Summer 8-10-2021

Beyond Access: A Principal's Behaviors Displayed In The Implementation Of A District-Wide Initiative Focused On Students With Disabilities

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, BEYOND ACCESS: A PRINCIPAL'S BEHAVIORS DISPLAYED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A DISTRICT-WIDE INITIATIVE FOCUSED ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, by NICKLAUS E. KHAN, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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BEYOND ACCESS:
A PRINCIPAL'S BEHAVIORS DISPLAYED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A
DISTRICT-WIDE INITIATIVE FOCUSED ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

by

NICKLAUS KHAN

Under the Direction of Sheryl Cowart Moss, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The civil rights movement provided the foundation for students with disabilities to access education in the same settings as their nondisabled peers. However, placement in the same settings is not a guarantee of equitable educational experiences. This study was an exploration of the behaviors of a principal in the implementation of a district initiative for equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities, with a focus on the co-teaching service delivery model. The study was the means used to explicitly explore how or if those behaviors aligned with the characteristics of the social justice leadership framework. Qualitative methodology, specifically an instrumental case study design, was the approach chosen to explore these perceptions within one school in a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. The selected participants from the site were a principal and a special education teacher. The collection of various data sources occurred via semi-structured interviews and a review of

pertinent documents. Open coding, pattern coding, and codeweaving commenced to develop themes. The following themes emerged: a willingness to identify problems, a solutions-oriented approach, and an inclusive mindset. The findings demonstrated that the principal's behaviors in the implementation of the district initiative aligned with several characteristics of social justice leadership. The study included a further analysis of the descriptions of the principal's behaviors through the lens of several constructs of social justice leadership. The principal displayed a connection to socially just pedagogy, an inclusive and democratic mindset, a relational and caring demeanor, and an action-oriented and transformational leadership style. Findings from this study could contribute to the extant literature and practice in the following areas: the impact of principal behaviors on initiative implementation, instructional leadership practices for students with disabilities, and leadership priorities for recruitment. There is a need for further research on social justice leadership at the school and district level and leadership development in special education. This study also suggests further research into the design and implementation of co-teaching models for students with disabilities.

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

in

Educational Policy Studies

in

the College of Education & Human Development
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2021

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my daughter, Nadia. Hopefully, you see that anything is possible with focus and determination. Although this work is a great accomplishment, you remain my greatest accomplishment in life thus far. Love you, Suga-Dumplin. The world is yours.

I would also like to dedicate this study to my mom, Carmen Khan, and brother, Mark Khan. Your sacrifices and support throughout my life provided me with the foundation for where I am today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank God for guiding my steps through this process and keeping me focused on working on HIS time, not mine. I want to thank Dr. Sheryl Cowart Moss, Dr. Will Rumbaugh, and Dr. Nick Sauers for serving as my dissertation committee members. To my committee chair Dr. Moss, I truly appreciated your encouragement and optimism when I felt so far off track. Your guidence and reassuranced helped to keep me motivated. To my Cohort VII family, I am honored to have shared this journey with you and look forward to hearing about your future accomplishments.

Throughout my career, I have encountered some great leaders that have helped me grow professionally and personally. I want to acknowledge Dr. Katika Lovett. You have helped to increase my knowledge and to broaden my perspective on addressing special education issues. I was glad to be part of the "Lovett Cluster." To Gayle Burnett, thank you for helping me grow professionally and personally. You helped me look at problems, tasks, and people from a different lens. You provided that support and encouragement that helped me stay the course to keep reaching for my goals regardless of the situation. Nnenna Ogbu, thanks for being a critical thought colleague allowing me to bounce off my sometimes crazy ideas.

Jason Lewis and Arleen DeLeon, thank you for the push from the point of consideration to apply for the program and encouragement throughout this program, and overall support in life. To Marshall Bridges (Uncle Brian), thank you for the unwavering support and unfiltered conversations. Our conversations helped me navigate through a tough time to keep things moving forward in life. Thanks to all the other close friends that supported me including Barry Post, Jameel Crues, Tilnisha Rosser, Miguel Dominguez, and Akyiomi Fields.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge Natasha Domond. Thank you for the patience, love, understanding, and support. We have many date nights and trips to make up. Love You.

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1. THE PROBLEM

The inception and progress of special education in the United States are rooted in the civil rights movement. The revolutionary case *Brown v. Board of Education 347 U.S. 483* (1954) provided the foundation for dealing with inequities in public schools by establishing the discriminatory nature of racial segregation in public schools (Rotatori et al., 2011). The court case provided a way for U.S. government officials to address issues for students with disabilities (SWD), with cases such as *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 334 F. Supp. 279 (E.D. PA (1972) and Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. (866 (D.D.C. 1972).* These cases were the foundation for addressing access to educational opportunities for students with disabilities in the same setting as their nondisabled peers (Alquraini, 2013). The pivotal court cases contributed to the progression of the federal legislation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004), which, as Hunt (2011) mentioned, focused on the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) addressed the inclusion of children with disabilities with the least restrictive environment (LRE) mandate, which required teaching students with disabilities in the general education setting to the most appropriate extent possible.

However, mandated access does not always correlate with the actual provision of appropriate instruction in the general education setting. Morgan (2016) noted the increased inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004). McLeskey et al. (2012) found substantial advancement in least restrictive environment percentages for students with disabilities. However, students with disabilities often experience lower-quality education due to a lack of resources and low-quality

instruction that ultimately impacts their postsecondary outcomes (Wang, 2017). Under the banner of inclusion, schools might suggest that students with disabilities assimilate to the school environment rather than the school environment adapting to those students' needs and differences. Such a mindset contributes to the further marginalization of students with disabilities (Bešić et al., 2017; Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014).

In an exploration of leaders for social justice, Theoharis (2007) mentioned that marginalized students do not receive the education to which they are entitled without purposeful actions with an equity and social justice mindset to foster change in schools for their benefit. Obiakor et al. (2012) discussed how social justice is the foundation for inclusion, as it presents challenges to the beliefs and practices that contribute to a particular group's marginalization. Including students with disabilities in the general education setting and curriculum is a matter of equity and social justice. The goal of inclusion is to provide students with disabilities with specially designed instruction to meet their unique needs. The co-teaching service model is a means of ensuring that students with disabilities receive access to the same curriculum and specially designed instruction (SDI) as their nondisabled peers (Friend et al., 2010). Armstrong (2005) and Cramer (2015) indicated that special education policy focuses on integrating students with disabilities into the general education environment, where they receive a high-quality education. In this study, the definition of equity was the provision of specially designed instruction for students with disabilities to receive high-quality educational opportunities.

This study was a case study of a large, urban school district in the Southeastern United States. It entailed implementing an initiative focused on students with disabilities and the instructional components needed to promote equitable educational experiences with a concentration on co-teaching in a school system. The initiative consisted of training principals

and teachers on their roles in supporting and implementing the instructional components to provide students with disabilities with specially designed instruction in the same setting as their nondisabled peers. This study was an exploration of the behaviors of a principal and the perceptions of a teacher who participated in the district's initiative at one school. The study focused on how or if the participants' behaviors connected with the characteristics of social justice leadership.

Research Questions

Two guiding research questions were the means used to explore the principal's display of social justice leadership:

1. How does the principal describe his behaviors in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

2. How does the teacher describe the principal's display of leadership in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

Purpose

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to explore the behaviors of a principal and the perceptions of a teacher in the implementation of an initiative for students with disabilities at a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. The goal of the 5-year initiative was to promote equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching. The issues of quality educational opportunities faced by students with disabilities are issues of social justice. Inequitable, socially unjust actions include inadequate instruction and resources for students with disabilities (Wang, 2017). The co-taught model

provides accessible instructional delivery to both students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. The co-taught model is a way to meet implementation challenges that can occur when students with disabilities do not receive the specially designed instruction they need (Weiss & Glaser, 2019). Students with disabilities benefit from specially designed instruction; its adaptation of the content, methods, or instructional delivery provides for students with disabilities' unique needs while providing them with access to the same curriculum as their nondisabled peers (Reiner, 2018). The genuine inclusion of students with disabilities occurs when they receive equitable access to curriculum, resources, and opportunities. Furthermore, students with disabilities can significantly benefit from those opportunities (DeMatthews, 2014). This study focused on the behaviors of a principal in the implementation of the district's initiative focused on students with disabilities. This study was the means used to explore and describe how or if the principal's behaviors connected with the characteristics of social justice leadership.

Definition of Terms

The following are the definitions of the key terms used in this study:

- *Co-teaching.* According to Friend et al. (2010),

  Co-teaching may be defined as the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, in a general education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning needs. (p. 11)

- For this study, the definition of equity was the provision of specially designed instruction for students with disabilities to receive high-quality educational opportunities.

- *Inclusion.* Friend and Pope (2005) defined inclusion as,

  The understanding that all students—those who are academically gifted, those who are average learners, and those who struggle to learn for any reason—should be fully welcomed members of their school communities and that all professionals in a school share responsibility for their learning. (p. 57)

- *Social justice leadership.* "Principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223).

- *Equitable access.* Equitable access consists of the development and implementation of the practices that contribute to the instructional implementation of and support for students with disabilities receiving special education services in the same classroom setting as their nondisabled peers.

Frequently Used Terms

The following are the terms and acronyms frequently used throughout this study:

- Free and appropriate public education (FAPE)

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Least restrictive environment (LRE)

- Specially designed instruction (SDI)

- Students with disabilities (SWD)

Context for the Study

The sampled school district consistently fell below the state's least restrictive environment target for the criteria of students with disabilities receiving services in the general education setting for 80% or more of the day. The least restrictive environment target is the goal for the number of students with disabilities receiving services in the general education setting with their general education peers. The state's Department of Special Education identified the least restrictive environment target. The school system in this study, like other school districts in the state, provided the least restrictive environment data to the state. School system leaders determine least restrictive environment data based on the service decisions made by the members of the individualized educational program teams for the students with disabilities enrolled in the district. The study's state provided a least restrictive environment target to increase access to the general education setting for students with disabilities. School districts with high least restrictive environment rates may have a more appropriate implementation of co-teaching practices than the school districts with high percentages of students with disabilities receiving services outside of the general education setting. The least restrictive environment federal mandate requires that students with disabilities receive instruction in the general education setting with their nondisabled peers unless schools cannot meet their individual needs with exhaustive use of supplementary aids and services (Kurth et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2020).

According to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), supplementary aids and services are:

Aids, services, and other supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable

children with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled children to the maximum

extent appropriate. (§300.42)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act also requires state educational agencies

(SEAs) to provide reports of the least restrictive environment rates and the settings where the

students with disabilities receive services (Williamson et al., 2020). In this study, the least

restrictive environment rates were not the sole focus of the district's special education leadership

team. With an overhaul in the district's central office leadership, the newly appointed special

education director focused on three special education program deficit items: initial and

revaluation eligibility compliance, students with disabilities discipline rates, and least restrictive

environment rates. The special education department provided direct oversight and guidance on

least restrictive environment decisions to increase students with disabilities 's access to the

general education setting. The study district showed improved least restrictive environment rates,

which suggested that it provided students with disabilities with increased access to the general

education setting. However, the district still had scores slightly below average on the state

measurement of students with disabilities served in the general education setting for 80% or

more of the day. Additionally, the students with disabilities achievement data did not show

significant gains in state assessment scores.

Students with disabilities participate in the state assessments along with their nondisabled

peers. Officials from the State Department of Education reviewed the assessment data by

subgroups inclusive of students with disabilities, finding that the students with disabilities

consistently displayed little or no gains on the state assessments. Therefore, the special education

department focused on instructional practices for students with disabilities. The district officials

hired a consultant to assist in developing an inclusive practices initiative (IPI) for the

instructional components needed to promote equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities. The inclusive practices initiative included training for principals, site-based special education administrators, general education teachers, and special education teachers.

The first two years of the initiative included a high frequency of training opportunities for staff members from the entire district for a district-wide infrastructure of cohesive practices. The special and general education teachers who served students with disabilities in the co-taught setting were the training targets. In the co-taught setting, students with disabilities receive instruction in the same location as their nondisabled peers. The initiative's next two years consisted of a condensed version of the training sessions. These condensed training sessions included reviews of the core elements of the initiative and the expectations that the new teachers and administrators would participate with the members of the site-based team who took part in the initial training sessions and implemented inclusive practices initiative components at their school sites. The last year of the inclusive practices initiative implementation consisted of teacher and site based special education administrator training sessions focused on specially designed instruction. These training sessions were designed to be delivered to the schools' special education leadership with the expectation of the session's redelivery at their schools.

The training sessions for teachers and co-teachers focused on implementing the co-teaching models. The sessions presented the special education and the general education teachers' roles in planning and implementing instruction in the co-taught setting. The sessions were an opportunity to gain insight from the participants on some of the barriers they encountered by providing examples of common barriers, including partnership problems between co-teachers, such as when one or both teachers act in dominating ways, reluctantly

collaborate, or remain absent in their roles. Other concerns include parent or guardian concerns and how to initiate co-teaching. In addition to the specific concerns, the manual suggested asking the training participants if they had any concerns. The district leadership team members collected relevant feedback, which they used to enhance the principal training sessions. The principal training sessions provided an overview of the co-teaching models and instructional expectations. The sessions also focused on leadership support, oversight, and the direct implementation of the practices supportive of co-teaching.

The final phase of the inclusive practices initiative occurred within the last two years of the initiative, with the expectation that the administrators and teachers had developed practices to support co-teaching in the first three years of training. The final phase focused on how to develop the instruction and implement the instruction within those practices. The special education administrators participated in specially designed instruction training to redeliver that training to teachers and other instructional staff members at their sites. As well as site-based training expectations, the district facilitated training focused on specially designed instruction for special education teachers.

In addition to the principal, teacher, and special education administrator training materials, there could have been various other artifacts developed. Potential artifacts included documents, such as lesson plans, site-based professional learning agendas, collaborative planning protocols, and classroom observations reports. The presence of these artifacts could have indicated the implementation of the various phases of the inclusive practices initiative.

The inclusive practices initiative's context provided an overview of developing and implementing an initiative for equitable students with disabilities educational experiences in a large, urban school district in the Southeastern United States. This study focused on a principal's

behaviors and a teacher's perceptions in the inclusive practices initiative implementation and addressed how or if those behaviors aligned with the characteristics of social justice leadership.

Significance of the Study

Inclusion is an important topic related to equity of students with disabilities. Pazey and Cole (2013) mentioned that creating inclusive schools is an essential step in eliminating marginalization. Inclusion provides access to a meaningful education with practices supporting equitable educational opportunities (Obiakor et al., 2012). Researchers have studied co-teaching as an inclusion strategy and highlighted the necessary elements and procedures for successful implementation (Pugach & Winn, 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Strogilos et al., 2015). Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) indicated that, with the growth of inclusive programs, full inclusion with co-teaching is the favored model for students with disabilities who do not require extensive support.

A key principle of co-teaching is that students with diverse needs in inclusive classrooms can have their needs met by two teachers (Conderman et al., 2009). Co-teaching is an often-adopted model because of its potential for supporting instructional equity for students with disabilities in the same setting as their nondisabled peers (Shamberger et al., 2014). Co-teaching is a means of ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the same curriculum as their nondisabled peers and the specialized instruction to which they are entitled (Friend et al., 2010). It is necessary to provide content knowledge to collaborate, create, plan, and implement lessons tailored to individual needs. The coupling of knowledge and skills enables teachers to foster equitable instructional opportunities for students with disabilities (Allday et al., 2013). Leadership is a critical component in the implementation of co-teaching in inclusive environments. Leaders can show their support by fostering collaborative planning between the

general education and special education teachers and specially designed instruction professional development opportunities to meet the needs of students with disabilities. A leader who focuses on supporting students with disabilities can set the tone for the school's culture and contribute to making inclusion part of the school culture.

DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) placed school leadership as at the forefront of inclusion and associated with the social justice understanding of marginalization problems. Rivera-McCutchen (2014) described how socially just leaders improve teaching and learning to foster equitable learning experiences. According to Friend et al. (2010), leading the implementation of inclusive practices for equitable learning experiences such as co-teaching requires school leaders to increase their knowledge. Additionally, principals are responsible for facilitating actions to support co-teaching, such as scheduling, making staffing arrangements, planning collaboratively, and addressing barriers to implementation.

Despite the importance of inclusion and the instructional facets needed for equitable students with disabilities inclusion, there is a lack of research on principals' behaviors in implementing inclusive practices programs focused on students with disabilities. DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) noted the lack of research on principals' displays of social justice leadership, which is still a relatively new and developing topic. There was a need for this study because it contributed to the knowledge of the use, or lack of use, of social justice leadership when seeking to understand if and how students with disabilities can access equitable educational experiences. This study provided additional insight into school district and educational leadership programs and the influence of specific behaviors on addressing students with disabilities' needs.

Overview of the Study

The development and implementation of a five-year inclusive practice initiative for students with disabilities in the study district fostered equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities. In this study, the five-year district initiative was the inclusive practices initiative consisting of training for general education teachers, special education teachers, special education building-level leaders, and principals. The teacher sessions included in-depth training on various co-teaching models, role expectations, collaboration, and instructional planning. The principal training addressed co-teaching models, role expectations, collaboration, and instructional planning, framed by their role in supporting and overseeing its implementation. Additionally, the administrator training included special education building-level leadership training on specially designed instruction for redelivery to building-level teachers. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, special education requires providing specially designed instruction to meet students with disabilities' individual needs. Specially designed instruction is the adaptation of the content, methodology, or instructional delivery to meet students with disabilities' unique needs, fostering equitable access to the same curriculum as their nondisabled peers (Bays & Crockett, 2007). Co-teaching's intent is to provide students with disabilities access to the same curriculum as their nondisabled peers while receiving specialized instruction (Friend et al., 2010; Weiss & Glaser, 2019).

The inclusive practices initiative training sessions included discussions and examples of the items supportive of equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities. The items discussed included specially designed instruction and collaboration structures, lesson plans, and the expectations of appropriate co-teaching services. A qualitative instrumental case study design was the method used to explore a principal's behaviors in the inclusive practices

initiative implementation. Qualitative research focuses on exploration, discovery, and description (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to explore the behaviors of a principal and the perceptions of a teacher in the implementation of an initiative for students with disabilities at a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. In accordance with the qualitative research methodology, there was a foundation of assumptions and a theoretical framework to address research problems on the meaning that individuals or members of groups attributed to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). Theoretical applications can characterize major issues from the research literature and represent practical problems (Yin, 2018). Social justice leadership addresses the issues of equity faced by members of marginalized groups. The theoretical framework of social justice leadership provided a lens for exploring a principal's behaviors during the implementation of a district initiative to provide equitable educational practices for students with disabilities.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review commences with a section on special education law. The purpose of this section and the respective subsections is to provide the historical roots of the problems faced by students with disabilities. This section provides a guide to understanding the specific problems of equity based on civil rights movement foundations. The literature review then focuses on inclusion by presenting different perspectives and the instructional practices of supporting equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities in the general education setting with their nondisabled peers. Finally, the review presents an exploration of social justice, including an overview of the literature on the social justice leadership theoretical framework. A review of the history of special education law leads to the foundations of equity for students with disabilities, instructional practices to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities, and the leadership characteristics beneficial for promoting and supporting students with disabilities equity.

Foundations of Special Education Law

The evolution of special education in the United States directly correlates with the fight for equity by various marginalized groups. A landmark case in U.S. history was *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which impacted equality in education (Prager, 2014; Ware, 2002). The landmark case indicated the discriminatory nature of racial segregation in a public school system. The case indicated that racial discrimination is a violation of the 14th Amendment on all citizens' guaranteed rights to equal protection of the law (Rotatori et al., 2011), presenting education as a civil rights issue. The court agreed that racial segregation violated the Constitution-provided opportunity for parents and advocates of children with disabilities to end the discrimination against students with disabilities. Family members and outside supporters of

students with disabilities asserted that there was no difference in student segregation based on race and disability status. They argued that segregation based on disability was also a violation of the equal rights provided to all through the 14th Amendment (McGovern, 2015).

