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## Components of Inclusive Education at a Public Charter School in the Northwestern United States

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jennifer R. Sweet-Fears

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Components of Inclusive Education at a Public Charter School

in the Northwestern United States

by

Jennifer R. Sweet-Fears

MS, Walden University, 2016

BS, Boise State University, 2014

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

August 2022

## Abstract

Examining the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School is important for its positive impact in its community and being an example to other schools in the northwestern region of the United States. The problem is that the school's surrounding area and region are underserved in inclusive charter school options. The school is an example to other charter schools that would like to engage in a more inclusive academic setting and seeks to explore replication. To gain a better understanding of the impacts of the school's inclusive setting on the students, families, and community, as well as the educators' needs and perspectives, the purpose of this study was to identify, explore, and understand the components of Public Charter School's inclusive academic setting through qualitative methods using interviews with key participants. The analysis process of this study involved categorizing data and recognizing emerging themes from data collected through interviews. The data identified three components: supportive administration in attitude and operational leadership, environment conducive to inclusion, and teacher supports and collaboration. This study will provide the organization with information to continually improve the inclusion model through training and policy and may also be used to make informed decisions regarding replication in the future. The school provides guidance in the region and nationwide and may serve schools that want to implement or improve inclusion. Student success in inclusive academic settings can support acceptance and tolerance, which may lead to more students pursuing higher education and in turn lead to positive social change in communities and beyond.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this research to my family and friends. To my husband, Todd, who did not think I was crazy when I decided to start my college career at 40 years old with a toddler and twin babies, thank you and I love you. My three children, Graham, Claire, and Henry who have been my biggest motivation from bachelor's degree and beyond, thank you. Those in my various circles often ask me, "why?" Why pursue this degree and this focus now? The answer, while multifaceted, is very simple at the core: I wanted to set an example to my children. The day I walked across the stage at Boise State University, with my children watching from the audience, I accomplished precisely what I set out to do. My pursuit *beyond* achieving this degree was then and is now applying what I have learned to promoting positive social change.

As the first in my family to graduate from college, both on undergraduate and graduate levels, I am immensely proud of myself, and hope education remains an important value for my family's generations to come. Thank-you to my mom, Bonnie, and to Dan who have encouraged me along the way. Mom, I am grateful that you listened to my complaining about the many hours and efforts I devoted to this journey. I love you very much, and your pride in me means everything. To my sisters, Heather and Sarah, and their families, for their love and support, I thank you and I love you. So many special people have helped and supported me, encouraging my path, and I gratefully thank my best friends Kim and Joyce for always asking "how is it going?" and hearing my responses from enthusiastic to overwhelmed. I love you both. Also, to my parents' in-

laws, Butch and Jan, for supporting me: thank you. I love you. So, in the end, it really takes a village. I am truly grateful to everyone who helped me.

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A special thank-you to Public Charter school for allowing me to study their impressive and incredible school and the inclusion it practices while achieving high standards. A special thank you to Mr. Shane Pratt who has helped me in understanding the school's academic excellence in inclusion with an always positive and Kids are First attitude. I am grateful.



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## Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

My client organization, referred to in this study as Public Charter School, is a small public charter school of 278 students located in the northwestern United States. It serves kindergarten through eighth grades and is a model for inclusive educational settings. *Inclusive education* is defined as the full commitment to educate each child or student regardless of ability or disability. This is achieved to the maximum extent appropriate while keeping the student in the same school setting and classroom they would otherwise attend with peers for at least 80% of the time (Roden et al., 2013) This setting includes both typical and nontypical students, and involves bringing services, support, and necessary supplemental aids to the child with disabilities instead of moving the child to services in a separate classroom. The framework of Public Charter School's culture had small beginnings, but now contributes on a large scale as children leave Public Charter School and contribute to society.

Public Charter School is said to have accidentally become an inclusive academic setting. The school had minimal facilities combining portable classrooms and a small building set upon a large piece of land. Here, enrollment succeeded, welcoming a large number of parents searching for special attention and alternatives for their children to succeed in school. Notably, enrollment interest also overflowed with traditional students who needed no special accommodations.

Traditional schools often have specified resource rooms that segregate special needs students from non-special needs classroom instruction. Special instructions and lesson plans take place in that dedicated space, with students separated and everyone

from students to parents to teachers to administrators feeling the effects of that gap between students and their lesson plans.

In contrast, Public Charter School had no resource room or other additional space to make these accommodations for students. So, in establishing their model of inclusivity, the school began its instructions by making accommodations in the classroom, amongst peers. As such, student interaction evolved and the school established support methods for student/teacher interactions. Some of these supports included teachers' aides in the classroom, and one-on-one support aides assigned to each student. Students in need of behavioral support received such benefits as quiet testing, a break from sensory input, or an overall break from a busy classroom setting. Public Charter School demonstrated and met an understanding of special needs students' best advantages. The results have been well-received, as the school wisely looked beyond its initial intentions of expanding facilities to build similar spaces as found in traditional schools. It was found to be preferable by parents, students, and staff to stay in the inclusive setting that had been born out of necessity.

As a nod to its vision and effectiveness, Public Charter School has been approached to replicate its model by two large foundations, each with a vested interest in education in the northwestern United States. Replication would bring change to communities in the way students with special needs are served and, in the process, also educate the community on inclusive education policy. Inclusive education is not a privilege for some special education students but is the right of all students (Taylor, 2011). A replication effort would help community residents understand this policy.

However, for communities to support replication, they must first understand the components of inclusive education for students and communities.

