that I have been a part of to see how each may grow or learn from the other as both have their positive and negative qualities.

Originally this project was aimed to analyze Rome, Italy as well to get a European country in the mix; however that was removed when COVID-19 began as Italy was a hot spot for the pandemic. As the pandemic began to worsen, the project went from being interview and

observation based with travel to both Cape Town and Hartford to being a policy review of special education to see if any academic cultural conclusions could be made from resources, language, program offerings, etc. in the policy. Due to the length of this project and the worsening pandemic, this appeared to be the most comprehensive and viable option to continue the research. However, completing in-person qualitative research on this topic as originally planned in something to consider as the researcher could see if the policy is truly implemented and to talk with people outside of the school system, like parents or caregivers, to hear their perspectives on the current policy and culture/discussion surrounding special education and disability rights in both Cape Town and Hartford.

### **Cape Town**

#### *Sample*

On the Board of Education for the Western Cape Province, there is a policy section that contains all of the policies that apply to the Western Cape Education system in alphabetical order. For this project, I chose to use the National Policy on Disability, the Framework for Teacher Education and Development Policy, and the Education White Paper No. 6. While these policies were all written and adopted in the early 2000s, they are the current policies available to researcher to analyze the system's approach to special education in Cape Town. These specific policies were chosen due to their connections to special education and disability in conjunction with the topics of teacher training, curriculum, and treatment of children. The document, Youth Development Strategy was also considered for this project; however, there was not a focus on special education in that document which made it less relevant to this project than the three chosen policies. Therefore, the three policies chosen, although formed nearly fifteen to twenty years ago, provide insight into special education procedures in Cape Town.

### *Data Collection Strategies*

To collect the data from these policies, I chose to read through each document three times. The first read through encapsulated getting a general sense of what the policies said in general about special education in Cape Town. For the second read through, I coded and underlined each moment discussing teacher training requirements in orange, curriculum in green, treatment of children in blue, and any background information or language use referencing the students in red. I chose to use three different colors to both keep each section distinct and to see how much of each policy was spent on each of the categories. Also, these three categories were chosen as they were topics I was curious about when interacting with the special education systems in both Cape Town and South Africa; plus, the policies followed these three categories in a precise manner. The third read was to both check that I did not miss anything in the first two reads to and begin making connections between the different information in each section. Due to this project being one semester and each policy ranging from 40 to 60 pages, I only did three read overs of each policy to ensure time to analyze the data collected in these read throughs.

### *Data Analysis Strategies*

When initially reviewing the data collected, I looked for moments of language use describing the students. I chose to begin here as it was the smallest footprint of the information gathered in the data collection phase. Next, I looked for overall themes within each code of the policy such as within the curriculum sections, there were multiple moments discussing the mainstreaming of students and the use of “special schools.” I looked for these subthemes within each section, and I then used a constructivist approach to determine whether the themes were on a positive trend—providing for the students—or on a negative trend—not accommodating the students. During this process, I faced a limitation of being more familiar with the U.S. standards

of education as well as acceptable language use. Removing these biases took multiple read throughs of the information collected to look at them from a purely academic standpoint. Moreover, I could not comment on the implementation of the policies as my observations from the Fall of 2019 were not broad enough to add to this research project. In the data analysis portion of this process, I made sure to guide my analysis with information gathered from surrounding literature described above in my literature review. It was important to not over analyze one program over another in this initial stage, but to read Cape Town policy and being fully comprehensive for Cape Town special education policies in this phase.

### **Hartford**

#### *Sample*

On the Hartford Public School's (HPS) website, there is a section, albeit not easy to find, that contains broad policy documents. Due to my subcategories of teacher training, curriculum, and treatment of students, I chose the three policies titled: Instruction, Personnel – Certified and Non-certified, and Students. These policy document contained all of the information for each type of learner, so I used key words like “special education,” “disability,” and “IEP” to find the specific sections in each policy that are solely about special education policy. The policies appear to be written around 2005, so they are more up-to-date than the Cape Town policy documents I was able to view; however, it appeared that Hartford buried the special education policy within these larger policy documents which suggests HPS is less confident in their special education policy. Due to the nature of this project and other policy titles seen on the website, these were the only three policies ever considered for this document review.