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was a critical case in the civil rights movement, which alone resulted in pivotal changes in the rights of individuals with disabilities. Before 1973, the laws related to the rights of people with disabilities were of limited scope and focused on therapeutic needs. The laws did not provide for equity from a civil rights standpoint. A pivotal change occurred with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, specifically Section 504. Section 504 includes language that indicates that institutions receiving federal funds cannot discriminate against people with disabilities. Section 504 is a statute of noted importance, as federal law shows any segregation or exclusion of an individual with a disability as an act of discrimination, and therefore, a violation of civil rights (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

The legal efforts to address the inequities faced by individuals with disabilities caused a shift in public education to a focus on students with disabilities. The language of individuals with disabilities underwent revision to students with disabilities. The change in terms led to a switch from the broad scope of all individuals with disabilities to a specific group within the public-school setting. Section 504 was the foundation for providing access for students with disabilities. Subsequently, this foundation resulted in the development of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975 (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

The civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the foundation for other legal statutes to narrow the focus from individuals with disabilities to a focused subgroup of students with disabilities. Public Law 94-142 indicated that children should receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Under the statute of FAPE, students with disabilities could receive

individualized education programs (IEPs) to support their individual needs related to their disabilities (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). The free and appropriate public education component provided specific aid to students with disabilities in the general educational setting. The development of various revisions and additional policies occurred to foster equity for students with disabilities compared to the educational opportunities provided to their nondisabled counterparts. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act underwent various refinements, with the first major alteration occurring in 1990. The critical refinement was the change to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

IDEA

The move from the Education for All Handicapped Children Act to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was not a rebranding ploy, as it included changes for revising the legal focus on supporting and protecting the rights of students with disabilities. The changes did not affect the provision of the critical component of FAPE. IDEA underwent pivotal reauthorizations, including those in 1997 and 2004. The 1997 reauthorization indicated that schools and students with disabilities had the same standards for proficiency on state assessments, thereby producing another level of accountability for school districts. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) contributed to the inclusion of students with disabilities in state and national assessments. Students with disabilities' increased enrollment required school systems to focus on these students' education (Bacon, 2015). Although some argue that inclusion in high-stakes assessments is not in students with disabilities' best interests, others believe it is a way to foster accountability and combat this often-ignored population's marginalization (Jewell, 2008). The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act further focused on accountability, making school systems accountable for improving outcomes for

students with disabilities. Hunt (2011) indicated that case law and federal policies, such as

Brown v. Board of Education (1954), PL 94-142 (1975), IDEA (1990), NCLB (2001), and the

2004 IDEA reauthorization, have impacted the theoretical aspects of special education and

practices.

The 2004 IDEA reauthorization makes schools accountable for providing services within

students' least restrictive environment (LRE). Educators can no longer place students with

disabilities in a general education setting as the extent of inclusion and equity. Cases *Mills v.*

Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1972) and *Pennsylvania Association for*

Retarded Children (*PARC)* v. *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) required placing and

educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The rulings indicated that

the preferred placement is a general education class instead of a class or program with only

students with disabilities (Alquraini, 2013). These cases were the foundation for addressing the

issues of access through the lens of the LRE clause.

Other cases with an impact on special education include the *Board of Education of the*

Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley (1982) and, most recently, *Endrew F. v.*

Douglas County School District (2017). *Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982) provided an

interpretation of the free and appropriate public education (FAPE) federal mandate that students

with disabilities must receive specially designed instruction to meet their needs. The case

indicated that educators can determine FAPE with a two-part test: (a) exploring a school's

adherence to the procedural requirements and (b) determining if the child's individualized

education program is reasonably developed enough to provide a meaningful education. *Endrew*

F. v. Douglas County School District focused on the second part of the Rowley test to determine

if a student had a reasonably calculated individualized education program. The court ruled that

educators should not develop an individualized education program with a minimum standard but with relevant assessments and challenging goals to meet the free and appropriate education (FAPE) federal requirement (Couvillon et al., 2018; Yell & Bateman, 2019).

Special education law requires additional focus, as general education teachers and administrators primarily focus on professional development for pedagogy and instructional practices (Couvillon et al., 2018). Special education law is an often-neglected topic. A lack of understanding about special education law can result in educators not fulfilling the law's requirements. Educators and administrators must understand legal statutes, such as FAPE and least restrictive environment, to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The least restrictive environment statute remains a driver of inclusion. Educators must consider the general education environment as part of the least restrictive environment continuum of services and individualized education program development. Students' placement in the general education setting is not a guarantee of equity unless students with disabilities receive instruction to meet their individual needs in adherence to the free and appropriate public education statute.

LRE Decisions

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and its least restrictive environment requirements, mandating school districts to provide education to students with disabilities in regular classrooms to the highest degree possible, has caused much debate. There are arguments about the decision-making process of considering students with disabilities for removal from the general education setting (Prager, 2014*).* IDEA requires that individuals making least restrictive environment placement decisions consider removing a child from the general education environment only when they cannot meet the student's needs in that setting, even with supplementary aids and services. Individualized education program placement

decisions have resulted in excluding students with extensive service needs from the general education setting.

Shyman (2015) highlighted the four factors in making individualized education program placement decisions that resulted from *Board of Education–Sacramento City Unified School District v. Holland* (1994):

1. The educational benefits of the integrated vs. the segregated setting

2. Nonacademic benefits (e.g., socialization/interaction among students without disabilities)

3. The effect that the student with the disability can have on the teacher and peers

4. The cost of supplementary services that will be required for the student to stay in the integrated setting. (p. 359)

There has been some momentum in studies on restrictive settings for students with extensive needs who display negative consequences resulting from placement decisions (Kurth et al., 2019). Kurth et al. (2019) analyzed the least restrictive environment statements contained in IEPs to explore the decision-making process, finding a lack of consideration of supplementary aids and services in individualized education program placement consideration. However, the results of their analysis did not include the consideration of other factors, such as curricular considerations, environmental demands, student deficit, and personnel requirements, when determining student placement. Practices in support of curricular considerations, environmental needs, staffing requirements, and planning for students with disabilities' individualized needs, can influence placement decisions.

Practices in support of these factors can contribute to students with disabilities' success in the general education classroom. One assumption of student placement is that the curriculum is

not a problem that obstructs the students with disabilities' performance (Frattura & Capper, 2006). Under this mindset, individualized educational program team members could decide for students with disabilities to receive instruction outside of the general education setting to best serve their specific needs in that setting. Some students might not thrive in the general education setting; however, team members should carefully consider an array of increased instructional supports before removing students. Carson (2015) indicated that if students with disabilities can succeed in their least restrictive environment with the necessary supports but do not receive these supports, they may undergo placement in more restrictive settings. Even though multidisciplinary teams must make placement decisions, principals are ultimately responsible for providing adequate support to students.

Principal's Role in LRE Adherence

Leaders must do more than merely provide students with disabilities with access to the general education setting; they need to offer equitable educational opportunities. Principals should know about all the federal mandates and their interpretations of how to implement IDEA's free and appropriate public education statute within the least restrictive environment (Sumbera et al., 2014). The federal mandates protect the rights of students with disabilities and show schools as accountable for providing students with disabilities with a free and appropriate public education.

School district leaders must report their least restrictive environment data to the respective State Department of Education, which provides these data to the federal government. The measure of compliance suggests that a simple body count shows the degree of successful inclusion; however, a body count does not address inclusive education's foundational moral aspect (Ware, 2002). Ware (2002) indicated that the moral aspect of meeting the needs of

students with disabilities through individualized education programs can be symbolic compliance to least restrictive environment mandates. There is a lack of empirical data on the academic success of students with disabilities in inclusive settings despite an increasing number of co-taught classrooms (Andrias & Burr, 2012). A body count is not the sole determinant of success. In addition to the least restrictive environment data, it is necessary to consider FAPE implementation within the least restrictive environment when assessing the success of inclusive practices for students with disabilities.

According to federal mandates, school leaders must ensure that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in their least restrictive environment. School leaders decide upon and document least restrictive environment placement through the individualized education program development process. Thus, school leaders could benefit from insight into implementing federal mandates and interpreting free and appropriate public education and least restrictive environment concepts. According to Sumbera et al. (2014), a lack of understanding of special education law can influence individualized education program development process decisions and responses to free and appropriate public education implementation barriers. Sumbera et al. further indicated that this lack of understanding could result in a false sense of accomplishment by individuals unable to recognize the indications of the issues facing students with disabilities.

A lack of understanding of legal mandates and the overall aspects of special education can impact a leader's implementation of inclusive practices for equitable access for students with disabilities. O'Laughlin and Lindle (2015) explored whether school-level leaders appropriately encouraged students with disabilities 's access to instruction in the general education setting. They analyzed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's legislative and regulatory

guidance, case law interpretations, and state-level procedural documents. The findings showed that principals had surface-level knowledge of the least restrictive environment mandate that did not affect their leadership decisions of least restrictive environment implementation. O'Laughlin and Lindle also found that the principals referred any LRE-related decision to the administrators they deemed the most knowledgeable about special education, usually the special education teachers. Referring LRE-related practices to others is problematic, as principals must know the FAPE and least restrictive environment statutes and the concept of inclusion. The principals who have such knowledge are more confident in deciphering and endorsing special education federal policies and flourishing as leaders.

Principals might struggle with least restrictive environment and free and appropriate public education implementation due to competing interpretations and the broad scope of the statutes; for example, there are no definitions of phrases such as "the maximum extent appropriate." The laws' wording enables individuals to interpret the laws according to their situations. However, vague wording could contribute to inconsistencies and inequities (Carson, 2015). Principals must learn more about the least restrictive environment mandate to heighten their confidence and fulfill their role in supporting their schools' special education departments. Sumbera et al. (2014) indicated that principals' confidence levels could impact their beliefs about students with disabilities and their roles as leaders of their special education departments, overseeing the services that each student should receive. Leaders could benefit from understanding what they must do for inclusive practices for students with disabilities and how to implement those practices.

Equity issues within special education can intersect with race, class, gender, and sexuality. The overrepresentation of students of color within the students with disabilities

population has received significant, decades-long debate (Shealey & Lue, 2006). The discussions include placing students of racial and diverse ethnic backgrounds into special education based on decisions about eligibility for special education services (Cartledge & Dukes, 2009). Cartledge and Dukes (2009) highlighted that disproportionate representation is a particular issue for Black students, who receive more restrictive placements within the continuum of special education settings. Thus, Black students with disabilities often have limited access to the same settings and curricula as their nondisabled peers. Some scholars view special education as a discriminatory and authorized structure for promoting segregation and racism (Morgan et al., 2017). Such researchers consider placement decisions in opposition to the foundation of special education in the civil rights movement promoting the least restrictive environment mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Inclusive leaders must go beyond just least restrictive environment decisions to engage in the decisions and knowledge of services and instruction (Pazey & Cole, 2013). Leaders must develop environments of authenticated equity in which students with disabilities do not feel like marginalized members of the school community (Moore, 2009). Inclusion is a concept related to social justice aiming to enable all students, including students with disabilities, to feel genuinely valued. Acknowledging the value of students with diverse needs requires consideration of the school structures that contribute to success and the strength of instructional techniques (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Access to the general education setting cannot be the sole standard for equity. Principals could use extant literature on least restrictive environment implementation to provide appropriate services, as needed. Many leaders lack an understanding of the legal statutes for inclusion and the concept of inclusion.

Understanding Inclusion

Inclusion is often a concept automatically utilized when discussing special education. However, many individuals lack a clear understanding of the meaning or purpose of inclusion. Friend and Pope (2005) described inclusion as:

A belief system. It is the understanding that all students—those who are academically gifted, those who are average learners, and those who struggle to learn for any reason—should be fully welcomed members of their school communities and that all professionals in a school share responsibility for their learning. (p. 57)

This definition is a holistic approach to addressing everyone in a diverse student population. In the realm of social justice, the description of inclusion may also include promoting equity for a marginalized group. Inclusion contributes to a new concept of equality in education that includes the notion of fairness of students with disabilities access to the same resources and opportunities as their nondisabled peers.

Some believe that certain aspects of the evolution of special education with an effect on inclusion contribute to exclusion (Armstrong, 2005; Armstrong et al., 2011; De Silva, 2013). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act resulted from the need to provide a marginalized population with equal access and increased support to contribute to their success. However, there is an underlying conflict within the idea of ensuring equity in the least restrictive environment. Kauffman and Badar (2014) discussed how exclusion from the general education setting is often not a requirement if a student has a disability; however, it could be a more equitable solution for meeting students with disabilities' needs. Conflict might occur when there is a desire to provide individualized instruction to meet students with disabilities' specific, sometimes personalized, needs in the general education setting with their general education peers (Prager, 2014). Gordon

(2006) noted that while inclusion is a mechanism for meeting least restrictive environment requirements, it is not always the least restrictive environment for every student. The general education setting might not be the correct least restrictive environment for the appropriate provision of individualized services (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Prager, 2014). However, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum regardless of their eligibility criteria; thus, students with disabilities also have high standards (Cramer, 2015).

This paradox also occurs with the 2004 IDEA additions, including holding the students with disabilities accountable for passing the same state assessments as their general education peers. The U.S. Department of Education's (USDOE) 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Section 1416(a)(2)(A) focuses on performance, compliance to IDEA's procedural requirements, and the results and outcomes of students with disabilities. The results-driven accountability framework is the means of monitoring the educational results and outcomes of students with disabilities with state assessments as metrics (Schulze & Boscardin, 2018; USDOE Office of Special Education Programs, 2015b).

Many students with disabilities participate in state assessments. Some students with disabilities with significant cognitive needs have alternative achievement assessment options; however, they still must meet the same grade-level standards (Billingsley et al., 2017). students with disabilities achievement across the range of disabilities and need levels connects to the grade-level standards expected of all students.

Because students with disabilities have the same standards as their nondisabled peers on state assessments, students with disabilities should receive instruction specific to their needs to prepare them for state assessments. However, Frattura and Capper (2006) highlighted the

perspective that the curriculum itself is not the problem that obstructs the performance of students with disabilities. Rather, this frame of thought could result in excluding students with disabilities from their nondisabled peers and instruction suitable for their needs. Exclusion could be the selected option instead of enhanced instructional support in the same setting as nondisabled peers. Sailor and Roger (2005) stated that students with disabilities in the general education setting could undergo removal from their nondisabled peers via separate instruction within that setting. Separation within the general education setting often entails isolated seating arrangements. Both mindsets of students with disabilities placement, regardless of whether students with disabilities learn in the same setting as their nondisabled peers, contradict Theoharis and Causton's (2014) definition of inclusion "as [students with disabilities] being educated in the general education classroom and having full access to the general education curriculum, instruction, and peers with needed support" (p. 83). Educators can enhance inclusion by investing meaningful time and energy into understanding collaboration, differentiation, and co-teaching. IDEA has resulted in steadily increasing numbers of students with disabilities served in the general education classroom, indicating the need for highly collaborative efforts between general and special educators (Morgan, 2016).

Inclusive Practices

Inclusive practices programs for special education require leadership support (Theoharis & Causton, 2014) to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2017). Principals lead school change and develop schools that provide teachers with the support they need to meet the diverse needs of all students, including students with disabilities (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). Implementing a strategic inclusive practices initiative focused on students with disabilities requires a commitment to changed mindsets and behaviors. Attending

professional development sessions with the hopes of automatically changing mindsets is not

realistic (Berryman et al., 2015). Strategic initiatives should provide support for professional

development and collaboration so that students with disabilities can access meaningful,

appropriate educational opportunities alongside their general education peers in the least

restrictive environment.

In a study of inclusive practices for English language learners, Theoharis and O'Toole

(2011) identified inclusion as the core of co-teaching. They found that implementing co-teaching

models and continuous community-building activities enabled English language learner students

and their English-speaking counterparts to gain higher levels of mutual understanding. The

teachers in their study used ongoing community-building activities to help the learners value and

understand one another.

Keefe and Moore (2004) described the positive outcome of co-teaching in a study on the

challenges of co-teaching implementation at a high school. They found that the special education

and general education teachers observed the benefits of co-teaching, including the individualized

assistance provided to students in need. Other observations included implementing modifications

due to successful team collaboration and eradicating the stigma of being a student with a

disability receiving special education services.

Instruction does not occur in isolation (Jackson et al., 2008). Instructional practices must

have clear relationships with real-world issues. Teachers or administrators must review the

research to assess their instructional practices' appropriateness for the populations they serve.

Research suggests the benefits of the inclusive practice of co-teaching for serving students with

disabilities. Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprathaban (2016) stated,

There are different instruction methods commonly used to cope with this varied learning

environment. Even though the inclusive educational practice is a challenge for regular

school teachers they are the active agents exposed to a lot of problems in implementation.

Even then they have to develop and implement the inclusive education policies and bring

out satisfactory outcomes for themselves and for the pupils. As inclusion stemmed out

from the right for equal education of all children, teachers should provide education to

them based on their abilities and disabilities. (p. 122)

Promoting equity requires leaders to know about the inequitable practices negatively

impacting students with special needs in inclusive settings. Bešić et al. (2017) stated, "Although

the positive effects of inclusion are well-known, the quality of teaching in inclusive classes as

prerequisite for these positive outcomes is not always ensured" (p. 332). Leaders must identify

inequitable issues relating to instructional practices and competency and develop and implement

plans to address the problems. Identifying and addressing inequity is part of being both an

instructional and socially just leader.

Co-Teaching

Inclusive practices can address the inequities faced by students with disabilities. The

1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and its 2004 reauthorization

have resulted in the increased significance of students with disabilities outcomes on both state

assessments and postsecondary measures (Huefner, 2000; Schulze & Boscardin, 2018). In the

Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District (2017) ruling, the Supreme Court decided to focus

on student outcomes and not just compliance measures (Weiss & Glaser, 2019). The shifts in

accountability in serving students with disabilities have produced the need for enhanced

instructional support, such as the co-teaching model. Accordingly, general education and special

education teachers collaborate to provide instruction with co-teaching models (van Hover et al., 2012; Weiss, & Glaser, 2019).

Friend et al. (2010) mentioned that co-teaching has grown as a method for providing students with disabilities with access to the same curriculum as their nondisabled peers while presenting them with the specialized instruction to which they are entitled. The researchers defined co-teaching as the partnership between special education teachers, general education teachers, and specialized staff members to cooperatively provide instruction to diverse student populations in the general education setting. Friend et al. further stated that the instruction must purposefully provide for the needs of students with disabilities. Gately and Gately (2001) defined co-teaching as a collaboration between general education and special education teachers to divide planning, presentation, evaluation, and classroom management to meet students' diverse needs. Weiss and Glaser (2019) identified co-teaching as merging the expertise of general and special education teachers to meet all students' needs. Weiss and Glaser highlighted the provision of specially designed instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The definitions of co-teaching show the intent to meet the letter and spirit of special education law.

Supporting co-teaching requires principals to develop structures to foster collaboration beyond the physical nature of two teachers working together in a co-taught setting. Bakken and Obiakor (2016) discussed that collaboration, from a leadership perspective, includes the activities supportive of effective co-teaching. Leaders must facilitate activities, such as collaborative instructional planning, to foster effective teacher collaboration in the co-taught setting. Causton-Theoharis et al. (2011) studied an inclusive practices plan and indicated that school leaders could benefit from developing structures with shared planning times. Such structures could help meet the requirements of co-teaching provided by Gately and Gately

(2001): "the collaboration between regular and special education teachers for all of the teaching responsibilities of all students assigned to a classroom" (p. 41). Gately and Gately further described co-teaching as both teachers working together by sharing the planning, presentation, evaluation, and classroom management tasks to develop differentiated curriculum to meet a diverse student population's needs.

Co-teachers must have some semblance of a positive working relationship to foster trust and collaboration. The study indicated some of the logistical scheduling challenges that can obstruct the partnership needed to implement co-teaching effectively, including interpersonal communication skills, administrative support, curriculum expertise, collaborative planning, a shared philosophy on classroom instruction and management, and the identification of the roles and responsibilities between co-teachers (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008). Teachers who lack classroom management strategy planning, common expectations, and goals could struggle to become successful partners (Miller & Oh, 2013; Pugach & Winn, 2011). Planning contributes to growth in the co-teacher partnership and the implementation of co-teaching.

Collaboration is a critical part of co-teaching, allowing special and general education teachers to strengthen their relationships as they share the responsibility for their students' educational experiences. students with disabilities experience marginalization; however, so do the special education teachers who serve them. The isolation of special education teachers is an experience contrary to the concept of inclusion (Morgan, 2016). Such isolation often occurs due to the teachers' lack of instructional implementation involvement, which can cause others not to perceive them as members of the classroom.

Collaboration within co-teaching teams requires more than the time and space to plan; co-teaching teams are relationships that require mutual respect. Klingner and Vaughn (2002)

indicated that "co-teaching and co-planning necessitate (a) communicating frequently and effectively with another professional, (b) sharing power and control over assessment and instructional decisions, and (c) being flexible" (p. 29). A culture of healthy communication does not include the exclusion of special education teachers. Morgan (2016) noted that school leaders must create welcoming and trusting environments for all stakeholders. Employing inclusive practices of co-teaching and collaboration adds value to a school. Mutual trust is a crucial component of co-teaching and collaboration.

Keefe and Moore (2004) noted the concept of mutual trust and discussed how the relationships between co-teachers are the most vital factors in teachers' perceptions of co-teaching. Negative or positive perceptions indicate the extent of co-teaching relationships. Keefe and Moore also discussed school leaders' need to be intentional when pairing teachers. School leaders could benefit from gaining insight into teachers' perceptions of co-teaching before finalizing partnerships. School leaders must ground the constant work of a school to create facilities with welcoming and trusting environments for all stakeholders. Trust contributes to the growth of collaboration and is a variable important for effective co-teaching (Morgan, 2016; Shamberger et al., 2014). Trust enables successful co-teaching relationships, as co-teachers can learn from each other to develop enriching learning environments. However, a lack of professional development to support effective co-teaching can be a barrier (Miller & Oh, 2013).