I served on the board of Public Charter School for six years. I became involved while seeking a positive educational setting for my son who has Asperger's syndrome. He is the primary reason I pursued higher education. I not only wanted to set an example through my involvement, I sought, a better school experience and learning environment for him and for children like him. My first experience in his young academic career was discouraging, but then we found Public Charter School. He attended the school from first grade through eighth grade, and graduated. His success, and the successes of many other students, drives me to deliver the same inclusive education experience to other schools so that their families, staff, and administrators can achieve beyond expectations as well.

I presented on the topic of inclusive education and finance management to the northwestern region of the United States Board of Directors Annual meeting and found a great interest in expanding inclusive educational settings in the region. Persons expressed a genuine interest in the academic and financial aspects of inclusive settings, and in replicating it. This suggests that the educational community in the northwestern region supports the need for additional inclusive educational settings. While the northwestern United States has a need for additional inclusive academic settings like Public Charter School, its inclusive educational approach can only be understood with a distinct and focused analysis of its model and components. Thus, there remains a need to understand what an inclusive educational setting looks like and to communicate that information to interested parties and communities.



### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that the northwestern region of the United States, and the state in which the school is located, are underserved in charter school options. Further, there is a specific shortfall of inclusive schools (Bodkin, 2018; Ryan, 2013). This cannot be remedied without a clear understanding of inclusive education model components. Interest is high, there is a waiting list of students who with their parents seek inclusive educational opportunities at Public Charter School. However, Public Charter School is at full student capacity, and there are only 49 public charter schools in the entire state according to Ryan (2019). The waiting lists in this region's charter schools can be lengthy and may consist of students who are typical, or normal, in terms of development and intellectual ability, as well as nontypical. The nontypical students may have a diverse number of issues including autism spectrum diagnosis or other intellectual or developmental difference or disability.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify, explore, and understand the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School, and to provide a research brief for my client organization summarizing the study along with recommendations for dissemination. Thus, Public Charter School may use this research brief for the purposes of replicating its model. This study describes the components of the inclusion model at Public Charter School, and its organizational and cultural conditions that may be key contributors to its success. Through interviews with teachers, staff, and faculty, I heard about methods used to validate all students being able to meet high

academic standards. I also heard about appropriate educational modifications and accommodations they utilize to enable students with disabilities to be successful in an inclusive classroom. Further, any experiences of acceptance and tolerance as reported by staff, parents or students are noted and held up as goals for many charter schools, their students, and staff.

### **Nature of the Administrative Study**

The research design that fit my topic is a qualitative case study. Researchers often use a case study approach to investigate the perceptions and reflections of experiences, and to bring collective sense-making, leading to meaning (Crotty, 1998). My study utilizes interviews with purposefully selected participants, offering valued perspectives of the components of inclusion at Public Charter School. Yin (2014) discussed case study research as an integral method for its usefulness, relevance, and quality. Yin further described a case study as using a “realist perspective” and focusing on maintaining objectivity in the methodological process. This objectivity is important to my case study, telling the story of the participants, practicing interviews, and collecting data without bias and is fundamental to understanding the true components of educational inclusion in the classroom setting.

### **Significance**

The significance of this study is that it clarifies the components of the Public Charter School’s inclusive education approach. This knowledge may be useful to the school in communicating its model to other interested public charter schools who may desire to replicate the inclusive education model. This replication approach could also

benefit students who may be considered typical as they learn in a setting side-by-side with nontypical students, thus providing opportunity to promote tolerance and acceptance.

This knowledge may also be useful to stakeholders of Public Charter School, including students, parents, families, teachers, faculty, administration leaders, and the community that the school serves. Student stakeholders could potentially be impacted by the results of this study in contributing to academic success and paving the way for future academic opportunities. Parents and families of students could benefit by becoming informed about personalized learning for their child that is not segregated from peer interactions. Finally, this study may show how inclusion perpetuates positive social change on a global level (Kalambouka et al., 2007) through supporting equality in education.

### **Summary**

Public Charter School is a small but inclusive academic model with a higher-than-average population of special needs students. Being inclusive is what makes the school special in terms of its reputation. The northwest region and state where Public Charter School is located are underserved in charter school options, and there is a specific shortfall of schools that are inclusive (Ryan, 2013). This study identifies and examines the components of inclusion at Public Charter School to provide the school with a clear explanation of its model; and with recommendations for how it may communicate its model to other charter schools that may want to replicate it to serve more students.

## Section 2: Conceptual Approach and Background

The problem is that the school's surrounding area, in its state and within the northwestern United States, are underserved in charter school options overall, and there is a specific shortfall of schools that are inclusive (Bodkin, 2018; Ryan, 2013). This cannot be remedied without a clear understanding of the components of an inclusive education model. The region has a challenge with its lack of charter schools available to serve the state's residents, particularly for parents who want an inclusive academic setting for their children. Waitlists can be lengthy for both typical and nontypical students. Inclusion involves accommodating where necessary to fit the student's need and remain in the regular classroom as much as possible.

The Public Charter School has been approached to replicate its model but must first be able to articulate its inclusive model and its components to make an informed decision to be successful. By articulating its inclusive education model, the school could educate the community regarding inclusion in and beyond an academic setting. Establishing this model would bring positive change in equality aligning with human rights principles and with democratic fundamental essentials in policy influence on a state and federal level.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify, explore, and understand the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School, and to prepare a research brief for my client organization summarizing the study along with recommendations for dissemination. Thus, Public Charter School may use this research brief for purposes of replicating its model.

### **Research Question**

What are the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Public Charter School is interested in exploring the replication of its school model and thus supporting the need in the area and region for additional inclusive charter schools. These charter schools would offer far-reaching benefits for all stakeholders and the community. The desire for these additional schools under the charter has been introduced by large foundations that support regional charter schools, and by community stakeholders, including parents and educators who believe in equality for these students. While the northwestern region and the state where this school is located have a need and desire for additional academic settings like Public Charter School, such a setting can only be successfully replicated with distinct and focused analysis of its model and components.