#### *Data Collection Strategies*

The data collection strategies followed the same parameters for the Cape Town data collection strategies section: three reads of the documents—online this time—and the information was coded with online highlighters in the same colors as Cape Town. These policies were coded online due to the policy documents being, in total, 100 to 300 pages each. Using the “control f” feature on the PC was a beneficial strategy in the data collection for HPS special education policy due to the large nature of the policy documents and the all-encompassing scope of the information. Please review the Cape Town data collection strategies section for an encompassing review of my choices in codes and three-time read over.

#### *Data Analysis Strategies*

The data analysis strategies for Hartford also followed closely to the ones for Cape Town as there needed to be continuity between the collection and analysis of data between the two localities to make the information gathered as equitable as possible for this project. Language use was analyzed in the policies in addition to how accessible the policy sections on special education were. Next, I looked at the overall themes I coded for in the policies and noticed the reliance on IEP (individualized education plans) for all special education policy and guidance. As noted above, a positive and negative trend methods were used within a constructivist approach of analysis. Some limitations of this project were not being to look at specific schools due to COVID restrictions and guidelines. Also, the special education policies were buried within the general policies which made the collection process more difficult. Moreover, I could not comment on my classroom experiences in the Hartford Public Schools from the Spring 2018 semester as the data was out of date.

#### ***IV. Findings***

The findings for this project are broken down into the three categories from my research project and discussed based on locality. In this section, quotes from policy and analysis are included to provide a comprehensive breakdown of the special education policies in both Hartford and Cape Town and the greater implications that come from these policies. It is important to note that some sections may be longer and more extensive than other which is based solely on the availability of information I found for the three categories in my policy review. Finally, my findings section serves to outline the information analyzed in the “Discussion” section of this paper, but there is some analysis provided to expand on the direct policy quotes and give additional background information on the creation of the special education policy in both localities.

## **Cape Town**

### *Teacher Training*

One of the slogans of Cape Town’s special education policy surrounding teacher training is “more teachers, better teachers” which shows that the schools are not solely concerned with the quantity of teachers, but the quality of teachers (Pretoria, 2007). “The current generation of teachers is the first to experience the new non-racial, democratic transformation of the education system” which is largely due to the “pervasive legacies of apartheid, but also as a result of the new policies needed to bring about change in education” (Pretoria, 2007). The goals set forth in the policy for teaching training are as follows:

“teachers are properly equipped to undertake their essential and demanding tasks; teachers are able to continually enhance their professional competence and performance; appropriately qualified teachers fill all vacancies in all schools, and that there is a dynamic balance between demand and supply of teachers; there is a community of competent teachers dedicated to providing education of high quality, with levels of performance as well as ethical and professional standards of conduct; and to teachers are deservedly held in high regard by the people of South Africa” (Pretoria, 2007).

As seen here, Cape Town acknowledges that there are many aspects involved in being a teacher, so there must be different topics discussed in a policy solely about teachers and teacher training. However, this paper will now focus on the specific education requirements and goals for teacher training and education in Cape Town, South Africa.

Cape Town has a multi-tiered training system for teacher education described as “two complementary sub-systems: Initial Professional Education of Teachers (IPET) and Continuing Professional Teacher Development (CPTD)” (Pretoria, 2007). The IPET education programs will build “comply with the minimum academic and professional requirements for beginner teachers to teach the new curriculum effectively in varied context” (Pretoria, 2007). In order to fulfill the IPET education program requirement, teachers can complete one of two types of programs: “the first pathway is the 480-credit Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree which will include the equivalent of a year’s supervised practical teaching experience” and “the second is an appropriate 360-credit first degree...followed by a 120-credit Advances Diploma in Education (ADE)” (Pretoria, 2007). Both of these pathways lead to a fully accredited teacher qualified to teach in whatever specialties were studied. Additionally, once a certified teacher, the circumstances surrounding them while teaching can qualify them for a teaching aid. This can occur at any point in one’s teaching career, and a teaching aid’s education requirements are as follows: “The Department of Education will also closely examine...the merits of a qualification route for Teaching Assistants as para-professionals who could be deployed where teachers currently cope with particularly onerous conditions. Such Teaching Assistants will be encouraged to study for the BEd while in service” (Pretoria, 2007). It is vital to notice that this is the only mention of an aid anywhere in Cape Town’s special education policy regarding teachers and teacher training requirements which reveals high standards for non-certified teachers



assisting in educational settings. These initial training requirements align well with the initial training requirements seen in Hartford.