A successful inclusive education initiative should include adequate teacher training (Drame & Kamphoff, 2014). Intentional and constant professional development are essential components in sustaining co-teaching in schools. Both general and special education co-teachers could benefit from training on effective co-teaching practices to foster inclusion and provide students with appropriate educational experiences (Shady et al., 2013). Friend et al. (2010) noted

the need for high-quality professional development in co-teaching. However, professional

development should not occur in isolation; instead, it should complement coaching and other

supports. Friend et al. further mentioned that principals and other building-level leaders must

arrange and support structures to promote effective co-teaching while engaging in professional

development to increase their understanding of the practice. Bolman and Deal (2008) introduced

the structural frame concept, which focuses on employees' formal roles and duties. Using the

structural frame could require restructuring to address organizational challenges. However,

before restructuring, leaders should understand the roles of teachers in co-taught classrooms.

Principals and leaders should also learn about approaches supporting co-teaching, such as the

universal design for learning (UDL).

UDL

Universal Design for Learning is a model that focuses on addressing teaching, learning,

assessments, and curriculum to improve access for all students (Cook & Rao, 2018; Pisha &

Coyne, 2001). Teachers can use the UDL to develop lesson plans with supports reflective of all

students' needs (Cook & Rao, 2018). Universal Design for Learning's focus on meeting all

students' learning needs aligns with the holistic definition of inclusion by Friend and Pope

(2005). The UDL is a model applicable to all students, as reflected in its three principles:

multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement (Cook & Rao, 2018;

Lynne & Nathan, 2019). The Universal Design for Learning's principles enable teachers to

identify obstacles to learning, purposefully address those obstacles, and observe student progress

(Jiménez et al., 2007).

Approaches such as Universal Design for Learning are means of improving the

educational opportunities of all students, including students with disabilities, and providing

meaningful access to the curriculum. In addition to curricular implications, the UDL is applicable for teaching, learning, and assessment (Pisha & Coyne, 2001). Instead of adjusting instruction for specific groups, educators can use the UDL to design instruction for all learners (Cook & Rao, 2018). The notion of the inability to meet the needs of specific students due to curriculum expectations, instead of increasing support to meet those expectations, can impact least restrictive environment decisions (Frattura & Capper, 2006). As a personalized plan, an individualized education program focuses on the specific needs of a student. Morningstar et al. (2017) noted that "IEP teams are required to plan for special education services, as well as determine the setting in which services are to be delivered" (p. 4). Cook and Rao (2018) indicated that educators could use their professional judgment to adopt effective practices within the broad nature of the Universal Design for Learning framework for their students. Cook and Rao further asserted that "teachers can identify how the student's disability impacts them in their particular content area, identify potential barriers, and use Universal Design for Learning to proactively design their curriculum and instruction to meet the individual student's needs" (p. 183). Universal Design for Learning provides an outline for developing instructional methods, goals, materials, and assessments and enables educators to tailor materials to individual needs (Saffar, 2019). Structures for instructional practices, such as Universal Design for Learning, that contribute to the provision of free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment provide support for implementing inclusive practices for students with disabilities.

Social Justice

Inclusive school reform has enabled students with disabilities to receive instruction in the same setting as their nondisabled peers (Theoharis & Causton, 2014). Esposito (2015) noted improvement in the equity agendas, participation, and academic achievement of various

marginalized groups, including students with disabilities. However, there is still a need for substantial work. Incidences of inequity remain despite advancements, as students with disabilities continue to receive subpar instruction and inadequate resources (Wang, 2017).

The global drive for inclusion is a relatively new focus in educational institutions. Coupled with this focus is the newfound attention to the leadership practices needed to drive and support inclusive practices. A school leader's attitude, knowledge, and consideration affect how school community members perceive the support that students with disabilities need to receive for equitable education experiences. Achieving success requires leaders to provide students with disabilities with instructional structure, support, and equitable experiences within inclusive environments (Garner & Forbes, 2013).

School systems have shown gains in least restrictive environment data with increasing numbers of students with disabilities served in the general education population. Morgan (2016) indicated increased inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting since the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. McLeskey et al. (2012) noted substantial increases in the least restrictive environment rates of students with disabilities. Increases in least restrictive environment percentages have occurred for students with disabilities except for those requiring significant supports (Cramer, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2017). There is a need to recognize the issues of access for students with disabilities in the same settings as their nondisabled peers from a social justice perspective. However, access does not provide equity if the instructional implementation does not meet students with disabilities' needs. Students with disabilities access to general education settings with their nondisabled peers is not a guarantee of receiving the same instructional opportunities (DeMatthews, 2014; Pazey & Cole, 2013). Cases such as *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017) included outcomes in the general

education setting. Such cases suggest the need to attend to students with disabilities instruction and services in the general education setting and not just access the same physical setting as their nondisabled peers (Weiss & Glaser, 2019). High-quality instruction and professional development focused on shifting classroom teaching practices are tenets of the instructional qualities of inclusive schools (Hoppey et al., 2018). According to the social justice lens, the values of inclusivity, relevance, and democracy are means of developing, planning, and evaluating how schools provide quality learning (Hartwig, 2013).

Social Justice Leadership

Leadership for inclusion is the larger framework of social justice leadership; however, it remains questionable whether students with disabilities are an area of focus in preparing school leaders (Lyons, 2016). Definitions of inclusion often connect to the values of equity and social justice (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013). Despite increasing social justice research, there is minimal literature on the connection between social justice leadership and inclusive schooling (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008). Social justice leadership researchers have broadly focused on a range of injustices and how principals attend to various issues, such as inclusion (DeMatthews, 2018).

The aim of inclusive schooling is to eradicate marginalization; thus, inclusion focuses on social justice (Pazey & Cole, 2013). Inclusion is a way to increase the number of students participating in general education classrooms and extracurricular activities. However, inclusion presents various challenges to school administrators (Oh et al., 2017). Increasing numbers of students with disabilities in the same settings as their nondisabled peers suggests the need for professional development for both special and general education teachers. However, these teachers lack preparation for effective collaboration to meet the needs of students with

disabilities in inclusive settings (Hoppey, 2016). Despite the challenges, socially just leaders address and propose solutions to the obstacles producing and reproducing inequalities (Furman, 2012).

Within a socially just framework, students with disabilities receive equitable educational opportunities beyond physical placement in the same setting as their nondisabled peers; they also receive quality opportunities in that setting (Spence & Peña, 2015). Social justice could address the equity and inclusion challenges faced by students with disabilities that are civil rights issues. DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) stated, "Equitable and inclusive education for all students becomes a core element of social justice leadership because the pervasive system of segregation has established such unequal outcomes for marginalized groups" (p. 846). A school leader can become an activist to make right the wrongs of an oppressed group. Socially just leaders must have radical, activist mindsets to address inequality (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). A socially just leader recognizes inequalities in a school or school system and implements measures to address and eradicate the issues. Socially just administrators must focus on special education (DeMatthews, 2015). Implementing social justice leadership principles to address inequality cannot occur in isolation. Leaders must fuse their instructional knowledge with social justice principles and utilize their resources in the best way possible to address the inequalities that students with disabilities face compared to their nondisabled peers (DeMatthews, 2015). Leaders must know their roles and responsibilities in fostering equity before they consider combining their knowledge and principles. Additionally, leaders must recognize that they should be advocates for marginalized groups of students. Socially just leaders focus on tearing down pre-established social constructs that provide a free experience for some and oppression for others (Jean-Marie et al., 2009); in this case, the others are students with disabilities.

Social justice leadership is a beneficial way to promote inclusion. Social justice is the foundation for inclusion and a way to challenge the beliefs and practices that contribute to a particular group's marginalization (Obiakor et al., 2012). Social justice leadership requires administrators to address obstacles to the development and evolution of marginalized groups.

Social justice leadership requires leaders to view disability through the lens of the social model of disability. With this perspective, socially just leaders do not view the experience of the disability as merely the result of the attributes of the disability; instead, they look at the existing bureaucratic policies and structures that present inequitable views of students with disabilities (Berryman et al., 2015). The social model of disability suggests that members of the education community, whether teachers or leaders, must examine the attributes of disabilities and their impact on the participation of students with disabilities in instruction. Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) defined inclusive education "as providing each student the right to an authentic sense of belonging to a school classroom community where difference is expected and valued" (p. 649). Professionals must address the barriers and work to eliminate them (Berryman et al., 2015). A socially just leader must consider the rights of the disenfranchised while working to eradicate the obstacles to their success. Socially just leaders exhibit the expected behaviors of those they lead. Thus, socially just principals must exhibit expected behaviors as they implement inclusive practices at their schools. In an exploration of principals, their attitudes toward inclusion, and their effects on individualized education program placement decisions, Praisner (2003) found that the principals who felt positively about inclusion were more supportive of serving students with disabilities in general education settings.

Teachers often lack preparation to implement inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Similarly, leaders receive little preparation for social justice competency. Miller and

Martin (2015) noted ongoing conversations in the field of education that indicate the lack of

social justice preparation in the professional development opportunities provided by school

districts. Leaders are expected to apply social justice principles to support students and

instruction; therefore, there is a critical need for social justice preparation.

Characteristics of Social Justice Leadership

Social justice in education focuses on the experiences of marginalized groups, including

inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes (Furman, 2012). Furman (2012) stated that

addressing inequalities requires socially just leaders who are "action-oriented and transformative,

committed and persistent, inclusive and democratic, relational and caring, reflective, and

oriented toward a socially just pedagogy" (p. 195). The leaders who display socially just

characteristics can support or address three constructs that uphold social justice: distributive,

cultural, and associational justice (Flood, 2019; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002). Flood (2019) described

the constructs:

> Distributive justice refers to the distribution of economic, cultural, and social resources
>
> among groups. Cultural justice is concerned with themes of recognition, nonrecognition,
>
> and domination between groups. Associational justice deals with the recognition and
>
> engagement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes. (p. 310)

Action-oriented and transformative behaviors and values align with distributive justice

when leaders address inequity with equitable distribution of resources among marginalized

populations. Action-oriented and transformative behaviors and values can also align with cultural

justice. School leaders exploring the recognition and nonrecognition and the issues of

domination between groups should initially increase their critical consciousness of the

oppression, exclusion, and marginalization of those groups (Normore, 2006). Increased critical

awareness requires school leaders to engage in purposeful activities that enable self-reflection and enhance awareness and growth. Leaders focused on a socially just pedagogy should encourage and promote their staff members to self-reflect to provide equitable educational opportunities for all student populations (Furman, 2012).

Inclusive, democratic, relational, and caring leaders connect with the construct of associational justice. Associational justice indicates that leaders must work with parents and community members to promote and develop more inclusive practices (Furman, 2012). The three constructs that uphold social justice require commitment and persistence. Socially just leaders courageously identify and fight against workplace barriers that obstruct social justice and contribute to the marginalization of specific populations (Normore, 2006). Social justice leadership is an unconventional approach and a fusion of dispositions, values, and practices reactive and thoughtful of the diverse elements of social justice within specific circumstances (DeMatthews et al., 2016).

There is much discussion on the meaning of social justice theory. However, some educational scholars ascribe to a commitment to social justice and suggest that schools contribute to equitable opportunities (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). Equity is a valuable component at the forefront of special education implementation and planning. The routes to equity do not have to appear the same in the implementation of individualized education needs (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Socially just leaders push to guarantee greater access and champion what students with disabilities require legally and morally to meet their needs. The reality of education is that many expect students with disabilities to meet the same standards as their general education peers. Such a situation includes an inherent issue fostered by special education policies and legal statutes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's least restrictive environment

and free and appropriate public education components have the twofold goal of guaranteeing students with disabilities access to specialized services and specially designed instruction in the least restrictive educational setting to the maximum extent possible (Connor & Ferri, 2007). Purposeful planning and support for students with disabilities' inclusive practices are necessary to meet the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act's clauses and address inherent problems. Wang (2018) stated, "In schools where social exclusion deprives people of their right to fully participate in school and community practices and activities, inclusion becomes the core concept of the social justice agenda" (p. 473). Inclusion provides a platform for students with disabilities to fully participate in all activities in the same setting as their nondisabled peers. Inclusion requires a socially just leader to drive such an agenda.

When leaders believe they have the moral responsibility to address the exclusion of historically alienated groups, they tend to utilize the social justice framework (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). Administrators use social justice leadership to address marginalized groups' issues, such as race, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. An aspect of social justice leadership for students with disabilities is promoting inclusive practices for students with disabilities (Theoharis, 2007). Socially just leaders participate in democratic, inclusive, and transformative methods to alter social constructs. Leaders employing the social justice leadership frame strive to influence all stakeholders to encourage justice and equity in schools (Wang, 2018). Theoharis (2007) described the connection between inclusion and social justice, noting that members of a socially just school do not allow the separation of students with disabilities from their nondisabled peers or separate curriculum and instruction for students with disabilities.

Summary

Rooted in the fight for equity during the civil rights movement, the field of special education has undergone steady growth. Cases, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), focused on the 14th Amendment and provided the opportunity to address issues of equity for students with disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Rotatori et al., 2011). The fight for equity resulted in the free and appropriate public education statute, individualized education programs to support students with disabilities (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. IDEA's least restrictive environment clause required students with disabilities placement into the general education setting to meet their needs to the highest possible degree. However, students with disabilities placement into the same setting as nondisabled peers is not a guarantee of inclusion. DeMatthews (2014) stated, "Students with disabilities are truly included when they have equitable access to curriculum, resources, opportunities, and can meaningfully benefit from those opportunities" (pp. 111-112). Special and general education teachers must collaborate to provide meaningful educational opportunities to students with disabilities.

Other approaches, such as Universal Design for Learning, focus on the instructional components that provide access for all students (Cook & Rao, 2018; Pisha & Coyne, 2001). The implementation of co-teaching and Universal Design for Learning and any other inclusion practices require leadership support (Theoharis & Causton, 2014). Inclusion and equity are the focus of social justice leadership (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Within the structure of social justice leadership, students with disabilities experience placement into the general education setting and receive meaningful educational opportunities (Spence & Peña, 2015). A socially just leader addresses the inequalities faced by students with disabilities and challenges

the beliefs that contribute to the oppression of marginalized populations (DeMatthews, 2015; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). The literature shows the connection between inclusion and social justice. However, there is a need to explore the display or non-display of social justice leadership characteristics and their impact on the implementation of inclusive practices initiatives that address the needs of specific marginalized groups, such as students with disabilities.

Both the special education law and inclusion sections have a theme of equity, as they focus on a specific marginalized population. The shared theme of equity is an issue relevant to the theoretical framework of social justice leadership, underscoring the literature on the theoretical framework of social justice leadership. Social justice leadership contributed to this study by providing a framework with a focus on equity. The underlying issues of this study were the equity issues faced by students with disabilities. The theoretical framework of social justice leadership was the selected lens to address equity issues in this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative instrumental single case study was the design used to explore a principal's behaviors and a teacher's perceptions of implementing a district-wide initiative. The initiative focused on equitable instructional practices for students with disabilities and the implementation of a co-teaching service model. The teacher's perspectives were a conduit for further exploration of the district initiative's impact and the means used to filter the principal's perceptions.

The following research questions addressed the principal's display of social justice leadership:

1. How does the principal describe his behaviors in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

2. How does the teacher describe the principal's display of leadership in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

The purpose of this single instrumental case study was to explore the behaviors of a principal and the perceptions of a teacher in the implementation of an initiative for students with disabilities at a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. This study focused on the principal's behaviors in implementing a district initiative of equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities. In alignment with the qualitative research method, this case study had a guiding theoretical framework that provided structure for the concepts, terms, definitions, and theories of the literature related to the selected framework (Anfara & Mertz, 2014). The theoretical framework of social justice leadership provided a foundation for studying how a principal and a teacher attributed meaning to the problems of equity for students

with disabilities in the context of the implementation of a 5-year district initiative. Data collected for this study were from a review of documents and individual interviews. Interviews supported the document analysis. In addition to interviews, the following documents underwent analysis: district leadership training manual for co-teaching, teacher manuals for co-teaching, the specially designed instruction manual, and a document titled Big Picture/Segment Sheet. The Big Picture/Segment Sheet was a document utilized by school district and school leaders for scheduling and verifying staff allotments. Following Saldaña's (2016) model, open coding, pattern coding, and codeweaving commenced to develop themes.

Research Design

A case study is an investigation of a bounded issue that has a definitive start and end for the selected case (Yin, 2018). The purpose of a case study is to explore real cases in real conditions (Stake, 2006). In this study, the case explored was the implementation of a district initiative with a five-year timeframe. A case study is a thorough description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit or a mixture of both that provides an in-depth description of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). Creswell et al. (2007) stated that a case study entails collecting data from multiple sources and producing a descriptive report and case-based themes. Yin (2018) argued that the ability to manage a range of evidence is a strength of case study research. Merriam (1985) indicated that scholars could obtain case study data via three standard approaches: observation, interviews, and documents. In this study, data collection occurred through interviews and documents. Data analysis enables the development of themes, patterns, and issues (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In this study, the data obtained from these approaches were the means used to develop thick descriptions, in-depth accounts of participants and setting for a thorough understanding and analysis (Merriam, 1985). Due to the multiple data sources, a

case study researcher treats the case's context and uniqueness with importance to build an in-depth understanding (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). This study provided thick descriptions of the participants' data to produce an in-depth understanding of a principal's behaviors in implementing a district initiative for equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities. The study also entailed analyzing how the principal's behaviors related to the characteristics of the social justice leadership framework.

According to Stake (1995), the individual case's uniqueness and context are essential for understanding a particular issue. This study focused on a principal's behaviors in implementing a specific initiative in one school district to address the issues of equity faced by students with disabilities. In a single instrumental case study, a researcher determines a particular issue or concern as an area of focus and selects a unique case to explain the issue (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). The instrumental design was an appropriate approach for this study, as it was not an exploration of a specific initiative; instead, it focused on the impact of the application or non-application of social justice leadership on implementing a district initiative at one site within a school district.

The instrumental case study design was the means used to gain insight into a principal's display or non-display of social justice leadership characteristics in implementing an initiative for students with disabilities. The district's initiative was not the focus of this study; rather, the focus was a principal's perceptions of his behaviors and a teacher's perspectives of the principal's behaviors in implementing the district initiative. This study provided insight into the principal's application or non-application of social justice leadership characteristics. Multiple data sources, including interviews and a document review, enabled exploring the study's topic through various lenses. Although the district initiative was not the focus, documents related to

the district's inclusive practices initiative underwent review and analysis; these were the administrator's inclusive practices training manual, the teacher's training manual, the presentation for specially designed instruction training, and the Big Picture/Segment Sheet. The training manuals indicated the expectations for the principal's role in the inclusive practices initiative implementation. The Big Picture/Segment Sheet provided evidence of the initiative's components and enabled exploration into the participant-described behaviors. The initiative was another instrument used to explore the principal's application or non-application of the characteristics of social justice leadership.

Sample

The sample for this study was a purposefully selected school in a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. The site participants were the principal and a special education teacher. The purposeful sampling method requires the rationale for and a description of a case's boundaries (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Purposeful sampling is a means to choose a small set of distinct cases or individuals to obtain a detailed understanding of the program, people, situations, or cases under study (Yilmaz, 2013). The district selected for this study's sample had participated in and developed a program directly connected to the phenomenon under study, thus representing a site that aligned with the research questions. The school site had a high number of students with disabilities who received services in the general education setting for a considerable percentage of the day. Educators worked in an environment of co-teaching; therefore, exploration commenced of the principal's behaviors in implementing the district-wide initiative for students with disabilities with a focus on co-teaching. Exploring the principal's and teacher's descriptions of the principal's behaviors enabled investigation into how those behaviors aligned with the characteristics of the social justice leadership framework. The selected site and

participants participated in and were responsible for the implementation of the district's

initiative. The site and participants directly related to the purpose of the study and research

questions, as the participants had engaged in the training and implementation of the district-wide

initiative of equitable instructional practices for students with disabilities, focusing on the

implementation of the co-teaching service model.

Site Selection

The site selected for this study was a large urban school district in the Southeastern

United States. The school was in an "urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population

of 250,000 or more" (Geverdt, 2015, p. 2). The school district provided services for roughly

52,000 students across 87 schools. Schools in the district were in clusters with varied student

demographics. The state-reported least restrictive environment data facilitated selecting a school

with a high percentage of students with disabilities served in the general education setting.