The following is the conceptual framework for this study. I begin with a description of my deliverable's format as a research brief. I will then provide descriptions of multiple concepts within inclusive education.

### **Deliverable is a Research Brief**

The deliverable of my study will be a research brief presented in document form to my client, Public Charter School. Research briefs describe the research study at the completion of a research project and intend to give the client an overall view of the findings, conclusion, and recommendations. According to Godden (2015), a research

brief is a formal, nontechnical document that summarizes the study to the client with findings, analysis, and recommendations. For a qualitative case study, the research brief should include background, purpose, methods, analysis, and recommendations, allowing the reader to easily understand the information (Baxter & Jack, 2008). My brief includes the background of the study, the purpose and basic procedures of the study, and an analysis of the findings with conclusions and recommendations.

An important element to consider when writing a research brief is the audience, as research briefs are most often presented to decision makers. My research brief will be presented to the administration of Public Charter School. Along with a brief introduction, my brief includes key findings that could support decision making (Berck, 2017). To summarize adequately, I used key points to relay my findings and tell the story of my study followed by a conclusion and any recommendations.

An effective research brief can be useful in presenting information when it is organized, “layered,” and makes a clear recommendation to the client (Princeton University, 2009). After the client organization reads a well-constructed brief, they should understand the following: the problem being addressed, the recommendations and benefits, and any possible costs involved. It is important that briefs are effective in use of space, not repeating nor using unnecessary filler. Every sentence should count (Princeton, 2009). An effective brief also has a clear and organized layout for ease of reading and presentation (Princeton, 2009). I have avoided generalities in my brief by using a clear and concise voice and specifically constructed sentences.

## **Concepts Within Inclusive Education**

The following concepts of inclusive education provide a conceptual framework and have helped in identifying the components in the Public Charter School model as participants shared their perspectives.

### ***The Right to an Inclusive Education***

Inclusive education is a right that arguably presents an ethical dilemma. Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act (193), The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), PL 94-124 (1975), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Department of Education, 1990, 1991, 1997) are the most important laws used to challenge or support procedural issues and to resolve claims of discrimination on the grounds of disability (Myers, 2017). The IDEA requires a least restrictive environment to educate students, which means the student should be educated as closely as possible to their peers who do not have disabilities.

Setting an example for nondiscrimination and acceptance of differences is the goal of Public Charter School and a fundamental in the school setting. While protecting students with disabilities through federal law is a great tool, it has unfortunately become the norm in district public school environments to utilize traditional special education practices of segregating students in a resource room away from peers. Parents often do not challenge the use of resource rooms in traditional special education, but as Public Charter School has modeled and educated parents on the meaning of least restrictive environment and inclusion, they are becoming more attuned to the right of their child to have an inclusive education.

### ***Terminology Specific to Inclusive Education***

Understanding the terms and operational definitions of the school help to visualize the components of inclusion and analysis of them. *Inclusion*, in an educational setting, is the commitment to educate each child or student, to the maximum extent that is appropriate. Keeping students in the school setting and in the classroom that he or she would otherwise attend with the peers of their age group is central to inclusion. This setting would include both typical and nontypical students and involves bringing the services of support and any supplemental aids that might be necessary to the child with disabilities instead of moving the child to the services in a separate classroom.

Inclusive education contends that all students should be accommodated within a general educational setting and in their regular assigned classroom among peers. Students have equal access to available resources and benefits and are supported by special education and general education staff as well as one-on-one para-professional behavioral interventionists (McManis, 2017).

Behavioral interventionists meet one-on-one with special education students and do not instruct academically but are there to help guide the student through the inclusive setting. These specialists are part of a team that consists of parents, administration, special education teachers and general education teachers that provide support to every special education student. My personal experience has been that special support accommodations and needs are well-documented and honored with an individualized educational program (IEP) document.



### ***Capabilities Approach to Inclusion***

Reindal (2016) provided a capabilities approach to inclusion that gives a unique perspective to the divide between regular and special education. Reindal argued that inclusion must be viewed as an ethical issue to bridge this divide between regular and special education. The author further discussed the need for a common definition and interpretation of inclusive education. Having a purpose, Reindal argued, makes inclusive education an ethical issue that is important socially as well as to meet the students varied needs from all aspects.

### ***Teacher Attitude and Practice (Implementation)***

How the teachers implement components on inclusion while teaching to their entire classroom is important to understanding whether inclusion is in fact successful. Teachers need specific training and supports in place for balanced classrooms. Damianidou and Phtiaka's (2018) research highlighted teachers' attitudes and teaching practices that enable inclusive education practices to be successful. This source also focused on proper training of teachers and components of the classroom setting as well as any stereotypes or prejudice that could disable success. I researched how teachers perceive inclusion and whether they feel adequately trained and supported.

To understand the importance of inclusive education as well as the complexities, successes and failures, teachers' attitudes should be examined (Minke et al., 1996). The success of inclusive education is dependent upon positive teacher attitudes, while negative attitudes can have negative effects on inclusion. Acceptance of inclusion by teachers, readiness, and understanding of inclusion all translate as positive in attitude.

Special education teachers must work closely with regular education teachers in support of one another and make appropriate adaptations to support all students. Gathering data on attitudes, satisfaction, and classroom adaptations from both special education and regular education teachers will indicate necessary accommodations for students that are in inclusion model classrooms.