After the IPET is met, Cape Town requires teachers to continue their education training in order to sustain and fully meet the needs of students they are teaching. Cape Town released a new CPTD in 2007 which states:

“The new CPTD system will: Ensure that current initiative devoted to the professional development of teachers contribute more effectively and directly to the improvement of the quality of teaching; emphasize and reinforce the professional status of teaching; provide teachers with clear guidance about which Professional Development (PD) activities will contribute to their professional growth; protect teachers from fraudulent providers; and expand the range of activities that can contribute to the development of teachers” (Pretoria, 2007).

As seen earlier, this system includes advocacy for the importance of teachers in addition to teachers being equipped to meet the needs of their students. This new CPTD system also expands upon the requirement that “all employers of teachers must ensure that their employees are properly encouraged and equipped to undertake the roles expected of them in the highly varied and ever-changing conditions in which they work” (Pretoria, 2007). The PD activities can be met in a variety of categories such as “school led programmes; employer led programmes, qualification programmes; other programmes, offered by NGO’s teachers’ unions, community-based and faith-based organisations, or other approved providers; self-chosen activities” (Pretoria, 2007). It is important to note that “the PD points method is an internationally recognised technique used by professional bodies in many fields to acknowledge their members’ continuing professional development” and that “in the new system, the South African Council for Education (SACE), as the statutory body for professional educators, will have overall responsibility for the implementation, management and quality assurance of the CPTD system” (Pretoria, 2007). Educators must meet “80 hours” of PD activities “in each successive three-year

cycle” per the policy (Pretoria, 2007) (Education White Paper 6, 2001). Cape Town chose this implementation of continued teacher development because it puts the responsibility of the training and the program choice largely of the teachers both individually and as a whole within each department. This way Cape Town can analyze how dedicated teachers are to accommodating the needs of their students by increasing their own knowledge as a teacher.

Cape Town also highlights the needs of these training programs in order for teachers to be fully equipped to teach their students regardless of learning styles and learning needs. In the majority of South Africa, “not enough teachers are trained to provide and coordinate learning support for learners with a range of learning needs and who experience barriers to learning and development within their classrooms and schools” which is why Cape Town decided to implement policy to change that (Pretoria, 2007). The policy writers overseeing this policy and the training requirements acknowledge that teachers have a vital role in preparing their young people for society and independence, so they decided to “require teachers to have new knowledge and applied competences, including the use of new technologies, and radical change in the demographic, cultural and linguistic composition of [the] classrooms” (Pretoria, 2007). Furthermore, teachers are charged with addressing “an artificially constructed parallel system of “special” and “ordinary” education which marginalizes and excludes many vulnerable learners, and inadequate training for teachers” which is the result of the apartheid (Pretoria, 2007).

An additional finding regarding teacher education programs is that “all teachers need to acquire skills in recognising, identifying and addressing barriers to learning and creating inclusive and enabling and learning environments for all learners, including those with disabilities and other special needs” (Pretoria, 2007). The location of this finding—next to policy on HIV/AIDS—highlights that there is an HIV/AIDS pandemic in Cape Town and the

surrounding area and that teachers need to be cognizant of this. By Cape Town including this in the policy, it shows that the committee is determined to provide an equitable education and resources for all learners regardless of what classifications they may have.

### *Curriculum*

Due to implementation of an inclusive education system and the rise of special education programs after the apartheid, much of the curriculum is focused around mainstreaming the students and education system to provide an equitable and encompassing education for all.

In order to achieve this vision, broad categories of curriculum include:

“acceptance of principles and values contained in the Constitution and White Papers on Education and Training; human rights and social justice for all learners; participation and social integration; equal access to a single, inclusive education system; access to the curriculum, equity and redress; community responsiveness; and cost-effectiveness” (Education White Paper 6, 2001).