The least restrictive environment clause requires that the individualized education

program team members consider the general education setting when determining where students

with disabilities will receive their educational services. The individualized education program

team members should consider an environment outside of the general education setting only

when they have exhausted all services, aids, and supports. The United States Department of

Education requires state leaders to collect least restrictive environment data with the percentages

of students with disabilities having access to the general education setting (Morningstar et al.,

2017). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that state education agencies

provide the numbers of students with disabilities by categories and the environments where they

receive services, including the percentage of time the students with disabilities spend inside the

general education classroom (Williamson et al., 2020). This information indicated schools with

high percentages of students with disabilities served in the general education setting. Higher least restrictive environment percentages in the general education setting correlated with the increased likelihood of students with disabilities served in the co-taught setting. The co-taught service model was an area of focus of the inclusive practices initiative that occurred in the study's district. The state least restrictive environment data was not used to predict or control any aspect of the inclusive practices initiative. However, in this study, the least restrictive environment data was appropriate to select a site with high numbers of co-teaching segments to explore a principal's behaviors in the inclusive practices initiative implementation that aligned with the constructs of social justice leadership.

After receiving permission to conduct the study from the Georgia State University (GSU) institutional review board (IRB), I sought and obtained the district's least restrictive environment data. Data organization occurred by the lowest to highest least restrictive environment percentages for students with disabilities receiving services in the special education setting for 80% or more of the school day. This criterion enabled the selection of a site with a high co-teaching environment. The next step consisted of excluding sites related to my work history to minimize the possibility of bias due to personal contacts. This phase was the means used to reduce the potential for personal bias, as I had insider status at some of the potential sites for the study. I then selected a range of sites that fell above the state's least restrictive environment target of 65% for the criterion equal to or more than 80% of the school day. Table 1 is an excerpt of the site selection least restrictive environment criteria.

Table 1

Site Selection – Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

School	General education at least 80%	General education less than 40%
School 1	97.06%	0.00%
School 2	**92.31%**	**0.00%**
School 3	70.70%	13.28%
School 4	69.77%	6.98%
School 5	69.71%	12.03%
School 6	69.44%	25.00%
School 7	68.57%	0.00%
School 8	68.18%	0.00%

Note. This table is an excerpt of the site selection least restrictive environment criteria. The table shows sites from the sample district of study above the state target of 65% of children with individualized education programs aged 6 through 21 who were inside the regular class for 80% or more of the school day. The table shows the site selected in bold type.

Following site determination was the next phase of participant selection. The participant selection process also had an impact on site selection.

Participant Selection

Participant selection was done through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a common way to select participants in qualitative research. The intent is to select a small number of distinctive cases or individuals to gain in-depth insight into the programs, people, situations, or cases under study (Yilmaz, 2013).

Using the list of schools with the qualities required by the site selection criteria, a search commenced for the principals' names from their schools' websites. Crosschecks of the principals' names occurred with the inclusive practices initiative administrator's training attendance log. After verifying attendance, I used a spreadsheet to record the principals' names

and then reviewed the attendance roster for the inclusive practices initiative teacher training sessions. I highlighted all the teachers from the potential schools and crosschecked their names on the schools' websites to explore if they were current staff members. The websites provided the e-mail addresses used for recruitment communication. Participant selection began following receipt of GSU and the site's governing agency's IRB. Recruitment and the first phase of data collection commenced and contact with the selected principal and teacher occurred via GSU e-mail. The development of the informed consent document (see Appendix A) occurred using the GSU-provided model. The informed consent process receives further discussion later in this chapter.

The initial intent was to select nine participants in triads at three sites, including a principal, special education teacher, and general education teacher from each of the three schools. However, the recruitment and follow-up e-mails did not receive many responses. The COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in the closure of the district's schools; however, school leaders had implemented school reopening plans at the time of the recruitment e-mails. One principal responded but could not participate due to the demands of reopening the school; most of the inquiries were unacknowledged. As indicated in Chapter 1, the study's district showed increased students with disabilities participation in the general education setting. However, there was still room for growth in the area of high least restrictive environment across the district; therefore, further limiting the number of sites that would have provided more of an opportunity to explore the initiative's implementation.

The selection and recruitment process resulted in two participants (a principal and a special education teacher) from one site. A review of the district professional development reports followed to identify which principals in the site selection pool had been at that location

for three to five years within the timeframe of the initiative to ensure engagement in the district

initiative. The first two years of the inclusive practices initiative implementation included

numerous training opportunities to build capacity within the schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected for this study were from individual interviews and a review of documents.

Two individual semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) occurred with the participants. The

principal and a special education co-teacher from the site received invitations to participate in the

study. Responsible for ensuring the implementation of the district's inclusive practices initiative

for students with disabilities, the principal had to foster the needed structures and oversee the

inclusive practices initiative procedures. The interview with the principal provided insight into

his perspective on the behaviors he displayed during the inclusive practices initiative

implementation.

The selected special education teacher served as a co-teacher during the inclusive

practices initiative implementation and had participated in inclusive practices initiative teacher

training sessions providing knowledge of the inclusive practices initiative components. Her

knowledge of the initiative provided a lens to assess how her principal supported the

implementation regarding the study's second research question. The teacher shared instructional

implementation responsibility in a class where students with disabilities received education

alongside their nondisabled peers. The inclusive practices initiative focused on collaborative

planning for and the implementation of co-teaching. The teacher's responses provided additional

perspectives of the principal's behaviors in the inclusive practices initiative implementation.

The documents reviewed included professional development materials related to the

district's inclusive practices initiative. The documents included the administrator training

manual; teacher training manual; specially designed instruction training manual; and the Big Picture/Segment Sheet, a form used for allotment and staffing planning. The Big Picture/Segment Sheet included sections for each special education teacher's schedules of services throughout the day, students served in each class, and settings where the service provision occurred. The document also showed the teachers' lunch and planning schedules. The teacher sections in the form comprised a master schedule, or big picture, of each teacher's special education services for the school year of the initial school closures at the start of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The association of inclusion with social justice leadership starts with a school leader's awareness of the issues facing a particular marginalized population (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014*)*. In this study, the district initiative focused on the equitable instructional opportunities provided to students with disabilities in the co-taught setting. The problems that may occur during the co-taught services model implementation include lack of teacher training, insufficient planning time, and inappropriate curriculum modifications with poorly adapted teaching material and instructional strategies (Strogilos et al., 2015). Socially just leaders must identify or learn about the barriers to equity faced by members of marginalized groups and focus on addressing those barriers. DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) indicated that addressing barriers requires school leaders to provide time for collaborative planning, allocate resources, and facilitate professional development for special education and general education teachers to enhance their instructional delivery.

After the interviews, each participant received a follow-up e-mail with a transcript for member checking and requested site-based documents. The expectation was that the lesson plans and professional development documents might have included intentional considerations for

students with disabilities. I believed that if I plotted these documents within the five-year timeframe of the initiative, I could determine patterns in the substance and frequency of such language. This review provided another avenue for exploring how the work in this school aligned with the constructs of social justice leadership. The purpose of the participant interviews was to explore the principal's display of social justice leadership in the inclusive practices initiative implementation for equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities.

Informed Consent

A researcher must obtain permission from university and research site IRBs before researching human participants (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The protection of human subjects is a critical component of case studies, as most address human experiences (Yin, 2018). A researcher must make participants aware of the study and officially request their willing participation, as indicated by their informed consent (Yin, 2018). Following the GSU model, I developed an informed consent document (see Appendix A) and provided it to the participants to sign. The participants provided their signed informed consent documents before the interviews commenced. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Human Research Protections, and the Food and Drug Administration, obtaining electronic signatures is acceptable. Therefore, the participants in this study electronically signed consent forms for video interviews in alignment with GSU and the applicable government or public health authorities.

The informed consent forms indicated that participant and school site names would remain anonymous. As suggested by the American Psychological Association (2021), the narrative descriptions included participant pseudonyms and limited descriptions of the school site, district, and participant characteristics. I used a table to keep track of the participants'

pseudonyms. A password protected cloud-based folder was the storage site for this table and other identifying information, such as audio recordings and the interview transcriptions.

Data Collection

Interviews. Case study researchers conduct interviews in alignment with the two principles of the case study: (a) obtain descriptions and (b) obtain the interpretations of others. Interviews are a way to capture multiple perspectives that researchers cannot observe and elicit thick descriptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Stake, 1995). I conducted semi-structured interviews with a special education teacher and a principal from one school. After submitting their informed consent forms, the participants received e-mails to schedule interviews at their convenience. All interview times were outside of the school district's business hours to avoid interrupting instructional time; this was a consideration in alignment with the district's IRB stipulations. Additionally, the participants could suggest alternate dates and times if the provided ones were insufficient. After the participants selected the dates and times for their interviews, they received an electronic calendar invitation from my GSU e-mail with a secure, password-protected virtual meeting link.

I adapted the interview questions for the principal from a study by Rivera-McCutchen (2014). The semi-structured protocol provided the opportunity to ask follow-up questions as needed. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) included questions on the principal's behaviors during the inclusive practices initiative implementation. There were five questions adapted from a broad overview of social justice and specific questions on promoting equity for students with disabilities. The purpose of the questions was to focus the principal on students with disabilities and avoid broad responses connected to plans or initiatives for other marginalized populations.

Unlike the Rivera-McCutchen protocol, the questions did not incorporate social justice leadership to avoid guiding the participants' responses.

The teacher's interview protocol included questions on her perceptions of the principal's promotion of equity for students with disabilities. The additional questions addressed specific aspects of the inclusive practices initiative implementation included in this study's design. The interviews allowed me to explore the possible display of social justice leadership if the participant had not yet mentioned it in response to Questions 1 through 5. Additionally, the semi-structured protocol provided a format for asking follow-up questions as needed.

All interviews occurred on a virtual platform. Virtual video interviews instead of face-to-face interviews occurred in alignment with guidance from GSU, the district of study's safety protocols, and the applicable government or public health authorities. A password-protected virtual interview platform was the means used to ensure privacy. In addition, locked interviews prevented non-invited people from entering. I used two devices to digitally record both interviews, with the files stored in an assigned folder in a password-protected electronic folder. An external company transcribed the audio recordings, with the transcripts subsequently stored in a folder labeled by the participants' pseudonyms in a password-protected electronic drive.

The participants received follow-up e-mails with copies of the interview transcripts for member checking and requests for site-based documents. Neither participant had questions nor requested changes to the transcripts. Member checking occurs after the interviews to avoid influencing participant responses or introducing personal bias into the transcriptions. The thank-you e-mails contained requests for lesson plans and site-based professional development materials. There was only one response to the e-mails where one of the participants noted that they could not fulfill the request at this time.

Document Review. Qualitative researchers can use organizational documents for essential data (Bowen, 2009). Document reviews are a valuable data collection method in a case study, as they can verify facts, such as names, details, and references. Document reviews can cover a broad perspective and provide the opportunity to make inferences (Yin, 2018). Reviewing pertinent documents can utilize information stored within those documents to extract themes and messages (Hall, 1999). The first step is the selection of documents that are relevant to the phenomenon explored, that provides the researcher with "stable" pieces of objective data (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). In this study, the documents collected, reviewed, and analyzed include the administrator inclusive practices training manual, teacher training manual, the specially designed instruction training presentation, and the Big Picture/Segment Sheet. Documents provide proof of activities that a researcher cannot observe directly (Stake, 1995). I reviewed the documents to compare the principal's and the teacher's perspectives of the principal's inclusive practices initiative implementation behaviors. Reviewing and analyzing documents can provide insight on the development of the documents and how they function and possibly connect to other documents (Flick, 2014). The contents of the documents served as a road map of the expectations of the principal's role in the exploration of the behaviors displayed by the principal in the implementation of the district initiative geared toward supporting students with disabilities. It was used to compare the insights shared by the principal and teacher on their perspective on the principal's behaviors displayed in the implementation of the district's initiative. The Big Picture/Segment Sheet document was used to confirm the perspectives on that focused on scheduling and staffing shared by participants. The Big Picture/Segment Sheet along with the various initiative training manuals reviewed and analyzed provided a multifaceted approach to process interrelated information from various sources (Wood et al., 2020).

Documents were utilized to offer strong evidence that was to confirm or contradict the

perspectives shared in the interviews. Additionally, they provided information that expanded the

exploration of principal's actions in the implementation of the district initiative beyond the

perceptions obtained from the interviews (Wood et al., 2020). The selected documents provided

evidence of inclusive practices initiative implementation and were the means used to confirm the

participants' interview responses. The documents were tangible displays of the characteristics of

social justice leadership in supporting students with disabilities. DeMatthews (2015) indicated

that socially-just administrators should focus on special education. A significant aspect of social

justice leadership for students with disabilities is the promotion of inclusive practices to ensure

that students with disabilities do not receive estranged curricula and instruction (Theoharis,

2007). The existence or nonexistence of the aforementioned documents showed the principal's

focus or lack of focus on instructional practices for students with disabilities. Appropriate

instructional practices are an equity issue faced by students with disabilities.

Data Analysis

First Cycle. The data analysis commenced after conducting the interviews and collecting

the documents. NVivo 12 was the software used to create a new project file and upload the

transcripts and documents. During the upload process, each document received a label to foster

organization, as follows: DOS CoTeachingAdministrators, Teacher DOSCoTeaching, and

Inclusive Practices & SDI. To protect anonymity, DOS indicated district of study within this

report. The creation of a backup occurred each time that there was utilization of the program.

Coding of the interview transcripts followed.

Open coding, the first coding cycle, occurred after an interview transcription and member

checking. This first cycle coding consisted of two parts, a process appropriate for qualitative

studies (Saldaña, 2016). I conducted the first part of coding after an initial review to familiarize

myself with the transcripts. In a line-by-line review of the transcripts, I proceeded with open

coding where I highlighted significant words or phrases and developed codes connected to those

words and phrases. Subcodes indicated the words that denoted the specific object or

characteristic referenced by the main code. In this first cycle, NVivo 12 software was useful to

highlight words and phrases, and the "quick code" option enabled the creation of codes for words

and phrases.

After familiarizing myself with the documents with an initial review, I coded the material

using the same initial and second coding cycles as the transcripts. The reviewed documents

included the administrator inclusive practices training manual, the teacher training manual, and

the presentation for specially designed instruction training. In this initial cycle, I reviewed the

documents, highlighting significant words or phrases to develop codes and possible subcodes

connected to the highlighted words or phrases. The intention was to develop memos for

documents before implementing the coding cycles. This was a plan in preparation for site-based

documents, such as lesson plans, site-based trainings, and any other artifacts that required

descriptions; however, the participants did not provide these documents as requested. The only

document that required a memo for explanation and coding was the Big Picture/Segment Sheet;

the others were training manuals for different phases of the inclusive practices initiative. The

documents provided rich text that underwent the same coding as the interview transcriptions. In

alignment with Saldaña's (2016) model, the second cycle of pattern coding entailed grouping the

codes and subcodes developed in the first cycle by observed pattern.

Second Cycle. Pattern coding, the second cycle of coding, consisted of grouping the

codes developed from the interviews and documents in the first cycle. Each group underwent

review to develop a code based on observed patterns of the initial codes and subcodes before developing a code for that group. The code attributed to each group was the pattern code. The transition from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 resulted in the reduction of large chunks of data.

Using the NVivo 12 platform, I developed groups using the "node" function; each group received the label of "PC" and a numerical value. The labeled "nodes" provided a structure for grouping the codes from Cycle 1. I developed additional group labels throughout multiple iterations of the grouping process to ensure a logical set of groups before assigning a pattern code label. Fourteen pattern codes emerged from the first cycle of coding. After reviewing each pattern group, I changed the name of the PC node to an assigned pattern code. I then proceeded to the final cycle.

Third Cycle. The final coding cycle followed the first two and applied to the interviews and documents. The final coding cycle entailed using the pattern codes from all transcripts as a springboard to create statements to present major themes. I prepared to utilize data for triangulation and develop the final report by implementing codeweaving (Saldaña, 2016). This process continued the reduction of data that was used to devolve the thick description throughout the findings of this report (Roberts et al., 2020). In codeweaving, I looked at the codes and subcodes, pattern codes, and primary themes, "weaving" them to develop sentences. I utilized my pattern codes as the main ideas in the sentences, with the initial codes as supporting details. The codeweaving contributed to the thick descriptions for the final report (Miles et al., 2020).

The second cycle concluded with the development of 15 pattern codes from the initial coding cycle. I then reviewed each pattern code group and developed a statement with the pattern codes and initial codes as supporting details in the description option of each code. Table 2 presents an excerpt of the coding process as an example of the three cycles of coding.

Table 2

Three-Cycle Coding Example

Cycle 1: Open code	Cycle 2: Pattern code	Cycle 3: Codeweaving
Demanding parents Funding impact on staffing Impact of COVID on funding connect to referrals Partnership problem awareness Planning dilemma IPP Staffing dilemma IPP Superficial co-teaching TS Time-consuming and resources consuming IEP meetings Weak Sp Ed teacher 1st year	Issues	Issues noted by the principal included demanding parents, funding, school culture, and instructions. Staffing and funding were discussed in the district training for administrators. The issue noted about school culture speaks to the partnership between co-teachers.
Collaborative planning options Collaborative planning with 4th grade Consider individual needs in planning Electronic planning example Electronic planning examples TS Ged Ed role Planning for SDI SDIT SDI in planning SDI IS IEP driven SDIT Shared responsibility in co-teaching TS What tends to happen in collaborative IPP	Collaboration in action	Ms. Rose provides examples of collaboration in action with her noted participation in collaborative planning with the 4th-grade team with the use of an electronic planning tool, a strategy mention in both the teacher and administrator trainings. The shared responsibility of planning is necessary to plan for the delivery of SDI.

Note. This table presents examples of the three-cycle coding by Saldaña (2016). This table shows an excerpt of two groups of open codes from Cycle 1. The second column presents the codes grouped by identified pattern and assigned a pattern code in Cycle 2. The last column includes a statement developed in Cycle 3 from weaving the pattern codes and open codes connected to a specific pattern grouping.

The pattern codes were used as a springboard to develop the themes used in the Chapter 4 findings section. The developed themes were a willingness to identify problems, a solutions-oriented approach, and an inclusive mindset.

Research Trustworthiness

The significance of a study is critical. Researchers must establish the trustworthiness of their data to prove the significance of their studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized the importance of verifying trustworthiness by establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, triangulation was the process used to develop confidence in the findings and maintain credibility. The triangulation process consists of examining multiple pieces of data to review the findings' consistency to see if they have a similar conclusion (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). The data collected in this study were from interviews and documents, including professional development documents of the district's inclusive practices initiative.

Member checking was a means of establishing the interviews' credibility. Member checking helps to ensure that personal bias did not influence the presentation of participant responses. After their interviews, the participants received a follow-up e-mail containing the interview transcript and a thank-you for their time. After each interview and in the follow-up e-mail, I stated that the purpose of providing the transcript was for review. Additionally, I highlighted that they could contact me if they had questions or needed clarification. The participants did not express any questions or concerns after the interviews or follow-up e-mails.

I established transferability by demonstrating the utility of my research for scholars to apply to further research on the implementation of a similar inclusive practices initiative or initiative for other marginalized groups. Every section of the study included thick descriptions that provided significant details of the context and research process (see Anney, 2015). I used a

matrix that showed the alignment of the analysis to the research questions, the themes, and the characteristics of social justice leadership (see Appendix C) to organize this process.

I established the dependability and consistency of my findings by having them evaluated by an external auditor. Pandey and Patnaik (2014) suggested that an auditor could be a researcher not involved in the study. The external auditor for this study was a fellow doctoral student familiar with qualitative research. I discussed the areas of focus with the auditor before providing the results. During the review, items considered included the logical structure of the findings, the connection to the research questions, and the themes' alignment to the data. After reviewing the findings, a follow-up discussion occurred with the external auditor to discuss her notations (see Appendix D).

Triangulation was a means to establish confirmability. Triangulation of the interviews and documents showed that the study's results came from more than one source, thus minimizing the risk of bias. Instead, multiple sources provided support for the findings. The following chapter presents the findings from multiple sources of data.

4. RESULTS

The study's two research questions provided a foundation to study the principal's display of social justice leadership in the implementation of an initiative for equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities:

1. How does the principal describe his behaviors in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

2. How does the teacher describe the principal's display of leadership in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

Data collected for this study were from a review of documents and individual interviews. Interviews supported the document analysis. The documents collected and analyzed were the district's leadership training manual for co-teaching, teacher manuals for co-teaching, the specially designed instruction manual, and the Big Picture/Segment Sheet. The documents provided an understanding of the expectations of the principal in the implementation of the district-wide initiative. Following Saldaña's (2016) model, open coding, pattern coding, and code weaving commenced to develop themes. Three themes emerged: a willingness to identify problems, a solutions-oriented approach, and an inclusive mindset.

The participants in this study were a principal and a special education teacher who worked at one site of a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. The participants' pseudonyms were Mr. Flowers (principal) and Ms. Rose (special education teacher). The semi-structured interview format provided a platform for Mr. Flowers and Ms. Rose to express themselves fully in answering the questions in the interview protocol (see

Appendix B). Follow-up questions occurred as needed based on the participants' responses. This chapter presents the participants' voices. The school pseudonym was Riverdale Elementary.