These multiple views including teachers' experiences and attitudes towards inclusive educational settings will provide insight into components necessary for general effectiveness of having special education children in classroom settings with students of all abilities, both typical and nontypical. It is important for the success of all students, as well as to meet expectations and have accountability on all levels (Roden et al., 2013). The goal is successful inclusive educational settings for both the typical and nontypical students in early education, performance of the teachers and staff as well as administration.

### ***Preparation for Higher Education***

The complexity would warrant research pertaining to how children who are educated in an inclusive setting move onto higher education, enter adulthood, and become contributing members of society. A particularly interesting area of research is on the higher education level, applying rules of inclusivity and assessing the particular learning tools and systems that contribute to greater success. Specifically, focus is on which specific aspects of inclusive setting education get these students successfully through school and then through college. Special attention is given to the impacts of inclusion along the way, including innovative inclusion methods and their impressions

upon the students. From here, students' successes through their community schools can lead to higher education and in turn lead to positive social change in communities.

Inclusive academic settings can support acceptance and tolerance and impact students' lives as they head on to higher education and beyond.

### ***Structure of the Classroom***

Resources and literature I have examined that are related to inclusive education settings, structure, and achievements are important to understanding the components of the inclusive setting at Public Charter School. Arduin (2015) discussed western society's reaffirmation to an inclusive education system for everyone. This literature addressed understanding the implications for society, as well as the barriers that might prevent and guarantee true inclusion. I was able to better understand how barriers, if any, might prevent true inclusion of students within the setting.

### ***Unique Needs of Students***

Cullen (2015) analyzed the needs of students with autism in higher education and gave insight into the types of supports needed leading into and during college. To have success in an inclusive setting, the needs of the students should come before anything. I examined through data the components that are invisible to the student, such as the IEP, as well as components that are directly impactful to the student. These components might include special seating or behavioral breaks from a busy classroom.

### ***Student Selection***

Education can be inclusive and having an adequate number of schools practicing inclusion could alleviate the temptation for charter schools to purposefully select fewer

special needs students, benefitting all students by serving without restricting mindset and attitude in leading these schools for all children. Public Charter School may have the opportunity to enhance the learning skills and academic building blocks that foster higher levels of achievement in academic and behavioral standards that can lead to lifelong learning.

### ***Holistic View***

All components of inclusion are important to its success. Da Luz Stelmachuk and da Silveira (2012) provide a collection of research of the experiences of regular education teachers and administrators when instructing students with disabilities. The experiences of those who instruct and support students at Public Charter School are important for me to understand and were a large focus of my study.

These concepts of inclusive education are part of what I looked at to identify the inclusive setting components at Public Charter School. However, components taken together make up a larger general view of successes and possible failures, so it is important to research the overall effectiveness (Roden et al., 2013). Examining the components did expose potential barriers that might prevent inclusion and replication of the model; however, this will be useful to Public Charter School to be able to overcome those barriers.

### **Relevance to Public Organizations**

This research study at Public Charter School has relevance to public organizations in general because it will provide components of the larger mission of the organization.

All public organizations could use this kind of analysis to understand its mission better and to implement its mission more effectively.

This study could also influence the public administration of inclusive education with policies in place for the future to guide those who may be new to a school and not fully understand the inclusion model.

This study could also influence decisions for public organizations made on a state level and the region. Public Charter School is often viewed as an example for other charter schools in the state where it is established, and by articulating the components of its inclusion model. It could lead to other schools adopting similar components in their public administration. The public administration of program development and implementation of an inclusive academic setting could be influenced toward a new understanding of components that work and those that do not work.

### **Organization Background and Context**

Public Charter School is a small school of 278 students located in the northwestern United States. The school serves kindergarten through eighth grades and is a model for inclusive educational settings. Inclusive education is defined as the commitment to educate each child or student regardless of ability or disability to the maximum extent that is appropriate while keeping the student in the school setting and the classroom that they would otherwise be attending with peers for at least 80% of the time (Roden et al., 2013). This setting includes both typical and nontypical students, and involves bringing services, support, and necessary supplemental aids to the child with disabilities instead of moving the child to the services in a separate classroom.

There is a shortfall of charter schools in the area and the region overall (About Idaho Charter Schools, 2019). The student waitlists and demand from parents has prompted the school to examine whether it could and should be replicated to serve nearby communities. Public Charter School would like to be able to serve more students. As a strong and well-established community school in the area, this desire is supported by administration and stakeholders as well as the governing board of directors. The mission and vision of the school find grounding in serving students in a positive, safe, and academically successful environment for all students. The school is dedicated to promoting inclusion through actions in the classroom as well as through its strategic plan with three- and five-year goals in areas pertaining to growth, in areas of classroom, administration and beyond.

Public Charter School has been approached to replicate its inclusion model by two important advocates of charter schools. These organizations have supported Public Charter School in the past through financial restructuring grants and loans to purchase property. Other persons have asked the Public Charter School administration to support other state and regional charter schools, and they have become strong advocates for replication. My administrative study could provide information to help the school decide whether to proceed with replication through highlighting components of the inclusion model that are successful and possibly those that are not.

### **Role of the DPA Researcher**

The role I have as a DPA researcher in this qualitative case study, is to describe the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School in the

northwestern United States. I explained the human element of these components through interviews and built a view of the components. I will be able to articulate my research to stakeholders and board members and the administration, so they might be able to advance in replication of the school and make informed decisions for its future. I have described the deliverable in the form of a research brief, which will be provided to the client organization, Public Charter School. I have adhered to all ethics and research guidelines and made recommendations based on sound research findings.