The inclusion of human rights and social justice largely stems from Cape Town’s desire to change the culture surrounding education and to reduce to stigma surrounding disability after the apartheid. This statement also serves to include the education services regardless of race and/or socioeconomic status as resources were allocated by those criteria during the apartheid. A nine-point guidance system laid out in the Policy on Disability for curriculum and the education system is as follows:

“(i) transforming all aspects of the education system, (ii) developing an integrated system of education, (iii) infusing ‘special needs and support services’ throughout the system, (iv) pursuing the holistic development of centres of learning to ensure a barrier-free physical environment and a supportive and inclusive psycho-social learning environment, developing a flexible curriculum to ensure access to all learners, (v) promoting the rights and responsibilities of parents, educators and learners, (vi) providing effective development programmes for educators, support personnel, and other relevant human resources, (vii) fostering holistic and integrated support provision through intersectoral collaboration, (viii) developing a community based support system which includes a preventative and developmental approach to support, and (ix) developing funding strategies that ensure redress for historically disadvantaged communities and institutions,

sustainability, and - ultimately - access to education for all learners” (Policy on Disability, n.d.).

These guidance point outline that the education system as an entity needs to be revised which includes the schools, the curriculum, parent/family knowledge and involvement, etc. It also highlights that funding must be provided to ensure that the system does not follow old habits and strategies. This policy aims to have a holistic approach to special education curriculum by offering students accommodations based on their individual learning needs. Furthermore, Cape Town defines inclusive education and training as

“acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support; enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies to meet the needs of all learners; acknowledging and respecting differences in learners, whether due to age, gender, ethnicity, language, class, disability, HIV or other infectious diseases; broader than formal schooling and acknowledging that learning also occurs in the home and community, and within formal and informal settings and structures” (Policy on Disability, n.d.).

By clearly stating the definition of inclusive education and training, Cape Town must support this definition by creating programs that fit this particular criteria. In order to comply with the definition provided, Cape Town has made some specific acknowledgements and recommendations about the current curriculum strategies as well as goals to improve the systems in place.

To put the guidelines above into action, the Policy on Disability created a list of current barriers and ways to fix them. “One of the most significant barriers to learning for learners in special and ‘ordinary’ schools is the curriculum” and “the most important way of addressing barriers arising from the curriculum is to make sure that the process of learning and teaching is flexible enough to accommodate different learning needs and styles” (Policy on Disability, n.d.). For example, the curriculum “must be integrated, holistic, and sustainable and result in full inclusion into society, self reliance and independence” and this must be done in a way that

accommodates the specific needs of each learner (Policy on Disability, n.d.). Additionally, there needs to be an emphasis on “supporting learners through full-service schools that will have a bias towards particular disabilities depending on need and support” which led to the increase in specialized schools in Cape Town (Policy on Disability, n.d.). Some ways to support learners stem from counselling to the use of assistive devices like wheelchairs or translating computers that allow for movement and communication. It can also come from reducing age grade norms to “accommodate those learners requiring a departure from these norms as a result of their particular learning needs” (Policy on Disability, n.d.). These specific ways of allowing learners with different needs and abilities follow the over guidance stated in the policies regarding curriculum.

### *Treatment of Children*

The treatment of students in special education has changed drastically overtime due to the apartheid. For example, “pre-1994, the provision of social services was welfare and grants based which resulted in dependency, lack of self-esteem and self confidence and was generally disempowering in nature” (Policy on Disability, n.d.). “Disability was addressed as a social welfare and medical concern within a framework known as the “medical model” which placed people in society based on their faults and medical diagnosis verses their abilities (Policy on Disability, n.d.). This changed “post-1994, [when] the democratic government of the day, introduced a “social model” approach to addressing disability. The model focuses on the abilities of People with Disabilities rather than their differences or disabilities and reinforces the principles of full participation, inclusion and acceptance of People with Disabilities as part of mainstream society” (Policy on Disability, n.d.). Yet, despite this shift after the apartheid, “the majority of People with Disabilities are still exposed to restrictive environments and barriers that

continue to marginalise and exclude them from mainstream society and its social and economic activities” (Policy on Disability, n.d.). This applies to students within the school system, as well which shows how the school system follows the trends of the surrounding area.