Background

Riverdale Elementary

Implementation of the site selection criteria resulted in the selection of Riverdale Elementary (Riverdale), located in a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. The school provided services for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. The school's state department of education had a least restrictive environment target of 65% for students with disabilities receiving services in the general education setting for 80% or more of the day, a rate 25% above the state DOE's least restrictive environment target for students with disabilities. The least restrictive environment rates indicate the number of students with disabilities receiving services in the general education setting with their nondisabled peers for at least 80% of the school day. The least restrictive environment rate contributes to the implementation of the special education service model of co-teaching. The school's mission and vision statements displayed a focus on inclusion, all students' holistic needs, and the intent to involve all stakeholders in supporting the students at the school. Mr. Flowers was Riverdale's school principal.

Mr. Flowers

Mr. Flowers responded immediately to the recruitment e-mail. His prompt response showed his eagerness and enthusiasm to participate in the study. Mr. Flowers signed the consent form and scheduled an interview. He displayed the same upbeat energy during the interview that he did in his e-mail responses in the recruitment and scheduling communication. Mr. Flowers made statements indicating that he recognized me as a district staff member; however, he did not

know my exact position. A few times in the interview, I had to acknowledge his statement while redirecting to the question initially asked.

Mr. Flowers shared that he had over 15 years of experience in education, all within the study district. He taught one of the required electives before he started his leadership track. His employment history showed that he worked in schools in different areas within the district. Mr. Flowers gained most of his teaching experience at the middle school level before his promotion to assistant principal at an elementary school. In the initial years of his leadership experience, he mentioned that he "learn[ed] about operations, instruction, management, [and] human resources." When asked about the district's inclusive practices initiative, Mr. Flowers said, "I've got to be honest. I know I did the inclusive trainings, but it's just [that] a lot has been going on, so am I in the right ballpark with what I'm talking about?" He mentioned, "One of the trainings stuck out [to] me, and I know that I've been through the inclusive practices, but [I remember] more of [the] Dr. Marilyn Friend trainings." Upon confirmation of this training, he appeared more engaged and said,

> So, I've been to Dr. Marilyn Friends' trainings twice. Once as an AP [assistant principal] and one as a principal, and honestly, I took a lot away from that. Primarily knowing what a co-taught model looks like, being able to evaluate and being able to go into a classroom and look for the different co-teaching models… there's like four or five of them. I got to pull up her sheets [training materials].

Mr. Flowers shared his work history. His descriptions of his past roles indicated that he had worked with students with disabilities throughout his tenure; however, he had not served as a certified special education teacher. He had been principal of Riverdale for the last 3 years. Ms.

Rose served as a special education teacher at Riverdale Elementary under Mr. Flowers's leadership.

Ms. Rose

At first, Ms. Rose did not respond to my recruitment attempts. However, once she responded, she displayed the same eagerness to participate as Mr. Flowers. She explained in her e-mail correspondence that she had a delayed response because of the special education tasks that required her attention due to the school reopening. She apologetically stated, "Sorry that I couldn't make last week work. We're kind of little frazzled right now." In relation to those tasks, Ms. Rose had to cancel the originally scheduled interview but continued to display her eagerness to participate. Considering her statement about the demands of reopening the school and the abrupt shifts to the interview schedule, I provided follow-up questions related to her statements for clarification and redirection to the questions.

Ms. Rose was a special education teacher at Riverdale Elementary with 5 years of teaching experience, 4 of them at Riverdale. She held bachelor's and master's degrees from one of the largest universities in the South. She indicated that she served as a co-teacher for all 5 years and had "been working for the past 4 years with the same co-teacher." She served in the co-taught setting and provided direct support to students with disabilities in the special education setting to meet students with disabilities needs outside of general education classrooms. When asked about her understanding of the district's inclusive practices initiative, Ms. Rose responded with statements that required follow-up clarification. Although the attendance logs reviewed for the participant selection process indicated that Ms. Rose attended the training, she remarked, "I'm trying to think if I can recall anything from that training."

Documents

In addition to the interviews with Mr. Flowers and Ms. Rose, the following documents underwent review for inclusion in the findings: the administrator inclusive practices initiative manual, entitled *Co-Teaching and Inclusive Schooling: Leadership Perspectives*; the teacher training manual, entitled *Co-Teaching: Classroom Partnerships for Student Success*; and the teacher specially designed instruction training manual, entitled *Specially Designed Instruction: A Willingness to Identify Problems Improving Outcomes for Students With Disabilities.* The inclusive practices initiative training presenter, Dr. Marilyn Friend, developed the manuals to present the components of the district's inclusive practices initiative. The documents provided insight into the expectations of the principal in the implementation of the district-wide initiative. Comparison of the documents to the interviews enabled me to recognize the expected behaviors and the outcomes of those behaviors in connection to the inclusive practices initiative. The Big Picture/Segment Sheet document provided proof of scheduling and staffing allotments compared to the interview responses by Mr. Flowers and Ms. Rose. The document included sections for each special education teacher, showing the daily schedule of services. Analysis of the interviews and documents indicated three themes: a willingness to identify problems, a solutions-oriented approach, and an inclusive mindset.

A Willingness to Identify Problems

Principal Perspective

A socially just leader can recognize school or school system inequalities (DeMatthews, 2015). The interview protocol included questions to explore barriers the principal faced in implementing the district initiative, the barriers the teacher faced, and the support the teacher received. The issues noted throughout resulted in the theme of a willingness to identify problems.

Mr. Flowers identified various problems with an impact on the inclusive practices initiative implementation, such as funding, time, access, instructional programming, school culture, and staffing. Some of the issues intersected. Regarding access, Mr. Flowers described the location where students with disabilities received instruction and noted that the "bulk of our students were in pull-out resource models [and] students were being served in a separate location by a special education teacher." Even for the students with disabilities receiving services in the general education setting under the co-taught model, he noted that he "would see a special education teacher either just hovering over special education students that are in the classroom, or really just having, basically, a resource class in the back of the classroom." One content-specific issue was the school's English language arts (ELA) program. He stated that Riverdale had a:

> Very rigorous ELA program that really boosted up our highest-level students. So, we went from a high percentage of proficient to distinguished, but we lost a lot of kids in the middle and lower groups. Many of them were special education students.

Mr. Flowers mentioned the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic several times during the interview. He indicated that the data before school closures showed that "[Riverdale Elementary] was on track to do really, really well with our students with disabilities." He followed by highlighting the impact of the pandemic on instruction:

> We just didn't have that [students with disabilities] data at the end of last year. So, we're kind of in that realm now, where COVID has hit, and it's very difficult to tell those gaps until we have the students that are back in the building.

In his closing remarks about the plans for co-teaching at his school, Mr. Flowers again mentioned the impact of school closures on the data. He stated, "Because just from 10 months of

virtual learning, you miss things. I mean, teachers—you don't have the best data, [but] you try and have the IEP meetings."

Mr. Flowers noted that funding was an issue. He recalled that in his first year as principal that he "lost some of our allotment for special education." Additionally, he said,

[Riverdale Elementary] is still losing a lot of money this year in our budget, and we lost some of our special education allotment, too. So, it follows the students to the students, but when you lose those special [education] teachers, sometimes it feels like you have to do double the work.

His statements show the intersection of funding and staffing issues. Mr. Flowers also described the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on funding and the impact of virtual teaching on the special education initial eligibility referral process. The students with disabilities referral process consists of referring students for evaluation for disabilities according to state criteria. After found eligible, a student then receives special education services. The principal explained,

You've tried to have the initial [meeting], and then, all of a sudden, the timeline just gets extended because it's virtual or the data [are] not all there. It's hard to present accurate data because the child's [evaluation is] done in front of you, but we need to get our numbers back up. We need to earn more special education teachers. We're going the opposite direction.

His statement shows the impact of the number of students with disabilities at school on teacher allotment. Mr. Flowers identified issues with school culture in addition to funding.

Mr. Flowers noted that the school did not have the best school culture, as shown by a low climate rating at the start of his tenure. He described dealing with "buy-in from teachers" and parents when driving the vision of inclusion, which required more academic and social access for

students with high needs. He faced the barrier of teachers and parents in pushing for more access. The principal said,

> It's sometimes tough for teachers to understand why students are doing that, why they're in there, [why] this child doesn't hold a pencil properly or crumples up the paper, or is not age-appropriate to be in this class. And it was a lot of back and forth with the teachers to try and either convince them to do this or to buy into this type of program or these type of ideals.

At the other end of the spectrum, he noted issues with parents who expressed concerns about the stigma of special education. Mr. Flowers shared that these parental concerns often occurred even after the clear determination that special education placement was the best way to meet their children's needs.

The final issue was related to school culture and the sometimes-demanding parents in the school community. Mr. Flowers indicated dealing with the demands of parents is sometimes "time-consuming." He described long meetings of several hours that impacted the time of multiple staff members, sometimes including himself, and stated, "We have really high demands [from] special education parents." The principal provided an additional example of the high demands of parents and described the conversations held in individualized education program meetings for students with disabilities. He reflected on parental pushback on student placement decisions for children with intellectual disabilities, saying,

> Parents can always be a barrier. When we would offer more resources, or we would offer more time back in the ID classroom, [the] parents did not always want their kid labeled as ID. The [parents] wanted their students to be general education. They wanted their students to be in that least restrictive environment in their minds, and we would have to,

several times, do that. We tried it, or [said], "The data are here. Your child needs to be in the specialized program. There's no other options right now."

Teacher Perspective

Ms. Rose described a problem in her first year of teaching that directly impacted the partnership between her and her co-teacher at the time. Ms. Rose indicated that in her first year at the school, she was "treated more like a teacher's aide, kind of like a student teacher, almost. No partnership whatsoever. It was their classroom. I was just in it." She elaborated on the culture issues that first year and described the general education teacher as possessive of her room and position, which impacted the class culture. The general education students also conveyed a message that the classroom was theirs when they entered the room. Ms. Rose discussed the impact of such behavior on the culture: "Kids can pick up if two people aren't getting along [even if] they have the same purpose of being here, but [co-teaching] needs to be an actual partnership."

Ms. Rose identified another barrier to co-teaching in her first year: "I [was] split between grade levels, [and] that's really hard." When asked to describe her background in education, she identified that it was her first year remaining with the same co-teacher all day. Ms. Rose said she preferred the consistency of co-teaching with one teacher. When reflecting on her past teaching assignments, she stated, "I do a little bit of resource every now and then. It kind of depends on the group of kids that come each year. But I try as hard as I can to stay in the general [education] classroom, in the co-taught setting, as much as possible."

Ms. Rose described changes in her teaching schedule, responding, "This year, I am [with one grade], yes. I haven't done two different grade levels this year. I'm just in fourth grade." She indicated that she had a consistent teaching schedule for the last 4 years. Additionally, she stated,

"I've been working for the past 4 years with the same co-teacher, so it's been a blessing, and we actually get along, and we can vibe really well in the classroom." The timeframe described by Ms. Rose intersected with the start of Mr. Flowers's role as principal and the implementation of the district initiative.

Document Reflection

The barrier of scheduling is not a problem faced only by Mr. Flowers and Ms. Rose. Scheduling is a noted issue in the administrator training manual. The allowance of certified staff for both special and general education teachers can cause scheduling issues (Friend, 2016). Friend (2016) highlighted a potential barrier in the administrator training manual:

> The number of staff members needed in inclusive schools is related to the nature of students' disabilities and their distribution across classes and sections… Staffing is directly related to scheduling. To the extent that the master schedule fosters the effective and efficient use of staff, the number of needed personnel remains reasonable. (p. 13)

The administrator manual presents a barrier related to the planning of a co-teaching team. The administrator manual indicates that "in a few schools, professionals have two planning periods each day, and one of those time slots can sometimes be allocated for co-teaching planning" (Friend, 2016, p. 15). The Big Picture/Segment Sheet document for Riverdale presented the special education staffing positions and the staff's reflective schedules.

A Solutions-Oriented Approach

Principal Perspective

Socially just leaders work to address and plan solutions to obstacles that contribute to inequalities (Furman, 2012). At one point in the interview, Mr. Flowers mentioned his motto: "Bring me solutions; don't bring me problems." The interview questions focused on the barriers

faced in inclusive practices initiative implementation and how the participants addressed those barriers. Mr. Flowers addressed access and instruction and noted the importance of

> Re-looking at our IEPs to really look at the environments that our students [are] learning in to try and increase our co-taught model and co-taught teaching. So, together with our special education lead teacher and our SST and 504 coordinators, we've really looked at increasing the co-taught services for our students within the classroom.

Additionally, Mr. Flowers mentioned a focus on staffing and scheduling in supporting collaboration:

> We've [Riverdale Elementary] allotted a special education teacher, really for each grade level, and we have one co-taught class on each grade level. Those two teachers basically team-teach all day together, and I've really learned the importance of having a good cohesion between those two teachers because they need to be able to plan together, they need to be able to step away during the day and work together to share lesson plans together [and] be on the same page.

Mr. Flowers described some of the purposeful staffing decisions that he had made in the special education department and other instructional leadership positions:

> Within 1 year, with just bringing on the right people—bringing on a new program administrator, a new assistant principal, a new special education lead teacher, a new IB coordinator, a new instructional coach—all of that came together to create an entire[ly] new culture and feel for the school.

He indicated that the special education lead teacher "sends our teachers [to inclusive practices training] every year."

Mr. Flowers addressed the impact of the global pandemic and the related school closures. In response to his previous statements of the impact of the school closures on instruction, he described his plans for the inclusive practices initiative implementation:

It's time to take it to that next level, which has already begun, of really looking at the instructional piece, really looking at the co-teaching model, really looking at those inclusive practices. [We can] give feedback now, granular feedback, to the teachers [of] just the instructional piece because we're compliant now, and I'm not worried about compliance issues. [We'll] continue that work where [Riverdale Elementary] left off last year.

Mr. Flowers elaborated on plans in support of co-teaching:

But, I would love to just continue to look at the instructional piece and really look at those co-taught models and continue to build my background knowledge [of] it and [put] less focus on the compliance piece because we now have teachers in there [who] can do it.

Teacher Perspective

Ms. Rose's responses to the interview questions showed her involvement in the solutions described by Mr. Flowers. When asked how she prepared to support students with disabilities in the co-taught setting, Ms. Rose indicated that she participated in grade-level planning with the general education teacher on that grade level. She described a planning cycle where she connected to one content area. However, she discussed another meeting where she and the general education teachers shared all their upcoming plans for content areas:

We meet together, and we have different planning teams within that. I'm a part of the math planning team. And so, we all come together, we all have a part, and we share, like,

"Okay, this is what's going on with our math team." Science and social studies share, [and then] reading and ELA share, and then we do our scope and sequence to see where we are for the rest of the 9 weeks.

Ms. Rose explained other aspects of planning, saying how the teachers had

A shared document, and it's the scope and sequence. And so, on that [document], it's just every single week laid out, and each week has each subject area depending on what team you're a part of. For the math team, I am responsible for application problems, quizzes, and tests. And so, I'll go in and add those into the document. Other people with other responsibilities will go in and add [their material]."

She further described her role in the instructional planning and said,

I take what they are learning and what they're working on, and then I modify. I make sure all the accommodations are being met. I make sure all of the lessons that are being taught to the general [education] students are going to be able to meet my students' needs without it having to be a completely different curriculum.

She also described her planning for station teaching, one of the models of co-teaching:

For example, for math, we have three different rotations. We have the new material rotation, where the general [education] teacher, that is her expertise. She is really good at teaching the new material, the grade-level standards. She knows all of that.

Ms. Rose further described the planning process. She defined her role as to "review [and] kind of fill in the gaps where we are." Regarding specially designed instruction considerations, she stated,

We base it off of the groups [of students with disabilities]. What [does] the group need? Do they need [an] extension? Do we need to go higher, or do we need to fill in some

gaps? [The] third group is an independent practice group, which we kind of base, again,

off the students.

In another description of her role in supporting students with disabilities, Ms. Rose said,

The idea is for you to walk in and not be able to tell who is the general [education]

teacher and who is the special [education] teacher. We do try to make sure we rotate, and

we share the responsibility of everything [so] that I don't only help the students with IEP.

Ms. Rose later provided some examples of how she implemented specially designed instruction:

I might give them, for example, science [and] social studies. It's a lot of information, and

a lot of my students struggle with comprehension. And so, I might give them a word bank

or matching [instead of] another type of test strategy. And then, I also will sometimes just

talk to them about it. If it's a test, I'll just say like, "Okay, what do you know about the

solar system?" And then, kind of base what their knowledge is off what they can share

with me because sometimes I find that's easier than putting a test in front of them.

Ms. Rose indicated that specially designed instruction implementation was a barrier that

she could not always avoid due to the individual needs of the students with disabilities; however,

she noted,

I am there from the moment the kids get in the classroom until they leave for dismissal. I

think that is a huge benefit. Whereas, when a special [education] teacher is being shared

between classrooms [and] between grade levels, and sometimes you just can't avoid that

based on numbers. But, if there is ever a way to have a teacher stay with one other

teacher the whole day, I think that makes it so much more beneficial.

Ms. Rose addressed the issues of access for students with disabilities with high-level

needs, noting that Mr. Flowers

Encourages having kids push into specials, push into recess, lunch. We used to have an

ID classroom [specialized classroom for students with high-level needs], and he was

really big on having them, even if it was just, again, just to have social interaction with

peers their own age. He's very big, and he understands the importance of having all of the

kids feel included in the school.

Ms. Rose said that Mr. Flowers focused on an inclusive schools week, stating,

[Mr. Flowers] really pushes it on us, [saying], "All right guys. This is y'all's [your]

chance to get on the announcements, make some activities for all the teachers." [Mr.

Flowers] really pushes us to get in front of the school. "Okay. Tell kids what it means to

be inclusive. Tell teachers how to teach their kids to be inclusive." He really encourages

that.

Document Reflection

Friend (2016) highlighted a response to the barrier of staffing in the administrator

training manual:

The number of staff members needed in inclusive schools is related to the nature of

students' disabilities and their distribution across classes and sections… Staffing is

directly related to scheduling. To the extent that the master schedule fosters the effective

and efficient use of staff, the number of needed personnel remains reasonable. (p. 13)

The administrator manual indicates that the aim of co-teaching implementation is to meet

students' needs without the need to increase staff (Friend, 2016). The training manual includes

the parental barriers also mentioned by Mr. Flowers. Regardless of the challenges of dealing with

the demands of time or resources from parents, "Parents are not just welcomed partners in the

schools; their participation and collaboration are actively sought" (Friend, 2016, p. 23).

Solutions for planning was a section of both the administrator and teacher training manuals. The section about co-planning resources presented electronic collaboration options and two strategies of periodic face-to-face planning and on-the-spot planning. Friend (2016) described,

> Face-to-face planning is important, but it should be periodic, directed toward data interpretations and focused on an analysis of past and future instruction. When principals move from master scheduling planning time and instead find a means to provide coverage for co-teachers for at least an hour once every 4 weeks for macro planning. (p. 22)

Friend also discussed on-the-spot planning:

> In these and many other cases, teachers need just a few minutes to touch base. If they have a prescribed procedure for students to follow while they briefly meet, they are able to get back on track while avoiding a loss of instructional time for students. (p. 22)

The Big Picture/Segment Sheet had segments for planning embedded in the schedules of the special education co-teachers.

An Inclusive Mindset

Principal Perspective

Inclusive and equitable education for all students is a significant component of social justice leadership (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Mr. Flowers aimed to foster an environment inclusive for all students and said, "Equitable services are going to all of our students and not just our students that are the majority of our school." He reflected on his data, saying, "If you look at our subgroups, and you look at our students with disabilities and at our African American, Black, [and] Hispanic students, they obviously are not performing at the same

level as their White counterparts are, so we have poured a ton of resources into our intervention programs [as well as] our special education programs." Mr. Flowers's statements indicate his inclusive mindset for various populations at Riverdale and a focus on specific groups within those populations.

Mr. Flowers described the opportunities provided to the students requiring a high level of support to participate in the general education setting:

> Even if it was for social-emotional learning in the morning, even if it was for just science and social studies blocks, [we] offer services to [students with disabilities]. So they could, even in a low-incidence program, still be in a classroom with [general education] students and [general education] teachers. Moving those students into a general education class was something that we really pushed for the IEPs. A lot of the parents loved that idea, and that was something that we would present to them in those IEP meetings.

Mr. Flowers displayed his inclusive mindset while navigating decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. The principal mentioned the impact of the pandemic on inclusive practices initiative implementation. Through all the uncertainty of school reopening plans during the pandemic, he showed a focus on students with disabilities. The district provided a face-to-face targeted intervention program for a core group of students whom the principal deemed most impacted. He said,

> I made it a point to make sure that special education students and students with IEPs were served first. So, we brought back [the students] 2 days a week, and I didn't have to do that. The district said, "Identify who you want to." And we brought back all of our tier-two and tier-three students twice a week and all of our special education students or students with IEPs [and] academic IEPs for twice a week."