### **Summary**

This research study will provide information on the components of inclusive education at Public Charter School. Public Charter School would like to be able to serve additional students in an inclusive academic setting and support other schools in offering inclusion. By asking the research question “What are the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School? Supplying a detailed research brief, the school could make supported decisions for its future and the support of other schools and help more students. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to identify, explore and understand the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School, and to prepare a research brief for my client organization summarizing the study along with recommendations for dissemination. Thus, Public Charter School may use this research brief for the school interests and purposes of decisions on replicating its model and supporting other schools pursuing an inclusive model.

### Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

The problem is that the northwestern United States and the state where the school is established are underserved in charter school options with a specific shortfall of schools that are inclusive (Ryan, 2013); and this cannot be remedied without a clear understanding of the components of an inclusive education model. The state has a challenge with its lack of charter schools available to serve the residents of the state, particularly for parents who want an inclusive academic setting for their child (Ryan, 2013). Waitlists can be lengthy for both typical and nontypical students. Inclusion involves accommodating where necessary to fit the students' need and remain in the regular classroom as much as possible.

Public Charter School has been approached to replicate its model but must first be able to articulate its inclusive model and its components to make an informed decision to be successful. By articulating its inclusive education model, the school could educate the community regarding inclusion not only in an academic setting but also beyond and bring positive change in equality aligning with human rights principles and fundamental essentials in policy influence on a state and federal level.

The purpose of this qualitative research is to identify, explore, and understand the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School and to prepare a research brief for my client organization summarizing the study, along with recommendations for dissemination.



### **Practice-Focused Question**

The practice-focused question is the following: What are the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School?

### **Sources of Evidence**

To have the best possible understanding of the components of Public Charter School's inclusive educational setting, I interviewed a variety of participants, including parents, teachers, support aides, and administrators. Qualitative interviews allow researchers to achieve the best possible understanding of a social setting or phenomenon and specifically the school's inclusive components (Creswell, 2013). I spent time interviewing the selected participants to capture their perspectives and insights of those involved in the inclusive model.

I also examined organizational information provided by the special education director at Public Charter School to understand the needs of individual students and teachers. Special education directors coordinate teachers and support staff for special education programs and offer insight critical to understanding inclusion. Understanding the process of targeted school support, performance evaluations, and improvement plans provides details to compare past inclusive practices to current practices to measure improvements.

### **Evidence Generated for the Administrative Study**

Qualitative methods are often used in evaluations because they tell the program story by capturing and communicating participants' stories. My intention was to gather information and generate findings that would be useful in understanding the components

of the school's inclusive academic program (see Patton, 2015). Personal interviews of selected participants provided rich information as to the components of the inclusive model as well as how interviewees view those components and their impact on student success.

Open-ended interviews are less structured and can become a conversational tool for research. Open-ended interviews reveal stories of the participant's experiences, as opposed to simple answers to specific questions (Yin, 2009). I chose key participants to interview, including administration, special education department heads, and teachers to create a well-rounded view of the components of inclusivity at Public Charter School. In depth and open-ended interviewing along with a standardized set of questions provide each participant with the same basis or stimulus for the interviews (Patton, 2015).

Through qualitative methodology, I utilized interviews with key persons involved in Public Charter School's inclusive classroom settings. I took time to establish trust with participants during initial introductions and meetings and gather data through interviews, while protecting identities of individuals. Collecting data in the natural setting allows participants to speak directly and feel empowered to tell their stories of experiences in the inclusive setting. I interviewed 11 participants to gain balanced perception and reach data saturation (Creswell, 2014). In keeping with the constructivist approach discussed by Creswell (2014) and Crotty (1998), my intent was to inductively research and generate meaning from participants interviews.

### *Selection*

Purposeful sampling is when participants are selected based on their specific involvement in the topic being researched (Creswell, 2013). For this study, I selected participants who are intimately involved in the Public Charter School model of inclusive education as they are best equipped to help identify the components of inclusive education that are making an impact on students. This allowed me to explore and more fully understand the components of inclusive education from the perspective of multiple viewpoints including administrators, parents, teachers, and students. The experience of the students and the progress they make in inclusive classrooms is described through my qualitative research data collection.

Participants were selected for their unique experiences and views of the inclusion setting at Public Charter School. Participants included administration, faculty, staff, and parents to gather data that represents all vantage points of inclusion. Administrator input added to the logistics of inclusive components from a management viewpoint and helped understand financial, legal, and planning elements. Faculty, specifically the special education director, helped with understanding IEPs and components that might be personalized for specific student needs. Teachers offer a unique perspective of the overall classroom components and educational measures and accommodations. I also interviewed an educational assistant and paraprofessional to gain insight into their support of the teachers and students. Parents are a critical part of my data collection, as they offer knowledge on student happiness and component success. The components of the academic setting as told from these individual vantage points bring personal values to

my study. Participants were selected for their unique position or vantage point of the inclusive education program at Public Charter School.

### *Participants*

Maxwell (2013) stated that through qualitative design, a researcher's intent should not be to generalize, but to explain, describe, and interpret participant's experiences. A purposeful selection of participants and open-ended questioning created a sample that describes the components of inclusion. I listened carefully to what participants said and described regarding the setting (Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998). This purposeful sample comprised 11 individuals, including two parents, two teachers, three support aides, and four administrators.

All participants play a critical role in implementation of support to students in the inclusive setting. Each was interviewed around their unique perspective of the inclusive model:

- Parents provided insight pertaining to their child's experiences and how the components work to help them learn in true inclusion. I interviewed two parents of students who are on an IEP and fit criteria for special education. I gained knowledge into each student's experiences through their parent's insights and vision of how their child is doing in the inclusive model. The perspective of this vantage point is important to understanding the components and successes or failures.
- Teacher interviews provided understanding of the components they provide and their unique view of the inclusive setting daily. I interviewed two regular

education teachers to cover a variation of grade levels. Teacher's experiences, and attitudes towards inclusive educational settings helped me understand the successes and failures. I selected teachers with experience at different grade levels to understand the components at multiple grades. It is important to assess the general effectiveness of having special education children in classroom settings with students of all abilities, both typical and nontypical.