In order to alter this in the school system, the Board of Education decided to reassess the classification of students in need of special education programs. The policy focuses on “the overhauling of the process of identifying, assessing and enrolling learners in special schools, and its replacement by one that acknowledges the central role played by educators, lecturers and parents” (Education White Paper 6, 2001). There will also be an incremental transition of students from specialized school to full-service schools overtime according to what the learner needs. A specialized school is one that caters to students that are part of a particular disability. For example, Sibongile is a school for students with severe disabilities, specifically Cerebral Palsy. Yet, once/if they transition to the full-service school, the building’s accessibility needs to be reassessed because “in the context of disability, the principle of accessibility can be described as synonymous to the principles of full inclusion, equality and participation in mainstream society” (Policy on Disability, n.d.). A full-service school is one where students of all abilities participate, but there are special education classes for certain students. In order to fulfill accessibility need of students, “space and cost norms for buildings, including grounds, will focus on the design and construction of new buildings, as well as the renovation of existing buildings” (Education White Paper 6, 2001). For example,

a person who uses a wheelchair needs a ramp and wider door space to gain access to buildings; a person who is Deaf/ lives with a hearing impairment needs sign language interpreters or hearing devices to hear/listen, a quadriplegic would have additional and different needs from a paraplegic although both may use a wheelchair; all wheelchair users are not necessarily paraplegics or quadriplegics, the needs of a Deaf-Blind person is different from that of a Deaf or a Blind person. This principle speaks to the need for services to be appropriate and relevant to the type or category of disability that one is addressing” (Policy on Disability, n.d.).

Furthermore, in addition to making the buildings more accessible, the policy seeks to make the surrounding environment more equitable by promoting “inclusion and integration of People with Disabilities into mainstream society by engaging in public awareness, promoting advocacy campaigns and developing and implementing communication activities” (Policy on Disability, n.d.). Therefore, in addition to working on the school level to reach a holistic special education system, the policy puts a focus on the community as well.

### *Language/background*

The use of language in the policies has changed overtime following the end of the apartheid. In the White Paper No.6, the policy states a goal of using inclusive language:

“In accepting this inclusive approach we acknowledge that the learners who are most vulnerable to barriers to learning and exclusion in South Africa are those who have historically been termed ‘learners with special education needs,’ i.e. learners with disabilities and impairments. Their increased vulnerability has arisen largely because of the historical nature and extent of the educational support provided” (Education White Paper 6, 2001).

They came up with this change as “advocates inclusion based on the principle that learning disabilities arise from the education system rather than the learner” (Education White Paper 6, 2001). The policy states that “there should be consistency between the inclusive approach that is embraced, viz. that barriers to learning exist primarily within the learning system, and the language in use in our policy papers” which shows that the policy writers acknowledge that Cape Town historically and currently has outdated language that does not foster an inclusive environment (Education White Paper 6, 2001). However, the policy writers decided to get feedback from the general public on the policy draft and came to the conclusion that:

“Despite embracing this groundbreaking approach, these submissions suggested that the Consultative Paper opts to use outdated terminology such as ‘learners with special education needs’ and ‘learners with mild to severe learning difficulties’, which are signifiers of the ‘deficit’ or ‘medical’ model in which barriers to learning are assumed to

reside primarily within the learner. Also, the strategy of targeting ‘learners with mild to severe learning difficulties’ put forward in the Consultative Paper was argued to be outdated since most learners within mainstream education experience ‘barriers to learning’” (Education White Paper 6, 2001).

This shows that the culture in Cape Town has space to improve in their views of people with disabilities although the policy outlines a more holistic approach to students with special education. The school system in Cape Town is taking large strides in creating a more inclusive environment for students with disabilities.

## **Hartford**

### *Teacher Training*

Hartford’s teacher training requirements were laid out in a less direct way than the Cape Town policy. Yet, Hartford prefers to hire teachers with specific training and experience: “In the employment of teachers and other certified personnel, special consideration is given to professional training, teaching experience, and personal characteristics desirable in good teachers” (Freedman, 2005). There were no guidelines in the policy on the type of education needed for initial teacher training requirements, but the policy was inclusive of certified and non-certified personnel which shows that Hartford allows a wider range of people to work with students in special education programs. There was a medicalization aspect to the Cape Town training requirements as the bureau of education works with the ministry of health; however, Hartford approaches the medical aspect in a different way:

“Nothing in this policy shall be construed to prevent school personnel from consulting with a medical practitioner who has information concerning a child, as long as the school district has obtained consent from the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the child, in accordance with the Section II.D., above. Nothing in this policy shall prevent a planning and placement team from recommending a medical evaluation as part of an initial evaluation or reevaluation, as needed to determine a child's (i) eligibility for special education and related services, or (ii) educational needs for an individualized education program” (Freedman, 2005).