Teacher Perspective

When asked how her principal supported or promoted inclusive practices for students with disabilities, Ms. Rose stated, "He was really big on having [students with high needs], even if it was just, again, just to have social interaction with peers their own age." Both of them noted the focus on social interaction as part of meeting the needs of a particular group of students with disabilities. Ms. Rose stated, "Even if it's for just social interactions and [students with intellectual disabilities from a specialized class] pop in during science and social studies, they're getting that social interaction with classmates their age." At the time of the study, Riverdale did not provide those specific classes on the campus. Ms. Rose answered a follow-up question on what might exist beyond mere access to general education settings to learn if Mr. Flowers did anything to usher in or support co-teaching. She stated,

> He really listens to us, and he knows that we have a lot of minutes [that] we have to follow and guidelines [that] we have to follow. When [I] or the general education teacher I work with, when we come to him with, "Hey, this isn't working. This is what we want to try." He's very open to it. He's like, "You know what? You know what these kids need. Do what these kids need." He listens to co-taught [classrooms]. He doesn't hold us above other classrooms, and he won't be the first to say, "Hey, y'all should do this. Y'all should try this." But if we come to him with something, he's quick to let us try something, if that makes sense.

Document Reflection

Friend (2016) described a holistic perspective of inclusion in the teacher inclusive practices training manual: "Inclusion refers to a broad belief system or philosophy embracing the notion that all students should be welcomed members of a learning community, that all students

are part of their classrooms even if their abilities differ" (p. 6). Friend also stated, "The principal

is a strong and vocal advocate for all students, adamant that they access the general curriculum

with a system of supports around them" (p. 7).

Friend (2016) provided examples of the global movement toward inclusiveness and

social justice in the administrator co-teaching training manual:

- Students in co-taught classrooms often have better opportunities to learn social,

  behavioral, and cultural norms through informal interactions with peers and

  professionals.

- Students who are ELLs often struggle with social isolation; services in a separate

  setting may exacerbate this issue.

- The diversity among learners today often suggests that many students benefit from

  the services that specialists can offer within the context of the general education

  classroom.

- The various points of view co-teachers bring to a classroom enable instruction to be

  richer, deeper, and tailored to each student's needs. (p. 9)

Alignment to the Constructs of Social Justice Leadership

Mr. Flowers described his behavior in the inclusive practices initiative implementation as

focused on inclusion. He described the shift to change the school culture to a more inclusive

environment that included the collaboration of district leaders and school staff members. Social

justice was the basis of his inclusive mindset, as he confronted beliefs and practices that

contributed to the marginalization of a group (Obiakor et al., 2012). Mr. Flowers described his

collaborative behaviors, such as fostering general education and special education teacher joint

planning and facilitating master schedule planning sessions with his core leadership team.

Schools that show effective inclusive practices incorporate the collaboration of various staff members, including principals, to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (DeMatthews et al., 2020).

Mr. Flowers showed his investment in the inclusive practices initiative implementation by attending the administrator training session during his leadership positions as an assistant principal and a principal. DeMatthews et al. (2020) noted that principals of effective inclusive schools provide high-quality professional development opportunities to teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Although there was no evidence of site-based professional development, Mr. Flowers mentioned that his special education site-based leader sent his teachers to the district training related to the inclusive practices initiative.

Inclusive schooling requires eradicating marginalization; therefore, inclusion is a social justice issue (Pazey & Cole, 2013). Ms. Rose described her experiences at Riverdale, and her statements about Mr. Flowers aligned with his descriptions of his leadership actions for a more inclusive school. Ms. Rose described how scheduling was a barrier in her first year that impacted the co-teaching partnership. She stated that she was "split between grade levels" and noted that the partnership "works best when it is just you and one general education teacher the whole day." Furthermore, she described the impact of classroom culture on her role in her first year. She indicated that there was "no partnership" and that the co-teacher treated her more like an aide or "student teacher." Her description aligned with Mr. Flowers' observations of co-teaching in his first year. Mr. Flowers had observed co-taught classrooms and saw the "special education teacher either just hovering over special education students that are in the classroom." Mr. Flowers said,

[I] really learned the importance of having a good cohesion between those two teachers. It does take a lot of work, and you have to have good cohesiveness because I've seen what happens as well when those two teachers are not collaborating or don't get along well together early on.

Ms. Rose did not have many recollections about the inclusive practices initiative and its related training. However, she mentioned items related to the district initiative, such as scheduling adjustments and collaborative planning. Shared collaborative electronic planning was a topic addressed in the co-teaching training. There was also some discussion about the items related to specially designed instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Ms. Rose provided examples of meeting students' diverse needs in relation to the development of a station teaching structure. Such a finding aligns with the district's inclusive practices initiative administrator training manual. According to the teacher co-teaching training manual,

A central concept for co-teaching, but one that seems often to be overlooked, is that co-teaching is the vehicle through which students' specialized services are delivered. For students with disabilities, it is specially designed instruction that is based on their assessed needs and the goals (and possibly, objectives) that have been prepared for them. (Friend, 2016, p. 5)

Ms. Rose recognized the importance of needs-based specially designed instruction. She described the grouping for station teaching and said, "We [the co-teacher and I] base it off of the groups [of students]. What [does] the group need?" Ms. Rose also provided an example of her thought process when designing specialized math instruction for one station group: "Well, let's make sure we know how to add and subtract. And then, we can dive into what the fourth-grade standard is asking us to do."

Although the participants discussed items related to specially designed instruction, neither Mr. Flowers nor Ms. Rose specifically mentioned specially designed instruction. Ms. Rose described considering students' specific needs when planning for instruction. Discussing planning for station teaching utilization, she shared the thought process in purposefully selecting each station and identified the general education teachers' role as content specialists. Ms. Rose further described her role, pointing out the teachers' individual roles, co-teaching models in instructional planning, and examples of specially designed instruction planning.

Ms. Rose indicated that in a co-taught classroom setting, "The idea is for you to walk in and not be able to tell who is the general education teacher and who is the special education teacher." She described the shared responsibility of the general and special education teachers in the co-taught setting to serve all students. However, a principal should have the ability to identify the differences between the two to move from providing the "granular feedback to the teachers" mentioned by Mr. Flowers to more specific feedback. Such a finding suggests that the principal realized that future instruction in co-taught settings would require him to increase his knowledge to provide teachers with specific feedback. In alignment with a socially just framework, students with disabilities should receive equitable and meaningful educational opportunities beyond placement in the same setting as their nondisabled peers (Spence & Peña, 2015).

Mr. Flowers's and Ms. Rose's responses provided the data needed to explore the principal's behaviors in the inclusive practices initiative implementation. The reviewed documents also contributed to the exploration and consisted of analyzing the district professional development artifacts for the co-teaching administrator sessions contents and the principal's focus on collaboration and planning. However, the participants did not provide the requested site-based documents. Additionally, Ms. Rose did not grant permission to obtain any district-

level observations. Mr. Flowers mentioned a focus on collaboration and planning; however, he did not provide evidence of this with site-based documentation. Upon reflection, the co-teaching training session items that could have been helpful include co-teaching planning templates and schedules. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted to the last 2 years of the initiative and, consequently, more in-depth focus on instruction.

The principal's behavior aligned with the first years of the inclusive practices initiative implementation of establishing an infrastructure for co-teaching, which focused on scheduling and developing co-taught teams. Mr. Flowers wanted to delve more into the instructional aspect of the co-taught classroom, as the last 2 years of the district's initiative focused on instruction. Leaders can benefit from merging their instructional knowledge with social justice principles. In this way, they can find the best ways to apply their resources to address the inequalities that students with disabilities face in contrast to their nondisabled peers (DeMatthews, 2015). The last 2 years of the district initiative focused on the specially designed instruction to meet students with disabilities 's individual needs. Riverdale's lesson plans could have provided evidence of specially designed instruction planning; however, the participants did not provide lesson plans.

The inclusive practices initiative administrator training presented various tools that administrators could use to implement co-teaching for instructional walk-throughs. The principal and district could have collaborated on co-taught instructional observations with specific co-teaching observational tools. After fully reopening the school, Mr. Flowers's plans showed his focus on instruction and the opportunity to conduct instructional walk-throughs with specific observational tools.

The lack of documentation could suggest an issue with the fidelity of the inclusive practices initiative implementation. The inclusive practices initiative training manual presents the

use of electronic tools and collaborative strategies to support collaboration and co-teaching. The participants did not provide the requested documents. However, the principal's and teacher's perceptions of the principal's behavior in the inclusive practices initiative implementation show behaviors connected to social justice leadership characteristics. Ms. Rose described collaborative planning, using a shared document, and time for "periodic face-to-face planning," as indicated in the manual. Additionally, Mr. Flowers described the importance of partnership and cohesiveness in co-teaching teams "because they need to be able to plan together, they need to be able to step away during the day and work together, to share lesson plans together [and] be on the same page." Teachers usually receive the opportunity to collaboratively plan within the school day in the master scheduling process.

Although Ms. Rose and Mr. Flowers indicated the active occurrence of collaborative planning practices, they did not provide the requested documents supporting their descriptions. However, I did have access to another document that showed the scheduling structure mentioned by both participants. The school and the special education department used the Big Picture/Segment Sheet for scheduling and verifying staff allotments. The Big Picture/Segment Sheet obtained was for the school year of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The document showed Ms. Rose as a co-teacher for all the subject areas assigned to one grade level. Additionally, it listed a co-teacher for every grade level, which aligned with Mr. Flowers's statements.

The three constructs of social justice are distributive, cultural, and associational justice (Flood, 2019; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002). According to Flood (2019), distributive justice is the dissemination of resources, including economic, cultural, and social resources. Cultural justice consists of acknowledgment of the recognition, nonrecognition, and domination between groups.

Associational justice focuses on the acknowledgment and engagement of members of marginalized groups in decision-making practices.

Mr. Flowers's descriptions of his behavior indicated that he allocated resources to special education students at Riverdale. He described the allotment of "a special education teacher, really for each grade level, and we have one co-taught class on each grade level." The resources distributed included a co-teacher for every grade level and the drive to have students with disabilities with high-level needs participate in the social resources available. Mr. Flowers expressed an evident drive to have students with disabilities with high-level needs participate in the general education setting. He said, "Even if it was for social-emotional learning in the morning, even if it was for just science and social studies blocks, [we] offer that service to [students with disabilities]." Mr. Flowers acknowledged issues in the school culture for students with disabilities inclusion and described solutions to those problems. His first major shift in addressing the access issues of students with disabilities to the general education setting consisted of exploring placement decisions. He noted that when he first started as principal of Riverdale, most students with disabilities "were being served in a separate location by a special education teacher." His actions to increase inclusion for students with disabilities at Riverdale intersected with his display of associational justice. He engaged the members of his leadership team in his drive for more students with disabilities integration into the general education setting through co-teaching. He stated, "Moving those students into a general education class was something that we really pushed for [in] the IEPs."

Additionally, he described his engagement of the parents of students with disabilities in proposing changes to their children's individualized education programs. He indicated that placement options into the general education setting were "something that we would present to

[the parents] in those [IEP] meetings." Leaders who display the characteristics within the themes described by Furman (2012) support or address the three constructs of social justice. In this study, further research aligned with the display or non-display of social justice leadership in the findings with the themes by Furman (2012): oriented toward a socially just pedagogy; action-oriented and transformative; committed and persistent; relational and caring; and reflective, inclusive, and democratic.

Oriented Toward a Socially Just Pedagogy

Mr. Flowers. As Mr. Flowers indicated, it was his duty as the principal to set the "tone" for the school's culture, which he did in part by implementing inclusive practices. He recognized his role in meeting the needs of diverse populations at Riverdale. He said, "African American, Black, [and] Hispanic students, they obviously are not performing at the same level as their White counterparts are, so we have poured a ton of resources [not only] into our intervention programs but also our special education programs." Mr. Flowers stated, "Gosh, equity is such a buzzword right now. I mean, we know that. We've actually written equity into our [school] mission." Mr. Flowers ensured that "equitable service" occurred and said, "We [at Riverdale] created a schedule that has, basically, intervention blocks throughout the day. So every grade level has a dedicated 45-minute [block]. That's a time [when] every student is getting what they need during that time."

Mr. Flowers showed a desire to eradicate the marginalization of students with disabilities in his recognition and purposeful efforts to address the lack of students with disabilities receiving instruction in the general education setting. He described revisiting individualized education programs for students with disabilities placement decisions to "increase our co-taught model and co-teaching." Mr. Flowers described the status of students with disabilities access to the same

setting as their nondisabled peers, saying, "We [Riverdale] are well over 95% co-taught for students with disabilities in our school, in a general education setting and in a co-taught setting." Furthermore, the principal described the marginalization of students with disabilities in the general education setting, stating that students with disabilities were "basically a resource class in the back of the classroom." In his display of social justice leadership, he planned to go beyond access to focus on the instructional practices for students with disabilities.

Ms. Rose. Ms. Rose described Mr. Flowers's drive to focus on students with disabilities during inclusive schools week and how he pushed for teachers to use their classes to teach inclusivity. She stated that Mr. Flowers directed her to "[tell] teachers how to teach their kids to be inclusive. [Mr. Flowers] really encourages that." Ms. Rose's statements about her schedule showed Mr. Flowers's drive to increase co-taught services in placement decisions. She said, "This year was our first year that I have had science and social studies listed as co-taught in IEPs."

Document Connection. Friend (2016) described the holistic perspective of inclusion for all students in the teacher inclusive practices initiative training and the administrator manual. Mr. Flowers expressed his focus on all students. Friend further noted that a principal is a vocal advocate for all students. Ms. Rose described the advocacy of Mr. Flowers's drive during inclusive practices week, using the word "push" to describe the importance that Mr. Flowers placed on driving the message of inclusion.

Action-Oriented and Transformative

Mr. Flowers. Mr. Flowers realized that the school had issues with culture. He said, "[The school] had a culture problem, it did. A school that's high demand, a high-performing school, shouldn't have a two-star climate rating, for example, or a three-star climate rating." He

described internal culture issues with special education, specifically with the issues that impacted the inclusion of students with disabilities. Mr. Flowers took action and brought in a new core leadership team, as he recalled,

Within 1 year, with just bringing on the right people—bringing on a new program administrator, a new assistant principal, a new special education lead teacher, a new IB coordinator, a new instructional coach—all of that came together to create an entire[ly] new culture and feel for the school.

Mr. Flowers led his team members to address the issues of access faced by students with disabilities. According to the participant, "The bulk of students [at Riverdale] were in pull-out resource models, [and students with disabilities] were being served in a separate location by a special education teacher." He noted that he worked collaboratively with the new team members to increase co-taught services at the school.

Mr. Flowers described the barriers he faced with teachers and parents when initially driving inclusive practices for students with disabilities with high levels of needs. About the issues connected to school culture, Mr. Flowers described "a lot of back and forth with the teacher to try and either convince them to do this or to buy into this type of program or these type of ideals." He focused on "hiring teachers [who] will fit the mold for Riverdale, [who] we knew could buy into our mission and vision were all great ways to help smooth [issues] over my second year."

Mr. Flowers described parental issues and expectations as "really high [and] demanding, special education parents." The parental demands sometimes resulted in day-long meetings with family members represented by attorneys, something Mr. Flowers described as "time-consuming." He was actively involved in the IEP meeting even though he was not a required

member. As students became more inclusive in the general education classrooms, Mr. Flowers faced cultural issues due to the necessary collaboration in co-taught classrooms. He said, "[The] first year trying to find a co-taught team with three extremely weak special education teachers was tough."

Ms. Rose. Ms. Rose described how Mr. Flowers supported or promoted an inclusive culture, noting that the principal made it a point to have students with disabilities with high-level needs

> Push into specials, push into recess, lunch. We used to have a specialized classroom [class for students with disabilities with high-level needs], and [Mr. Flowers] was really big on having them, even if it was just, again, to have social interaction with peers their own age.

Again, Ms. Rose used "push" to describe Mr. Flowers's encouragement to teachers to drive inclusion and transform the school culture. A compatible co-teaching pair is an essential component of the co-teaching class culture; as Ms. Rose said, "Kids can pick up if two people aren't getting along." However, she mentioned that she and her co-teacher had a great relationship that was "a blessing, and we actually get along and can vibe really well in the classroom."

Document Connection. Finding the right partnerships and schedules is not an easy task. According to the administrator manual, "Scheduling for inclusive schools is complex and iterative. It usually takes several years for scheduling dilemmas to be resolved" (Friend, 2016, p. 22). Although Mr. Flowers discussed a focus on teacher evaluations to transform the school culture, he did not comment on current or follow-up evaluations. Additionally, Ms. Rose did not consent to providing observation data from the district.

Committed and Persistent

Mr. Flowers. Mr. Flowers's responses suggested that he did not have a short-term drive for meeting the needs of students with disabilities. He attended the administrator training at both leadership levels: as assistant principal and again as principal of Riverdale. The district attendance records showed his attendance. The state DOE website showed a slightly improved climate rating score at Riverdale since his appointment as principal. Mr. Flowers demonstrated his commitment and persistence in focusing on the students with the highest needs and evaluating his special education teachers' practices. He made purposeful staffing decisions for the special education department and other instructional leadership positions. Master scheduling and related staff allotments reflected the principal's commitment to improving co-taught practices at Riverdale. He allotted a special education teacher at every grade level, where "two teachers basically team teach all day together." The least restrictive environment percentages at Riverdale suggest a commitment to and persistence in achieving students with disabilities inclusion in the general education setting. When asked about his plans for co-teaching, Mr. Flowers expressed that he wanted to resume where he left off before the COVID-19 pandemic. He planned to align the instructional aspect with the inclusive practices initiative structure to focus on instruction in the final 2 years. As previously stated, the pandemic had an impact on the structure.

Ms. Rose. Ms. Rose's description of Mr. Flowers's focus on the inclusion of students with disabilities with high-level needs suggests his commitment to inclusion. She also noted his commitment to driving the message of inclusion in the school's activities for inclusive practices week. Ms. Rose's statements about her daily work schedule showed the impact of Mr. Flowers's

master scheduling decisions. The teacher mentioned "just [teaching] in fourth grade, being present "from the moment the kids get in the classroom until they leave for dismissal."

Document Connection. The introduction of the administrator inclusive practices initiative training manual indicates that building, supporting, and sustaining co-teaching are not easy tasks. Master scheduling and collaboration are crucial elements in the administrator and teacher manuals that require time to develop. According to the manual, "In a few schools, professionals have two planning periods each day, and one of those time slots can sometimes be allocated for co-teaching planning" (Friend, 2016, p.15). In this study, the Big Picture/Segment Sheet document for Riverdale Elementary provided support for Mr. Flowers's and Ms. Rose's statements about scheduling. The document showed Ms. Rose as a co-teacher for all subjects within one grade level and a co-teacher for every grade level; these findings aligned with Mr. Flowers's statements.

Reflective

Mr. Flowers. Regarding Riverdale's special education department, Mr. Flowers highlighted the state of the school when he became the principal and where he needed to go. He said,

> One of the big things that was our focus early on, and honestly, the special education department, and honestly, before the 5-year inclusive practices plan was really just compliance, right? We wanted 100% compliance. So now, it's time to take it to that next level, which has already begun, [which is] to really look at the instructional piece.

Mr. Flowers discussed his special education team when he spoke about implementing the initiative in his first year as principal. Mr. Flowers noted the barriers to developing co-taught teams and the difficulty in forming co-teaching teams, stating that having "extremely weak

special education teachers was tough." In his initial years of observing co-teaching at the school, "It really ended up just being the teacher feeling like they were a special education teacher."

Ms. Rose. Ms. Rose reflected on her initial years of teaching and described the negative impact of scheduling barriers on partnership. She indicated that her schedule was "split between grade levels" and stated, "The partnership works best when it's just you and one general education teacher the whole day." Her comments aligned with Mr. Flowers's focus on scheduling, which resulted in better partnerships. Ms. Rose described her schedule at the time of the study as "a blessing," She noted that she did not always co-teach all day; instead, in the past, she "resourced every now and then. It kind of depended on the group of kids that came each year." The term "resourced" indicates the special education setting where students with disabilities receive services in classrooms outside of their nondisabled peers.

Document Connection. The administrator manual includes a challenge for principals to reflect on their schools' status with a list of the elements of inclusive schools. Additionally, principals could use the manual to match the elements with their perceptions of inclusion. One of the elements is that inclusive schools should have the option for instruction in a separate setting if the data suggest separate instruction as necessary for certain students with disabilities 's needs. Mr. Flowers noted parents' apprehension when describing placement decisions for their children with intellectual disabilities. The parents did not always agree with placement into a special education setting outside of the general education classroom even if "the data [are] here, and there's no other options." He reflected on issues with placement decisions and displayed awareness that the best option for some students with disabilities is not always education in the general education classroom.