- Support aide interviews helped me understand the components they deliver in the classroom for the teacher and student. I included three support aides to collect a variation of grade levels. Support aides include persons hired specifically to work one on one with and support a particular student throughout their school day. I interviewed one individual from this category and one support aide who supports the teacher in the overall classroom to explore the different needs of each and how they support students.
- Administrators, including both the principal and assistant principal, special education director and business manager provided insight and understanding into the components from a support, business, and academic view, unique to how the components are overseen and managed. One of my study's most critical participants was the special education director (administrative participant). This person is in a position of creating, orchestrating, and implementing all the components. They conduct IEP meetings with parents, teachers, administration, and support aides and has valuable insight to the overall picture of Public Charter School inclusion setting.

### *Procedures*

I invited participants by sending an informed consent form via email. I provided a brief introduction of myself followed by an overview of my study, including background information and procedures with sample questions. The consent form informed potential participants that the study was voluntary, apprised them of any risks and benefits, and supplied them with privacy information and contact information for questions and rights advocacy. The consent form indicated that they should reply if they would like to participate and that, upon receiving a positive response, I would set up appointment times and confirm a meeting place. Each interview was recorded and conducted in a private area or via phone call or the Zoom videoconferencing platform (<https://zoom.us>). I began each interview with a quick background and informed them that I would be recording and taking notes.

**Instrumentation.** I used a specified set of open-ended questions for each participant group, with a baseline of questions that were the same for all groups. The administrators, teachers, support staff, and parents were interviewed with questions that included some specific components. For example, included in administrative interviews were questions to better understand academic testing in the school and to confirm and understand how the components support delivery of instruction success. I interviewed the special education director to understand any special supports for students that make up the components of inclusion. I included in this interview questions that pertain to IEPs to confirm and understand how these components support delivery of instruction success. This interview helped me understand the general effectiveness of having special

education children in classroom settings with students of all abilities, both typical and nontypical. It is important for the success of all the students as well as to meet expectations and have accountability on all levels (Roden et al., 2013). Having open-ended questions with some specifically targeted questions allowed me to have rich conversations with the participants about inclusive academics at Public Charter School. Each interview was between 30-60 minutes in length.

**Interviews.** Procedures included interviews in an informal discussion. Interviews were conducted according to appointment times set with participants. All interviews took place at Public Charter School in a private office or via Zoom or phone call to ensure that participants would feel comfortable and may speak freely and openly. Interviews were recorded on a voice recording application using my phone, and I used a notebook to record handwritten notes. Data were preserved in recorded form and transcribed to ensure that data were preserved safely and that I would be able to revisit each participant's responses. As the interviewer, I listened carefully to participants, as well as observed their responses. I respond appropriately to encourage a deeper and more rich response, while remaining unbiased, neutral, and respectful (Patton, 2015).

### ***Protections***

My research protected participants' confidentiality and privacy. All interviews adhered to standards of ethics with consent forms for each participant. I adhered to standards and guidelines of Walden University and was committed to protecting participants. The data were recorded and protected to ensure privacy and integrity as well as against loss. My responsibility as a researcher is to assure confidentiality, participant

protection and secure data storage. In addition to cultivating a rapport with participants to assure them that I would treat their data with respect and maintain privacy, I stored research records with integrity. My data notebook will be always kept in a secure location and with back-up in a secure computer file.

This section discusses the procedures used to ensure ethical protection of the participants in the Professional Administrative Study in the following areas:

**Strategies for Recruitment.** I adhered to the guidelines and recommendations of Walden University's IRB. Ethical concerns are a priority for all researchers, I took precautions and steps to recruit participants based on IRB approved strategies. I was granted access by the organization to email addresses for a targeted selection of potential participants. I used IRB approved consent forms with invitations to invite participation in the study. The participants of my research study were invited via an approved consent forms and responded with consent to my study. All participants volunteered and chose the time, date and place they would like to meet. Eleven participants accepted; interviews were in private locations to protect them. There were no unpredictable incidents or ethical concerns.

**Consent and Privacy.** Perspective participants received a consent invitation email that explained that participation was voluntary and there was no compensation. Participants were informed they could opt out at any time throughout the process. Participant identification and data for my study is confidential. Confidential data were stored on a secure computer with backup to cloud storage. All notes were dictated and stored in the same manner. I took care to mask my organization and used a pseudonym



for the school's name. I did not identify or name any participants and numbered each of them for confidentiality.

**Client Organization Approval.** My client organization agreed to participate in this study. Please see appendix C.

**Walden IRB Approval.** My research study's Walden University approval number is 07-30-21-0599651 and expires July 29, 2022. The participants of my research study were invited via an approved consent forms and responded with consent to my study. All participants volunteered and chose the time, date and place they would like to meet. Participants accepted; interviews were in private locations to protect them. There were no unpredictable incidents or ethical concerns.

### **Analysis and Synthesis**

The process of analysis involved categorizing, coding and analysis of the collected data as well as recognizing emerging themes and variables (Yin, 2017). I asked interview questions and used participant's responses to compile themes and patterns and identify the components of inclusion. The data collected for this qualitative case study was transcribed and organized into coded categories, paying careful attention to emerging themes and patterns. I read transcripts, listened to recordings, and immersed myself in the data to better understand and extract major topics that participants discussed and categorize as needed.