This recommendation process in place is both for the benefit of the student's health as well as the possible classification of a student in needing an individualized education plan which is how HPS classifies a student who has a disability.

The Hartford Policy does specify that for "all new school employees...shall be required to complete an educational training program for the accurate and prompt identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect. Such training program shall be developed and approved by the Commissioner of Children and Families" and that All school employees in general "shall retake a refresher training course developed and approved by the Commissioner of Children and Families at least once every three years." (Freedman, 2005). This follows roughly the same model that Cape Town does just without the point system. It also places the responsibility on the teachers and educators to complete the training on time as well as choosing the program that will most benefit their ability to meet the needs of their students. Also, the word teacher in this sense "includes each certified professional employee below the rank of superintendent employed by the Board in a position requiring a certificate issued by the State Board of Education" (Freedman, 2005). Finally, the only specification to teachers in relationship with students in special education programs is that the "ratio of adults to SPED students should be the same as the instructionally mandated ratio - per IEP" (Dorfman, 2005). The use of the word "adults" is important here as the IEP allows for both certified and non-certified personnel to work with students with disabilities in HPS.

### *Curriculum*

Special Education curriculum for Hartford Public Schools is largely based on a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This stems from the:

"Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – Alternative Assessments for Students with Disabilities for Statewide and District-wide Assessments The Board will, in all respects,

comply with the requirements of state and federal law with regard to the special education of students with disabilities. The Board directs the Superintendent or designee to, in accordance with state and federal law, develop procedures that indicate how district staff shall determine when a student with a disability eligible for special education and related services under the IDEA shall partake in alternative assessment(s) to particular statewide or district-wide assessments of student achievement. Such procedures shall include, among other things, a requirement that all decisions for alternative assessments be made by the particular student's planning and placement team" (Dorfman, 2005) –

Special Education students “may meet these requirements through modifications and adaptations as prescribed in the student Individualized Education Plan” (Dorfman, 2005). The IEP essentially is a guideline for the students curriculum which includes education protocols, recess requirements, restraint notification, and accessibility statements. For example, when it comes to recess—which is only seen in elementary schools—all students “have included in the regular school day, time devoted to physical activity, of not less than twenty minutes in total, except that this requirement may be altered by a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) for a child requiring special education and related services according to state and federal law, as may be amended from time to time” (Dorfman, 2005). This activity “can be a combination of planned physical education classes, recess, and/or teacher directed classroom activities” (Dorfman, 2005). This is only alterable for students who have an IEP.

Some more curriculum based policy that stems from an IEP is that “students with disabilities may have promotion criteria adjusted per his/her Individual Education Plan (IEP)” which means that if a student's abilities demonstrate a higher or lower grade then their IEP can change the grade that their age may assign them to (Dorfman, 2005). This places the responsibility on the education system to accommodate the student's needs rather than putting the responsibility on the student and family to change the ability of the learner to meet the standardized curriculum for a grade level. It is also the responsibility of the library to provide

materials that “meet curricular needs and the individual needs, interests, and learning styles of all students at all levels” which again puts the responsibility on the school system (Dorfman, 2005). Additionally, the IEP also states curriculum requirements and accommodations for students when they are in distress: “the Director of Special Education or his or her designee, must compile annually the instances of physical restraint and seclusion within the District, the nature of each instance of physical restraint and seclusion, and whether instances of seclusion were conduct pursuant to IEPs” (Dorfman, 2005). These restrictions and restraints are rarely implemented unless it is for the benefit of the student as HPS aims to create an inclusive environment that disciplines the students in special education programs the same as the other students in the school whenever possible.

#### *Treatment of Children*

Building on the previous idea, the treatment of children guidelines in HPS policy outlines different accessibility requirements, bullying, and IEP reviews. In terms of accessibility, the school must have a system in place that accommodate students in situations such as a fire emergency: “each school must have an evacuation plan for every physically handicapped student and for students with special medical needs” (Dorfman, 2005). Additionally, students in special education programs must follow the same health screening policies as all other students in the schools to guarantee that they are healthy or if they need any additional resources to accommodate something like an auto-immune disease which is especially important at this moment in time due to COVID-19 (Dorfman, 2005). As far as academics are concerned, a “special education student who is experiencing attendance problems must be referred for a PPT meeting for program review” (Dorfman, 2005). Moreover, the PPT must review a child’s academic records within ten days of a student with an IEP being recommended for suspension or

expulsion and consider “the relationship between the student’s disability and the behavior that led to the recommendation for expulsion or the suspension which constitutes a change in placement, in order to determine whether the student’s behavior was a manifestation of his/her disability” (Dorfman, 2005). This is an important point in the policy as a person’s disability may cause actions that the school personnel find disruptive or inappropriate so it is important to educate the community in addition to reviewing the incident at hand.