Inclusive and Democratic/Relational and Caring

Mr. Flowers. The themes of inclusive and democratic and relational and caring intersected with the principal's behaviors. Mr. Flowers mentioned sitting in individualized education program meetings with all stakeholders, including parents, to discuss student placement, using the word "we" to describe being an inclusive member of the individualized education program team. He strove to include some of the highest-needs students with disabilities in the general education setting. He discussed options with parents at individualized education program meetings, but not all parents felt comfortable with the ideas presented. Mr. Flowers described dealing with pushback from parents in placement decisions, telling them, "We [IEP team] tried it, or the data [are] here. Your child needs to be in the specialized program." He also noted that some parents supported the inclusive considerations in the individualized education program meetings. Mr. Flowers said, "A lot of the parents loved that idea, and that was something that we would present to them in those individualized education program meetings." Mr. Flowers recalled an all-day meeting: "I sat in a meeting on virtual from eight to three o'clock about a proposed student that would be coming." He recognized and appreciated his special education site-based leader who "just manages it all [and] does it with a smile on his face because [in] special education, you can be in meetings all day." Mr. Flowers's recognition of a member of his leadership team was one of many examples of support for his team.

Mr. Flowers's inclusive and democratic mindset included not only students with disabilities, as he displayed his inclusivity for other staff members with his drive to increase co-teaching practices by collaborating on solutions to address issues with access and co-teaching at Riverdale. Mr. Flowers sought assistance from his special education site-based administrator and insight from those involved in managing the intervention process at the school, where the

students receiving interventions also needed specific instructional support within the co-taught setting. He said the collaboration occurred "together with our special education lead teacher and our SST and 504 coordinators" to increase co-teaching practices and co-taught classes.

Ms. Rose. Ms. Rose indicated Mr. Flowers's openness to listening to staff members' suggestions. She highlighted how the principal considered suggestions from her and her co-teacher and allowed them to implement practices based on their professional knowledge. Ms. Rose provided an example of when she and her general education co-teacher approached Mr. Flowers with concerns and stated, "'Hey, this isn't working. This is what we want to try.' He [was] very open to it." Mr. Flowers trusted the co-teaching team members in the decision-making. Ms. Rose said, "If we come to him with something, he's quick to let us try something if that makes sense." An example of the intersection of caring and inclusive, Ms. Rose said, "[Mr. Flowers] understands the importance of having all of the kids feel included in the school."

Document Connection. The administrator training indicated the need for parental participation and collaboration in inclusive schools. Mr. Flowers's examples of his participation in individualized education program meetings showed the collaboration sometimes needed between leaders and those whom he described as "demanding" parents. Overall, Mr. Flowers stated that Riverdale was a "school [with] high parental involvement." However, there were no documents or noted examples of how he actively sought parental participation, which could be due to his perception of parental involvement.

Connections to Identified Themes

A Willingness to Identify Problems. Mr. Flowers identified the problems with an impact on all students while attending to specific student populations at Riverdale, including students with disabilities. He implemented purposeful actions to address the inequities faced by

the members of those populations. Mr. Flowers identified an issue with the school culture and recognized the issue of a lack of access to general education classrooms for students with disabilities. His statements indicate that he decided to act to transform culture and issues of access. Mr. Flowers displayed a commitment to closing the gaps, such as school climate, with an impact on students with disabilities. The school's least restrictive environment rates and Mr. Flowers's and Ms. Rose's comments about the inclusion of students with disabilities with high-level needs indicate the principal's persistence in addressing access. Mr. Flowers showed his ability to identify problems within his school and with himself. He reflected on Riverdale's co-teaching practices before the COVID-19 pandemic and the practices needed for the future. Such reflection indicated his willingness to identify areas of growth for himself as a leader. Mr. Flowers said there were demanding parents in the school community. He noted that parental interactions sometimes had an impact on school resources. He did not expand on the impact of "demanding" parents on resources other than time.

A Solutions-Oriented Approach. Mr. Flowers focused on more than meeting instructional support with the implementation of specific intervention programs. The supports he put into place also addressed the social needs of students with disabilities. Mr. Flowers pushed for a more inclusive environment to avoid the exclusion of students with disabilities from their nondisabled peers; at the same time, he "pushed" to share the message of inclusion with the entire school. Mr. Flowers noted that his staffing decisions had an impact on the school culture. Furthermore, he collaborated with the members of his new leadership team to increase the services provided to students with disabilities in the co-taught setting. He hired new leadership team members and teachers who supported the mission and vision of inclusion. Mr. Flowers showed his drive for inclusion in his decisions and commitment to development. He indicated

that he attended the administrator training twice and planned to increase his knowledge. He stated, "I would love to just continue to look at the instructional piece [and] continue build[ing] my background knowledge." Mr. Flowers noted that progressing from the state of co-teaching before the pandemic to the state needed required him to develop his "background knowledge." He said that developing his background knowledge would allow him "to be able to give really bite-sized, accurate, great feedback to those two teachers about how to best serve [students], not just our special education kids in that class." Despite sometimes challenging parents, Mr. Flowers displayed a caring and inclusive attitude that suggested his investment in the issues related to demanding parents. Mr. Flowers was willing to be democratic and involved. He also allowed teachers to make decisions.

An Inclusive Mindset. Mr. Flowers's messages and actions suggest his inclusive mindset. He focused on all students but also paid particular attention to the needs of students with disabilities. He shared that he wanted to ensure that "equitable services are going to all of our students and not just our students that are the majority of our school." Mr. Flowers's solutions to the identified issues showed his position on creating an inclusive school for all, including students with disabilities. In his hiring practices, he accounted for the staff characteristics that would contribute to the mission and vision of an inclusive school. Mr. Flowers's scheduling and staffing allotment decisions had benefits for students with disabilities. Mr. Flowers made his decisions with an inclusive mindset. In his perception of co-teaching roles, he indicated that "a special education teacher does not have to be confined to just the special education students in the [class]." Even in his solutions, Mr. Flowers showed consideration for all students. He said, "Inclusive practices training helped me see that two teachers working equally together can really double the results for all of the students that are in the class." Mr.

Flowers's involvement with a leadership team that consisted of staff members centered around different areas of student support showed his inclusive mindset to focus on all students. The interviews provided insight into Mr. Flowers's behaviors in implementing the inclusive practices initiative, an initiative focused on equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching. The documents provided insight into the expectations for the principal in the inclusive practices initiative implementation. Mr. Flowers's descriptions of his behaviors, Ms. Rose's insights into her principal's behaviors, and a document review provided information on how or if his actions aligned to the characteristics of social justice leadership. The data analysis showed that the principal's and teachers' perceptions of Mr. Flowers's behaviors in the inclusive practices initiative implementation indicated actions connected to the characteristics of social justice leadership.

Summary

Exploring the display or nondisplay of social justice leadership through Furman's (2012) themes contributed to an examination of the findings. Furman's themes were "oriented toward a socially just pedagogy, action-oriented and transformative, committed and persistent, relational and caring, and reflective, inclusive and democratic" (p. 195). Investigating connections to the following themes provided insight into the behaviors of Mr. Flowers. The emergent themes were a willingness to identify problems, a solutions-oriented approach, and an inclusive mindset.

Mr. Flowers displayed persistence and commitment to meeting the needs of all Riverdale students, including students with disabilities. His behaviors aligned with Friend and Pope's (2005) definition of inclusion that indicates that all students, inclusive of students with disabilities, are to be fully welcomed into the school community and supported by all professionals. In his initial years as principal, he transformed a school culture that did not

provide an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. He made some strides, as evident by an increased state school climate measurement. Mr. Flowers identified barriers to the access and educational equity of students with disabilities. His display of social justice leadership was evident as he gave attention to abolishing pre-established social constructs that provide a free experience for some and suppression for others (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Realizing that he could not shift the culture by himself, Mr. Flowers included staff members to collaborate and implement solutions. He even displayed a willingness to accept teachers' feedback and trusted them to make the best decisions for their students. Other identified issues that intersected with school culture and access for students with disabilities were funding, co-teaching partnerships, and staffing.

Many of these issues overlapped when Mr. Flowers implemented solutions that impacted more than one problem area. Solutions to increase access to students with disabilities contributed to the need for additional teachers. Mr. Flowers recruited and structured staff members to meet co-taught service needs and foster consistency with co-taught teams. Such actions did not occur overnight; however, his commitment and persistence resulted in a scheduling structure supportive of collaborative planning and co-teaching partnerships. Obiakor (2016) indicates that from a leadership perspective, collaboration includes the activities supportive of effective co-teaching. Therefore, leaders must facilitate activities, such as collaborative instructional planning, to cultivate successful teacher collaboration in the co-taught setting. Mr. Flowers' statements, the Big Picture/Segment Sheet document and Ms. Rose's descriptions displayed that Mr. Flowers facilitated the aforementioned activities.

Mr. Flowers's inclusive mindset connected to the tenets of social justice leadership. Within a socially just framework, students with disabilities are provided equitable educational

opportunities further than physical placement in the same setting as their nondisabled peers; they also gain quality opportunities in that setting (Spence & Peña, 2015). He described addressing the needs of all students while focusing on the subgroups marginalized at Riverdale. The subgroup of focus in this study was students with disabilities. The access issues that students with disabilities encountered included access to the general education setting. Access to general education settings with their nondisabled peers is not a guarantee of students with disabilities receiving the same instructional opportunities (DeMatthews, 2014; Pazey & Cole, 2013). The principal identified instructional delivery deficits in co-taught classrooms. Although impacted by school closures due to the global pandemic, Mr. Flowers planned to increase his knowledge and support for instructional practices for students with disabilities in co-taught classrooms. Therefore, he plans to continue to promote equity for students with disabilities at Riverdale.

This study focused on the behaviors of a principal and the perceptions of one of his teachers in the implementation of an initiative for students with disabilities. The next chapter presents the study's implications, suggestions for future research, and a discussion of the findings.

5. DISCUSSION

Conclusions

The objective of this study was to explore the behaviors of a principal in the implementation of an initiative for students with disabilities at a large urban school district in the Southeastern United States. The study's two research questions were the means used to explore the principal's behaviors:

1. How does the principal describe his behaviors in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

2. How does the teacher describe the principal's display of leadership in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

The findings showed that Mr. Flowers demonstrated behaviors reflective of social justice leadership in the inclusive practices initiative implementation.

The interviews provided insight into the participants' perceptions of the principal's behaviors in inclusive practices initiative implementation for equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching. The documents provided an understanding of the expectations for the principal in the inclusive practices initiative implementation. Three themes emerged from the data analysis: a willingness to identify problems, a solutions-oriented approach, and an inclusive mindset. This information enabled exploration of how or if these behaviors aligned to the characteristics of the social justice leadership framework.

Research Question 1

Mr. Flowers's described behaviors aligned with the three constructs that support social justice leadership: distributive, cultural, and associational justice (Flood, 2019; Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002). The social justice constructs aligned with the themes that emerged in this study and Furman's (2012) themes of social justice leadership. Action-oriented and transformative actions and values can align with cultural justice. In reflection of these intersecting constructs and themes, Mr. Flowers displayed a willingness to identify problems with the school culture, specifically the access of students with disabilities to the general education classroom. He noted that one of the initial issues when he became a principal was that most Riverdale students with disabilities received instruction in a "separate location by a special education teacher." Theoharis and Causton (2014) define inclusion as students with disabilities receiving instructions in the general education classroom with full access to the general education curriculum, instruction, and peers with required support. Leaders must foster authentic equitable environments in which students with disabilities do not feel like marginalized members of the school community (Moore, 2009). Mr. Flowers solution to access issues was to transform the culture, determined to "increase [Riverdale's] co-taught model and co-teaching."

Changing the culture and increasing the access of students with disabilities was a task that Mr. Flowers addressed by himself. Demonstrating the social justice leadership themes of inclusive, democratic, relational, and caring and their connection with associational justice, Mr. Flowers described his collaboration with his leadership team. He noted calling on the leadership team members to assist with increasing access for students with disabilities into the general education setting through co-teaching. Mr. Flowers stated that his initial step was to review individualized education programs for students with disabilities placement decisions "to really

look at the environments [where] our students were learning." He mentioned this process with the students with disabilities with the highest-level needs. Increases in least restrictive environment percentages have occurred for students with disabilities excluding those necessitating significant supports (Cramer, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2017). He noted that considering the services to provide in the general education setting "was something that we would present to them in those [IEP] meetings." Morningstar et al. (2017) noted that IEP teams are responsible to plan for special education services, as well as to establish the setting where students with disabilities will receive those services. Mr. Flowers' drive for access opposes the belief of some IEP team members that feel that they are unable to meet the needs of specific students due to curriculum expectations, instead of increasing support to meet those expectations, can impact least restrictive environment decisions (Frattura & Capper, 2006).

Mr. Flowers noted, "We [at Riverdale] are well over 95% co-taught." The least restrictive environment percentage at Riverdale was a rate close to the percentage displayed in Table 1. Mr. Flowers improved the least restrictive environment percentage by allocating resources to increase the students with disabilities' access. The allocation of resources was an action of distributive justice. He indicated that he had a special education teacher for every grade level and that "two teachers basically team-teach all day together." Co-teaching was a practice evident in the Big Picture/Segment Sheet document for Riverdale showing that a special education teacher at every grade level had predominantly co-teaching segments all day. Inclusive leaders must go beyond solely least restrictive environment decisions to take part in the decisions and understanding of services and instruction (Pazey & Cole, 2013).

The results show Mr. Flowers's commitment to inclusion for all students at Riverdale. Principals are the leaders accountable for meeting the needs of all students, including those of the

students in marginalized groups. Mr. Flowers identified the issue of students with disabilities

marginalization at Riverdale. Socially just leaders identify issues and develop solutions to

eradicate the noted problems. The principal formed solutions to address issues of access and

educational equity in co-taught settings. One of Mr. Flowers's solutions was a master schedule to

foster collaboration. Enabling co-teachers to plan together allowed them to address the

inequitable educational opportunities provided to students with disabilities in the co-taught

classroom. Causton-Theoharis et al. (2011) indicated that school leaders could benefit from

developing structures with shared planning times. Mr. Flowers scheduling support co-teachers in

meeting Gately and Gately (2001) description of co-teaching as both teachers working together

by sharing the planning, presentation, evaluation, and classroom management tasks to develop

differentiated curriculum to meet a diverse student population needs. The solutions mentioned

by Mr. Flowers provided the opportunity for further exploration in the analysis of an interview

with a teacher at Riverdale.

Research Question 2

The second research question focused on Ms. Rose's perception of Mr. Flowers's

behaviors in the inclusive practices initiative implementation. Her description of Mr. Flowers's

support for inclusive practices at Riverdale showed him to be a principal with an inclusive

mindset. Ms. Rose indicated that Mr. Flowers supported including students with disabilities with

the highest-level needs in the general education environment. She stated that Mr. Flowers

focused on the inclusion of high-needs students with disabilities, "Even if it was just, again, to

have social interaction with peers." She further stated, "Mr. Flowers understands the importance

of having all of the kids feel included in the school." The teacher described her principal's push

to highlight and appreciate students with disabilities during inclusive schools week. Ms. Rose

also stated that Mr. Flowers made it a point to foster a culture of inclusion by having the special education team guide general education teachers to "teach their kids to be inclusive."

Ms. Rose's descriptions of how she supported students with disabilities indicated her involvement in appropriate instructional practices for students with disabilities in the co-taught setting. Her descriptions of the issues faced in implementing co-teaching and solutions for those issues aligned with Mr. Flowers's comments on the changes made at Riverdale to support co-teaching. Mr. Flowers focused on creating a schedule and allotting staff, fostering an environment that both participants described as beneficial for co-teaching practices. Ms. Rose stated, "Partnership works, and the routine works and the rotations and everything like that works best when it's just you and one general education teacher the whole day." Ms. Rose's routine included collaborative instructional planning. Mr. Flowers indicated the need for cohesion between the co-teachers, saying they needed to "be able to plan together, [to] step away during the day and work together, to share lesson plans together, to be on the same page." Klingner and Vaughn (2002) indicated that "co-teaching and co-planning necessitate (a) communicating frequently and effectively with another professional, (b) sharing power and control over assessment and instructional decisions, and (c) being flexible" (p. 29). Co-teaching requires fusing the expertise of the general and special education teachers to meet the needs of all students (Weiss & Glaser, 2019). Additionally, Weiss and Glaser highlight the provision of specially designed instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The Big Picture/Segment Sheet document presented the planning segments for all the special education co-teachers.

This study focused on the behaviors of a principal in an inclusive practices initiative implementation focused on students with disabilities. The study was an exploration of whether

the principal's behaviors connected with the characteristics of social justice leadership. The evidence suggests that the principal displayed behaviors aligned with social justice leadership characteristics. The participants' perceptions aligned with the principal's description of his behavior in the inclusive practices initiative implementation.

Further Exploration

Mr. Flowers's recognition of the need for further exploration of instructional implementation in the co-taught classes at Riverdale aligned with inclusive practices initiative expectations. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused school closures and disruption to the timeline and focus of co-taught classroom instruction. Mr. Flowers mentioned observing subpar co-teaching practices for students with disabilities at Riverdale. He showed that he could recognize the weak instructional practices; however, he did not mention any current observations or his expectations for what practices were appropriate. Such a finding suggests the need to focus more on instruction, as Mr. Flowers described an emphasis on the co-teaching infrastructure. Additionally, the study district's IRB required obtaining consent for Ms. Rose's classroom observations; however, the teacher did not grant permission. In addition to the observations, the participants did not submit any of the requested documents.

Without access to the lesson plans, I could not explore the application of specially designed instruction for students with disabilities. Although Ms. Rose mentioned consideration of specially designed instruction during collaborative instructional planning, there was no evidence of that implementation. Mr. Flowers also did not provide evidence of the protocols or knowledge of planning tools that he discussed. The tools and planning structures mentioned by Ms. Rose and Mr. Flowers connected to sections of the teacher and administrator inclusive practices initiative manuals; however, there was no evidence provided in response to an initial

and a follow-up request. The lack of evidence could indicate that Mr. Flowers had not fully operationalized his philosophical positions and actions.

The study district's special education leadership team could benefit from revisiting the purpose and structure of the inclusive practices initiative. My requests and follow-up inquiries for the district initiative only resulted in a structured timeline for implementation. District leaders should go beyond a structured timeline of professional development implementation to a more robust plan for the initiative. The training manuals included the principal's and teachers' expectations for co-teaching practices; however, there was no indication of district leaders following up on the practices' implementation. A revamped initiative should include tangible outcomes and accountability protocols, which could require district-level special education leaders to lead through the lens of the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The structural frame addresses employees' formal roles and duties. Utilizing the structural frame as a lens may require restructuring to address organizational challenges. There could be a need to restructure the roles and duties of special education and instructional leaders at the district level to support the district initiative's oversight and implementation. The social justice leadership theme of action-oriented and transformative behaviors would contribute to such restructuring to meet students with disabilities' needs. However, restructuring could require the additional characteristic of courage, which is another attribute of social justice leadership.

As noted, Mr. Flowers displayed an inclusive mindset with a focus on all students and awareness of the issues impacting students with disabilities. District leaders could benefit from applying the study's findings to explore principals' behaviors in addressing the issues of other marginalized groups and determine if the principals display the characteristics of social justice leadership. The transferability of this study enables scholars and stakeholders to use the results to

address the inequities faced by members of other school populations outside of students with disabilities.

Principals from the various schools identified with purposeful sampling in this study did not respond to recruitment attempts. Some school sites meeting the least restrictive environment criteria did not have the criterion of principals who had participated in inclusive practices initiative trainings. District leaders could benefit from auditing all schools to determine which leaders have participated in the training and inform the district's special education department of training and support needs.

The inclusive practices initiative administrator training suggests the possible impact of funding on the implementation of co-teaching. The connection to local funding challenges could also link to federal funding. Nationally, there is a growing population of students with disabilities at schools; however, the historical federal underfunding of special education remains evident (Pazey & Cole, 2013). The findings indicate the impact of funding on co-teaching implementation. School leaders can better handle funding challenges with a focus on scheduling. The findings suggest that scheduling can have a converse impact on funding; thus, scheduling is advantageous. School, district, and department leaders must understand the importance of scheduling and collaborate in the scheduling process.

Implications

Principal Behaviors

The findings suggest that leaders who focus on an inclusive culture might display the characteristics of social justice leadership. Additionally, the findings indicate the benefits of demonstrating social justice leadership characteristics when implementing initiatives for marginalized populations—in this study, students with disabilities. Principals must address their

schools' holistic needs while ensuring that all populations have the programming and support specific to their needs. The findings suggest that a principal who displays social justice leadership characteristics can address the needs of both the whole school population and groups within the school.

Recruitment

The findings suggest the need to include the tenets of social justice leadership in school leadership training and recruitment, which could be a way to benefit diverse student populations. Social justice leadership also provides benefits for students with disabilities, as the drive for inclusion enables more students with disabilities to access instruction in the general education classrooms with their nondisabled peers. The increasing number of students with disabilities participating in the general education setting requires leaders with social justice leadership characteristics. Socially just leaders can meet the needs of the historically marginalized students with disabilities group, which has often received subpar education even with access to instruction in the general education classroom. Using the lens of social justice leadership to hire leaders who recognize the needs and barriers of certain groups is a way to select leaders who can meet those groups' needs. The same hiring and recruiting mindset for teachers is applicable for principals. This study provided insight into how one principal purposefully focused on staff evaluation and recruitment to address the issues of equity faced by students with disabilities at his school.