### **Analysis Systems**

The system that I used in my analysis of the data is a manual system. Once interviews were completed, I reviewed collected notes and transcripts of all the

participants. I read and re-read the evidence while closely watching for emerging themes and patterns while conducting research and making detailed notes of any first impressions. Through the process of narrative analysis, I collected content from interviews and focused on the stories and experiences of the participants and did this by separating and counting the idea, or thoughts and topics that participants talked about to get a visual picture of the narrative data (Creswell, 2007).

This analysis framework led to labeling of data to identify broader emerging concepts or thoughts. Once I identified overall thoughts, I looked for connections through common responses by participants. These thoughts were organized in such a manner as to provide a clear picture of the findings which lead to recommendations that I will provide to the organization.

### **Procedures to Ensure Integrity of Evidence**

The following will outline the procedures that I used to assure the integrity of the data collected through interviews was protected from bias. I separated these procedures into the categories of credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and outliers.

#### ***Credibility***

A credibility issue that could arise is single researcher bias as I have historical knowledge of the school's inclusive program through my personal experiences as a mother of a student who was at Public Charter School for several years. To mitigate this bias, I did not insert my own opinion into the interviews but only investigated the views

of the participants. I was able to ensure that their views were captured and not influenced by my own views and experience.

Second, the data is credible because the participants were carefully selected for their unique vantage point and expertise on the inclusive components at the school. They were immersed in the school, its program, and its students. I recorded each participant's unique experience and insight and credibility just as they shared it with me.

### ***Transferability***

The transferability of the evidence I collected is high because the participants are vetted for their knowledge, experience, and expertise in the inclusive academic setting. The administration leaders, teachers, staff, and parents selected have been involved with Public Charter School for a long period of time and offered insight into the components from varied vantage points. Since the information came from experienced persons located in an inclusive educational setting, the evidence should be able to be easily transferred for application in another like inclusive setting.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability of the evidence is supported through consistency in interviews. I asked the interview questions in the same manner to each of the interviewees to ensure that the evidence obtained was dependable. I asked questions that are the same, along with specialty questions for area of expertise. I also listened to my recordings of the interviews to ensure that I represent the evidence in the same way it was shared, thus also ensuring accuracy of the data.

### ***Confirmability***

This threat to the trustworthiness of the evidence was addressed by the fact that the participants are known to me and aware of my involvement in the school in past years. This led to them being open and honest in answering the questions of the interview, thus providing information that is accurate and can be confirmed. My relationship to the school provides access to participants that otherwise may not be possible, and this will enhance the ability to obtain accurate and important information.

### **Analysis Procedures**

Through inductive analysis, I discovered a pattern of thoughts and themes and categories in the data and continued building analysis and confirm and examine deviant cases that don't fit into categories. Categorizing interview data provides a clear and convenient way to find commonalities and patterns in identifying components of inclusion (Patton, 2015). My initial examination of the data revealed 96 standout thoughts. I then narrowed down these thoughts into 11 topics. Topics were grouped into five categories that encompassed the 11 topics into a narrower view to focus on identifying the possible components. As themes became more distinct, I identified three components resulting from my study. Detailed notes include data that is consistent with the majority in my analysis and will be explained in more detail in section 4.

### **Summary**

In this section, I provided details of the framework of my study. I included participant procedures, data collection, and analytical procedures to answer the research

question, “What are the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School?”

## Section 4: Results

In this chapter, I explain the findings of my research study. I restate the number of participants and provide participant demographics and characteristics relevant to the study. I describe the location and duration of data collection for each participant and describe how I recorded the data. Included are also any variations in data collection from the plan and any unusual circumstances encountered in data collection.

### **Introduction**

Public Charter school is a small school located in the northwestern United States that serves kindergarten through eighth grades and is a model for inclusive educational settings. *Inclusive education* is defined as the commitment to educate each student regardless of ability or disability to the maximum extent that is appropriate while keeping the student in the school setting and the classroom with which they are comfortable and would otherwise be attending. Public Charter School began as a small school but now contributes on a large scale as children leave and contribute to society.

The problem is that the Northwest United States is underserved in charter school options with a specific shortfall of schools that are inclusive (Ryan, 2013), and this cannot be remedied without a clear understanding of the components of an inclusive education model. The practice focused question is: What are the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School?

The past year's pandemic was not without effects on the school, including inclusion. There were additional items cited that supported inclusion that normally would not have been present. Although these components were unusual and initially a challenge,

participants expressed that these became valuable and possibly will be included in the norms of the setting. There was also a change in key personnel that would lead to a better understanding of inclusion and play a part in balancing new elements and practices with the standing ones.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify, explore, and understand the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School, and to prepare a Research Brief for my client organization summarizing the study along with recommendations for dissemination. Thus, Public Charter School may use this Research Brief for purposes of continuing successful inclusion in the school, replicating its model and supporting other schools that wish to implement or improve inclusion.

### **Demographics**

Participants in the study represented school administrative positions, teachers, and teacher aides, as well as parents. Administration included the school administrator (principal), assistant principal, special education director and office manager. These four positions were chosen for their expertise in finance, education, academic data, and relationships with staff, students, parents, and community stakeholders. Each offered unique perspectives on their professional roles identifying the components of inclusion. I selected teachers and teacher aides for their academic and support expertise in the classrooms. I included specific parents, chosen for their unique perspective on student success and any possible shortcomings in the setting.

The 11 study participants included four men and seven women. The age range was from 26 to 63, with 10 of the participants being over the age of 30. The level of

education was predominantly college undergraduate ( $n = 10$ ) with one graduate level participant. Participants' roles included two parents, four administrators, two teachers/faculty, and three support staff. Four participants had been employed at the school for 1–3 years, whereas the other seven had worked there for 3 or more years.