Another important moment in relation to this is bullying and harassment as students in special education programs often get bullied due to society placing them in the category of ‘different.’ HPS declares that:

“Bullying includes, but is not limited to, repeated written, oral or electronic communications or physical acts or gestures based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristics, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, socioeconomic status, academic status, physical appearance, or mental, physical, developmental or sensory disability, or by association with an individual or group who has or is perceived to have one or more of such characteristics” (Dorfman, 2005).

This definition is important because it provides a broad definition of instances that can be classified as bullying which will protect students with disabilities. While this definition applies to a large proportion of students with many identifications, it is designed to make students feel supported by the school system. The treatment of children here does not directly state a punishment for bullying, but the guidelines are inclusive of students with disabilities which signals that HPS knows that bullying to this group is occurring at a higher rate, and wants to work to end that treatment, even though it is a student-on-student offense.

### *Language*

There was no specific designation of language in any of the policies reviewed. However, HPS policy did consistently put the problem on the system rather than the students which is an

inclusive approach to language. A statement defining what HPS constitutes as a disability or what qualifies a student for an IEP would be beneficial.

## *V. Discussion*

In the findings section above, the most prevalent moments in each policy are laid out. This paper aims to answer the question: Based on special education policy, programs, and diction, how have various educational cultures expressed their views of students with disabilities? The following subsections will reference the findings above to argue that Cape Town's policies and programs reflect a more holistic view of students with disabilities and are easily accessible, but the language used puts the problem on the learner whereas Hartford's buried policies and selective programs indicate an incomprehensive view of students with disabilities though the language used puts the problem on the education system.

### *Teacher Training*

Both Cape Town and Hartford require some form of initial training requirement, but because Hartford allows both certified and non-certified personnel, the policy presents a less specific and less encompassing initial training requirement than Cape Town's policy. Cape Town even provides a general outline for paraprofessional training to make sure the students are interacting with educators who are equipped to meet their needs. However, both school systems require teachers to continue their training in three-year cycles which puts the responsibility on the educator to find the best training programs within the district's guidelines. Hartford requires one training session in the cycle whereas Cape Town requires educators to complete 80 hours of training over five categories of subjects. This implies that the localities each value the updating of a teacher's knowledge, but Cape Town's educational culture values a wide variety of

knowledge and current information to inform their teacher's teaching approach and skills. Additionally, the teachers in Cape Town work with the Minister of Health on training. Hartford educators have protocols in each student's IEP on who to contact in case of a medical need which is usually the school nurse of a local medical facility. The educational culture in Cape Town appears to value a more medical approach to special education as they want the schools to be able to cater to a student's needs in a large spectrum of circumstances. Overall, while both localities offer adequate teacher training requirements, Cape Town goes a step farther in ensuring the teachers are confident and equipped to meet the needs of their students in special education programs.

### *Curriculum*

The policies for Cape Town and Hartford each promote an inclusive education in terms of disability, race, gender, etcetera meaning that the policy creates the ideal educational setting for students in each locality. However, Cape Town is striving towards a more mainstreamed education approach where Hartford focuses on an individualized approach. There are currently many specialized schools in Cape Town which cater to groups of students based on specific disabilities like Cerebral Palsy and deafness, but they are working towards equipping special education specific classes in standardized schools to meet the needs of each student. Hartford has an IEP for every student in a special education class that outlines what the school believes the student needs to succeed, but Hartford has few specialized schools that have mastered catering to students with specific disabilities. It is hard to say which form of curriculum is more all-encompassing for student's education, but Cape Town's policy discusses providing physical accessibility of buildings, a transitional phase of academics, and creating support teams which is a more comprehensive approach to a student's education by looking at multiple forms of need.

Yet, Cape Town could benefit from more individualization per student as seen in the Hartford policy.