Instruction

Subpar instructional opportunities are concerns for students with disabilities. School district leaders should ensure that incoming principals receive training to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Like Mr. Flowers, many principals have not served as special education or general education co-teachers. School leaders should consider professional

development needs when reviewing schedules and co-teaching pairs. As indicated in the findings, the pairing of co-teaching teams affects the co-teaching partnership, which, in turn, has an impact on class culture and instruction. Leaders must understand the expectations of both co-teachers to assess their performance and address areas of need. Leaders could benefit from understanding the appropriate co-teaching practices that provide high-quality educational experiences for all students, including students with disabilities. Providing high-quality educational opportunities for students with disabilities requires the assistance of district leaders. The findings indicated the principal's awareness of the shift from compliance to instruction. Additionally, the principal noted the support from the local special education administrators (LSEAs) in the transition.

LSEAs have shifted from focusing on federal and state special education legal compliance to focusing on instruction. The LSEAs now share the responsibility with principals of ensuring equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Principals seldom have knowledge of the roles of special education teachers (Bettini et al., 2017). Like Mr. Flowers, many principals do not have backgrounds with students with disabilities and have had little or no training on meeting the needs of students with disabilities before matriculating into leadership and possibly even after assuming their roles. Principals should receive continued support on the instructional aspect of meeting the needs of students with disabilities to support the teachers who ultimately support students with disabilities. Backing principals in fostering equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities may require "new capacity, work practices, and relationships throughout central offices" (Honig et al., 2010, p. 8). The implications of principal behaviors, recruitment, and instruction intersect and impact equitable

educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Attention to such areas could be a way to support initiatives to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

Assumptions and Limitations

Qualitative research has inherent limitations that a researcher must acknowledge (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). One limitation of this study was researcher bias. I have worked extensively in the field of special education, including in the school district studied. My experience could have resulted in researcher bias. Researcher bias can have an unintentional impact on the investigator's perceptions and beliefs (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In addition, there was natural bias due to my current role and previous employment in the district related to my positionality. My professional history and contacts could have influenced the participants' responses to the interview questions. The selection of the site criteria was the means used to avoid personal connections. Addressing these limitations required remaining cognizant of bracketing my reactions and thoughts during all phases of the study. Bracketing consists of setting aside personal experiences, biases, and predetermined perceptions about the topic (Given, 2008; van Manen, 1990). To actively bracket my preconceived notions, I maintained a field journal for my personal use to actively memo my previous personal experiences, biases, or preconceptions, as they come to mind (Given, 2008). I further addressed this limitation by using my GSU e-mail account to prevent the participants from reviewing my district credentials listed on my work e-mail.

An additional limitation was participant recruitment. The intended sample size was a triad of participants from three sites within one school district. However, many U.S. districts enacted school closures and were in the process of planning for reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic (Melnick & Darling-Hammond, 2020) at the time of this study. The pandemic

impacted the school district explored in this study, as it did many others. With the selection criteria, the recruitment efforts resulted in two participants from one site agreeing to take part in interviews. The initial recruitment efforts did not receive responses, and the intended participants required follow-up communication.

The timing of the district's IRB approval to begin my recruitment intersected with the district of study's abrupt decision to reopen schools. Initial recruitment emails and follow-up e-mails did not receive many responses. Following my purposeful sampling process, I continued to seek out participants using the least restrictive environment rates (LRE) of schools within the district and verification of attendance of potential participants in the inclusive practices initiative's training sessions. I continued to review the participant sample list, but many potential participants had to be eliminated. As the potential school's least restrictive environment rates reflected percentages closer to the state LRE target, the principals and teachers at those schools displayed a lack of attendance to the respective district's inclusive practices initiative training session. Therefore, potential principals and teachers did not meet the purposeful sampling criteria for my site and participant selection. This further limited my selection options.

Other invited participants indicated no interest in participating or did not respond to the request. I sent additional communication to the schools on the established site selection list. However, I was aware of the events that may have had an impact on the participants' responses. A possible impact to responsiveness could have been the abrupt decision to reopen schools. Many of the schools that displayed high least restrictive environment rates also displayed high numbers of students intending to return at the initial phase of reopening. The high number of students intending to return could have been an issue for principals that may have had a small number of staff members available to work in person. This can pose a logistical barrier, as the

pandemic impacts the ability increase class sizes and the availability of extra support. Additionally, principals had to meet any of the noted challenges with the implementation of relatively new health and safety protocols. The principals and staff members had to navigate the demands of coordinating staff and students' return to the site locations for face-to-face instruction.

Suggestions for Further Research

There is a need for additional research on applying social justice leadership at the school and district level for teachers and principals. Further investigation could provide insight into the leadership characteristics beneficial for addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Future researchers could also contribute to the inclusion of the social justice leadership framework at the college and district levels in leadership preparation programs for topics relevant to students with disabilities.

Additionally, future scholars could research the needs and development of principals in special education to assist district leaders in providing professional development suitable for their schools' unique needs. Such research could also provide university leaders and educators information to collaborate with district leaders in establishing leadership options for the special education administrators who support principals. Educational leadership programs might not include topics related to administration services for students with disabilities (Crockett, 2007). Therefore, leaders who take part in solely on-the-job training jeopardize the equitable provision of special education services.

This study's purposeful sampling criteria included schools with high percentages of students with disabilities receiving instruction in the general education setting as reflected on the state-reported least restrictive environment rates. However, there is a need for further research to

explore the behaviors of principals with low least restrictive environment rates at their schools. Future researchers could explore principals' behaviors in implementing a district initiative for students with disabilities inclusion to discern if they display social justice leadership characteristics. Research on principal and teacher perceptions could be a means of exploring equitable access in service decisions and how they promote educational equity for students with disabilities.

Another area of suggested research is the impact of appropriate instructional implementation in the co-taught setting. District and state agency leaders could benefit from examining and comparing least restrictive environment rates to students with disabilities outcomes. There is a need for additional studies of the implementation of co-teaching as an issue of equity for students with disabilities, as equity is an issue of social justice.

Although there is a need for future research on the application of social justice leadership, this study shows the value and impact of social justice leadership. Mr. Flowers's perceived behaviors aligned with social justice leadership and connected with increased students with disabilities access. Mr. Flowers fostered a structure to support the implementation of co-teaching, potentially providing equitable instructional experiences for students with disabilities in co-taught classrooms. School leaders who display behaviors that align with social justice leadership can go beyond increasing students with disabilities participation in the general education setting by ensuring that students with disabilities receive equitable educational opportunities in the general education setting.

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    Publications.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Georgia State University Informed Consent

Title: *Beyond Access: Principals' Behaviors Displayed in the Implementation of a District-Wide Initiative Focused on Students with Disabilities*
Principal Investigator: Sheryl Cowart Moss, Ph.D.
Co-Investigator: Will Rumbaugh, Ed.D.
Co-Investigator: Nick Sauers, Ph.D.
Student Principal Investigator: Nicklaus Khan

Introduction and Key Information
You are invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in the study.

The purpose of the study is to explore the behaviors of principals in the implementation of an initiative for students with disabilities, specifically how or if those behaviors align with the characteristics of social justice leadership.

Your role in the study will last up to 60 minutes over one interview session. If needed, you will be asked to take part in a follow-up interview that will not exceed 30 minutes.

You will be asked to do the following: participate in a virtual video interview lasting up to but not exceeding 60 minutes. If needed, you will be asked to take part in a follow-up virtual video interview that will not exceed 30 minutes. You will also receive a request to provide school-based documents related to the study if available; you will not be asked to develop the documents. The documents requested will include lesson plans and site-based professional development materials.

Participating in this study will not expose you to any more risks than you would experience in a typical day.

This study is not designed to benefit you. Overall, we hope to gain information about principals' behaviors in the implementation of inclusive practices programs focused on students with disabilities. The study will provide additional insight for school districts and educational leadership programs of the influence of specific leadership characteristics in addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

Purpose
The purpose of the study is to explore the behaviors of principals in the implementation of an initiative for students with disabilities, specifically how or if those behaviors align with the

characteristics of social justice leadership. You are invited to take part in this research study because you are employed and were employed with the district involved in this study for at least 3 years within the timeframe of the district initiative. You have also participated in the training session of the district initiative that focused on inclusive practices for students with disabilities related to your respective position. There will be a total of nine people invited to participate in this study.

Procedures

If you decide to participate, you will participate in the following study-related activity. This activity will take up to but not exceed 60 minutes for the initial interview. If needed, you will be asked to take part in a follow-up interview that will not exceed 30 minutes.

- For the study activity, the researcher will conduct one virtual video interview. The interview will not exceed 60 minutes. The interview will be digitally recorded on two devices. One device will be the means of capturing the audio, and another will be the means of capturing both the audio and video. All digital recordings, both audio and video, will be stored in an assigned folder in a password-protected electronic folder.
- The virtual video interviews will commence in alignment with guidance from Georgia State University and applicable government or public health authorities. The interviews will occur at a time of your choice to minimize possible distractions.
- After the interview, the researcher will send a follow-up e-mail with a transcribed copy of the interview attached. The researcher will ask you to review the transcription for accuracy.
- After the interview, the researcher will ask you to provide study-related documents if available. The documents requested will include lesson plans and site-based professional development materials.
- If there are any clarifying questions, the researcher will ask you to participate in a follow-up interview that will not exceed 30 minutes. The researcher will digitally record the follow-up interview with two devices. One device will be the means of capturing the audio, and the other will be the means of capturing both audio and video.

Release of Information

Please indicate in the check box below if you give [School District] permission to release district classroom observation reports of co-taught instructional segments completed by the Department of Special Education district-level leadership to the researcher.

☐ Yes
☐ No

Future Research
The researcher will remove information that may identify you and may use your data for future research. If the researcher chooses to do this, they will not ask for any additional consent from you.

Risks
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe you have been harmed, contact the research team as soon as possible. Georgia State University and the research team have not set aside funds to compensate for any injury.

Benefits
This study is not designed to benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to gain information about of principals' behaviors in the implementation of inclusive practices programs focused on students with disabilities. The study will provide additional insight for school districts and educational leadership programs around the influence of specific leadership characteristics in addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

Alternatives
The alternative to taking part in this study is not to take part in the study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

Confidentiality
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:
- Nicklaus Khan
- Sheryl Cowart Moss, Ph.D.
- Will Rumbaugh, Ed.D.
- Nick Sauers, Ph.D.
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protections

We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The table created to track pseudonyms of participants along with other identifying information, such as audio and video recordings, and the initial interview transcriptions, will be stored in a password-protected cloud-based folder.

When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name or other information that may identify you.

- The table created to track pseudonyms of participants will be deleted upon completion of the final report.
- Other identifying information, such as audio recordings and initial interview transcriptions, will be deleted upon completion of the final report.
- The audio- and videorecording of the interview will be outsourced for transcription. The researcher's criterion for the company selection is the utilization of file encryption software platforms to maintain the security of the recording and transcript. All transcripts upon return will be stored in a password-protected cloud-based folder.

Contact Information
Contact Sheryl Cowart Moss, Ph.D., at 404-413-8277 and smoss13@gsu.edu

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

Consent
We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Overview

The objective of this appendix is to present the interview protocol used with the participants in this study. Each semi structured interview occurred on-on-one and lasted up to but did not exceed 60 minutes. A virtual platform was the means used to schedule all interviews. Virtual video interviews instead of face-to-face interviews commenced in alignment with guidance from Georgia State University and the applicable government or public health authorities. I ensured privacy by using a password-protected virtual interview platform.

I audio-recorded each interview with two digital devices. I ensured confidentiality by storing the digital files in a password-protected online storage platform. I contracted out the digital recordings for transcription.

The participants provided their signed informed consent documents before the research protocol commenced. I obtained informed consent with the informed consent form approved by Georgia State University's Institutional Review Board and the district's review panel. I stored the signed copy of the consent form in a password-protected online storage platform. The participants received the signed copies for their reference. The participants knew that they would receive copies of their interview transcripts for member checking. After the interviews, the participants received thanks for their time. Before ending the interviews, I referred back to the contact information section on the consent form. I emphasized that the participants could contact my dissertation chair, approving review boards, and myself if they had further questions.

The following research questions guided this study of the principal's display of social justice leadership:

1. How does the principal describe their behaviors in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

2. How does the teacher describe the principal's display of leadership in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?

Interview Protocol

Hello. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of the study is to explore the characteristics displayed in the implementation of the district's initiative for supporting students with disabilities. This interview will last no more than 60 minutes. You have provided a signed copy of the consent form before this interview, and you received a copy of the consent form. Do you have any questions about the informed consent? Please note my contact information, dissertation chair contact information, and contact for the review board at the bottom of the consent form if you have questions or concerns. To maintain confidentiality, please refrain from using anyone else's name or revealing anyone's identity during the interview. Now let us begin.

Principal Questions

1. Please state your name and your position.

2. Can you tell me a little about yourself? Please describe your background in the field of education.

3. Are you familiar with the district's inclusive practices plan?

   a. Can you tell me about your experience with the administrator training session?

   b. Please share your likes, dislikes, and any takeaways from that training.

4. Describe your work in creating equitable instructional practices for students with disabilities in the co-taught setting.

   a. How have these practices developed in the last 5 years?

5. What are some barriers/issues, if any, that you have experienced in providing support for students with disabilities?

   a. How have you addressed those barriers/issues?

6. How would you describe your role in advancing inclusive practices for students with disabilities?

7. Do you think your role has an influence on special education students' experience in the co-taught setting?

8. What are some items that you plan to implement next school year to support co-teaching? Why?

That is the conclusion of our interview. Thank you again for your time. After the interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the transcript for your review. I will analyze and use the interview in the results section of my final report. I will not include any identifying information in the final report and will delete any identifying artifacts upon the completion of the dissertation. I would like to remind you that if you have any questions, please refer to the contact information highlighted in your copy of the consent form.

Teacher Questions

Hello. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of the study is to explore the characteristics displayed in the implementation of the district's initiative for supporting students with disabilities. This interview will last no more than 60 minutes. You provided a signed copy of the consent form before this interview, and you have received a copy

of the consent form. Do you have any questions about informed consent? Please note that my

contact information, dissertation chair contact information, and the contact for the review board

at the bottom of the consent form if you have any questions or concerns. To maintain

confidentiality, please refrain from using anyone else's name or revealing anyone's identity

during the interview. Now let us begin.

1. Please state your name and your position.

2. Can you tell me a little about yourself? Please describe your background in the field of
    education.

3. Tell me about your understanding of the district's inclusive practices plan.

    a. Can you tell me about your experience with the teacher training session? Please share
        your likes, dislikes, and any takeaways from that training.

4. How would you explain your role in supporting students with disabilities in the co-taught
    setting?

    a. How do you prepare to support students with disabilities in that setting?

5. What are some barriers/issues, if any, that you have experienced as a co-teacher?

    a. How have you overcome those barriers or received support in dealing with those
        barriers?

6. How does your principal support or promote inclusive practices for students with disabilities?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience in providing support
    to students with disabilities?

That is the conclusion of our interview. Thank you again for your time. After the interview is

transcribed, you will receive a copy of the transcript for your review. I will analyze and use the

interview in the results section of my final report. I will not include any identifying information

in the final report and will delete any identifying artifacts upon the completion of the

dissertation. I would like to remind you that if you have any questions, please refer to the contact

information highlighted in your copy of the consent form.

Appendix C: Results Matrix

Principal perception	Teacher perception	Documents	Themes	Social justice leadership characteristics
RQ1: How does the principal describe their behaviors in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?	**RQ2:** How does the teacher describe their principal's display of leadership in the implementation of an initiative designed to foster equitable educational experiences for students with disabilities through co-teaching?			
• Principal recognizes issues that impact students with disabilities • Scheduling • Resource Allocation • Funding • Implementation of co-teaching • School Culture	• Describes those issues and describes how those issues have been supports by the principal. • Describes the schedule • Not much recollection of the training (IPI)	• Highlights issues faced with co-teaching • Mentions issue with teacher roles in co-taught settings • Highlights the importance of a schedule	A willingness to identify problems	• Making issue of disability central to their advocacy. • Social justice leadership involves participation in democratic, inclusive, and transformative methods to alter social constructs. • A foundational attribute of being a socially just leader is the ability to recognize the inequalities in their school or school system and implement measures to address and

Principal perception	Teacher perception	Documents	Themes	Social justice leadership characteristics
				eradicate the issues…best utilize their resources to address the inequalities of students with disabilities (DeMatthews, 2015).
• Collaborative planning • Looking at students' specific needs • Adjustments to schedule • Thinking about the future of the instructional focus that is needed. • Worked on purposeful hiring and pairing.	• Participates in grade-level collaborative planning • Use of planning tools • Happy with her co-teacher. •	• Did not provide a schedule. • Planning is mentioned in training manuals, along with examples • Scheduling is discussed • Did not provide consent to obtain observations • Big Picture/ Segments Sheet displays a section for planning for each Spec Ed co-teacher. • Big Picture/ Segments Sheet shows a co-teacher for every grade level.	A solutions-oriented approach	• Equity can be valuable at the forefront of special education implementation and planning • Administrators use social justice leadership to address issues dealing with marginalized groups. promoting the critical need for inclusive practices • Despite the challenges, socially just leaders work towards addressing and proposing solutions to obstacles that create and reproduce inequalities (Furman, 2012). • Providing the instructional structure and support to students with disabilities

Principal perception	Teacher perception	Documents	Themes	Social justice leadership characteristics
				for them to have an equitable experience within an inclusive environment (Garner & Forbes, 2013).
				• Within a socially just framework, students with disabilities s should be afforded equitable educational opportunities that go beyond physical placement in the same setting with their nondisabled peers to a quality opportunity while in that setting (Spence & Peña, 2015).
				• Special education must be a focus for socially just administrators (DeMatthews, 2015).
				• Specially designed instruction is beneficial because "marginalized students do not receive the education they deserve unless purposeful steps are taken to change schools on their behalf with both

Principal perception	Teacher perception	Documents	Themes	Social justice leadership characteristics
				equity and justice consciously in mind" (Theoharis, 2007, p.30). • A leader should fuse their instructional knowledge with social justice principles where they can best utilize their resources to address the inequalities of students with disabilities in comparison to their nondisabled peers (DeMatthews, 2015).
• Wants to consider ALL • Drives to include all students with disabilities , even those with high needs • Engages parents • Principal works to set the tone • Intervention program for diverse needs of the school	• Mentions the inclusion of students with High Needs • Said "We" in talking about inclusion • Describes Principal as an advocate	• Training manual mentions that the principal is an advocate	An inclusive mindset	• Inclusive and equitable for all students becomes a fundamental component of social justice leadership (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014) • Socially just leaders may push to guarantee greater access and champion what is required not only legally but also morally to meet the needs of students with disabilities .

Principal perception	Teacher perception	Documents	Themes	Social justice leadership characteristics
				• Socially just leaders in schools where social exclusion deprives people of their right to fully participate in school and community practices and activities, inclusion becomes the core concept of the social justice agenda (Wang, 2018). • Social justice is the foundation for inclusion as it challenges beliefs and practices that further marginalize a particular group (Obiakor et al., 2012). • From the social justice lens, the values of inclusivity, relevance, and democracy are utilized to develop and plan for evaluating how schools promote quality learning (Hartwig, 2013). • Become an activist…This radical mindset required to address the issues of inequality is a

Principal perception	Teacher perception	Documents	Themes	Social justice leadership characteristics
				frame of mind of socially just leaders (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). • Leaders employing the social justice leadership frame aim to influence all stakeholders to comradely encourage justice and equity in schools (Wang, 2018).

Appendix D: External Audit

BEYOND ACCESS:
PRINCIPALS' BEHAVIORS DISPLAYED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A DISTRICT-
WIDE INITIATIVE FOCUSED ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

Study Findings
Synopsis

1. The findings

    A. build logically from the problem and the research design.
        - The structure can be enhanced by developing sub sections for participants and documents
        - You can benefit from displaying more transitions connected to the participants' quotes
        - Clarify jargon related to the study

    B. are presented in a manner that addresses the research questions
        - Although the section addresses the research questions, however I had some clarifying questions related to the inconsistent wording (See notations)

2. Patterns, relationships, and themes described as findings are supported by the data. All appropriate data are accounted for in the findings.

    - Connections can be enhanced by the summaries connected to participant's responses.
    - Themes are supported by the data however the patterns can become muddled. The previous suggestion regarding the addition of sub-sections can be beneficial.
    - Need more connection to your theoretical framework in the summary section
    - Review the alignment of the findings to your summary. There were some instances where there is need for further clarity to the connections to your findings

Adapted from https://www.liberty.edu/media/1118/PhD_CES_Dissertation_Rubric.pdf