### *Treatment of Children*

Hartford's policy more directly addresses the treatment of children in the bullying/harassment section in one of the documents and in the succession of contacts for disciplinary actions. Cape Town's policy is less direct when discussing the treatment of children which suggests it is less direct with the discipline of students in special education programs. Yet both the localities offer equitable offerings in their policies such as resources for each student having needs met, statements of inclusivity and acceptance, etcetera. The policy for Cape Town goes as far as declaring wheelchairs for all students that need them and the same need and supply correlation for other specific disabilities as well. While the educational culture for both localities value inclusion and provide statements of acceptance, which place has a more comprehensive treatment of children could fall either way depending on if one prioritizes disciplinary actions made by the school or resources allocated to children based on a student's needs. Both places could benefit from implementing policy found in the opposite location to create a system that fully values the student.

### *Language*

Cape Town is aware of the need to change the language in the policies as it states it directly, but that implementation was voted out by policy reviewers. The knowledge and initiative is apparent for Cape Town, but the follow-through is non-existent creating an educational culture that puts the problem of an inclusive and equitable education on the learner and not on the school system. Hartford policy uses language that is current with United States

culture in their policies which demonstrates an educational culture that puts of the problem of and inclusive and equitable education on the school system.

### *Implications*

Some implications of this project regarding the policy and special education systems simply come with updating the policies more often to abide by current language standards and students needs. Additionally, HPS should make its special education policies easier to find so that the system appears to be a priority rather than hidden in the other policy points. Also, there should be more resources for students on special education programs as classification systems are altered to identify more needs for students. This means that the school districts need to increase funding for special education programs which in part comes from advocating for disability rights in the surrounding areas.

### *Conclusion*

Overall, each locality's policies have their strengths and weaknesses, but I argue that having a more accommodating curriculum and teacher training requirements reveals that Cape Town's educational culture is more holistic than Hartford. Yet, this is not by much as Hartford had more guidance for the treatment of children and more inclusive language. As each school district is soon going to be rewriting parts of their special education policies, they should consider implementing the strengths in the other place's policy to improve their own policy. This is not to make one locality better than another, but to provide the best education and resources possible for the students in special education programs.

## ***VI. Appendix***

### **Appendix A**



This project focuses on a document review and special education policy analysis. To begin, general internet searches via Google with keywords like “special education policy”, “Hartford”, and “Cape Town” were extremely beneficial in discovering the general websites and Board of Education pages needed for this project. The two most beneficial website base pages include: <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/dept/education> for Cape Town and <https://www.hartfordschools.org/> for Hartford. Once on the general pages, it was a process of discovering where the different places held their policy information. The next two sections describe in depth the process in navigating the different websites.

#### *Cape Town Website Navigation*

Once on the Western Cape Government’s main pages, one sees multiple drop down categories in the website header section. Under the “Documents” category, one will see a page for “Policies and Legislation”. Once on that page, look for the bullet point that says “Policies” and click on that link. There will be an alphabetical list of policies on this page. To begin, I worked through reading what policies were under each letter to get a basis on the different types of policies found on this page.: Under the “N” link there is “The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development”; under the “P” link there is the “Policy on Disability”; under the “Y” link, there is the “Youth Development Policy”. The policies were available and accessed on October twelfth, 2020. With each policy, there is an option to download and save it as a PDF. These three policy documents were chosen because of their relationship to this project’s subcategories of curriculum, teacher training, and treatment of children.

#### *Hartford Website Navigation*

Once on the Hartford Public School’s (HPS) website main page, one can see multiple subpage categories just like with the Cape Town website. For HPS, one will want to hold their

cursor over the “Information: *Leadership and departments*” page and go to the next sub-list: “Board of Education” where the arrow will reveal the page “Board Policies and Plans”. Once on this page, there are broad categories and pictures that hold the policy. Initially, I went through each picture to see what was included in terms of policy and discovered that HPS lumps all of their policies into these larger subcategories. Based on the this projects overall research categories, the policy groupings “Personnel”, “Students”, and “Instruction” are the three sections I chose. Within each 100+ page document, finding the specific section relevant to this project took some trail and error. Eventually, both looking for keywords like “Special Education” and “Disability” in the index and online search (for a MAC and PC: ctrl + f) to find the sections pertaining to my research. These results would filter through the many pages of documents and highlight the relevant section or even sections that expand upon my keyword search. This information was available and originally accessed by me on October seventh, 2020.

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