### **Sources of Evidence**

I gathered evidence for the study from participants that I selected purposefully, which means that they were persons with the most knowledge about the phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenon of the study was the inclusive model of education and the participants I chose were the ones most situated in the school to have perspective and insight into the inclusive model.

### ***Interviews***

I conducted interviews with 11 participants to identify and understand the setting and possible components of inclusion at the school. Through interviews with two teachers, three support staff, four administrative faculty, and two parent participants, I was able to learn about methods used to support students being able to meet academic standards, and what appropriate educational modifications or accommodations that might be utilized to enable students with disabilities to be successful in an inclusive classroom. I set appointments with selected participants, and each interview was planned for 30–45 minutes in length. Interviews ranged in time from 30 to 60 minutes, with the longest interviews being with administrators. Interviews with participants took place in the school setting and in an office with the door closed for privacy. Four participants



preferred interviews conducted via Zoom or phone call after hours for privacy and outside of work hours, as well as due to COVID restrictions and distance preferences.

Each interview was audio recorded and data saved in the Voice Memo application via Apple iPhone. Whether at the school or via Zoom, private locations were used. I took handwritten notes for all 11 interviews. All participants met the criteria for my study based on their unique position or role in the school's inclusion model. I used the presented interview questions (see Appendix B) for each specific group, and data collection proceeded according to my presented methods and plan. I developed questions for interviews that were appropriate to the different roles and qualifications of the participants. Since I took an open-ended interview approach, these questions were a starting point and prompted rich discussions through additional relevant questions and to ensure deeper conversations.

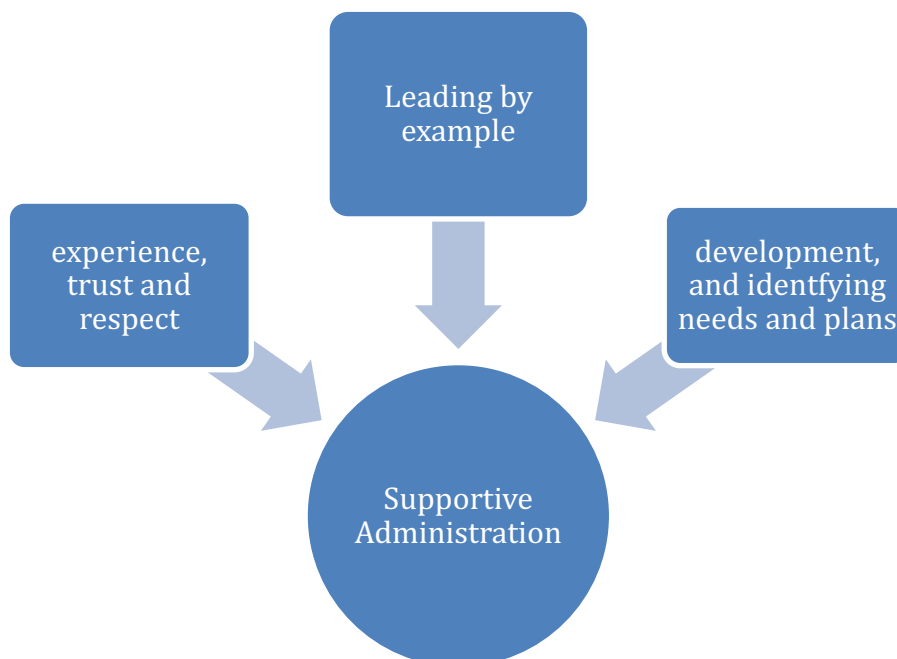
### ***Analytical Strategies Employed***

I used a manual system of data analysis to categorize the data collected. I took handwritten notes during each interview process with each participant and their recorded interviews. After the interview process, I reviewed the notes and recordings and took additional notes. The additional notes allowed me to reflect on interviews and more deeply think about the responses. I was then able to develop a list of words, written on paper, that were extracted from specific elements of my conversations with participants. Figure 1 is an example of my analysis strategy where I grouped multiple thoughts into one topic. In this example, experience, trust, respect, leading by example and identifying needs and plans could be grouped under supportive administration. I made 11 topics from

the 96 initial thoughts. Using a continual motion of data, I was able to start organizing and creating categories.

**Figure 1**

*Example of Analysis Strategy Used*



First, I identified 96 thoughts that were possible emerging topics (shown later in Table 1). I began to group the 96 thoughts into topics according to focus. To further narrow my data and begin to understand the possible themes or components of inclusion, I grouped the 11 topics into five categories. I did this process by making handwritten notes that would later be represented in included tables. These categories were then examined closer to see what possible themes might emerge that could become the sought-after components of the inclusive setting at the school. The following provides a more detailed analysis of the data leading to the study's findings.

## **Findings and Implications**

Participant involvement was anonymous and confidential; therefore, names are not included in the results and findings of my study.

### **Analysis of Data**

I started reading and listening to interviews multiple times to extract distinct thoughts that are mentioned and the frequency by each participant. I initially scanned the interview data with a broad overall view of the information. I intended to see if any overall points stood out. After taking an overall approach, I began by organizing and preparing data for analysis by arranging my interviews into groups of administration, teachers and support staff, and parents, to look at the data in groups and what stood out in each group. These groupings bring different perspectives with their different roles in their involvement in the school. As I examined each grouping with an overall view, I began to look closer at individual interview data and break down the information into more points. Initially there were 96 different thoughts generated in interviews. I then narrowed these 96 thoughts down by either frequency of use or by similarity of meaning, eventually identifying 11 standout common topics shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*96 Thoughts Categorized Into 11 Topics*

Leadership	Training	Peer support	Supportive administration	Environment	Parent support	Teacher supports	Language	Mindset	Collaboration	Financial
example	training	support	support	accommodating	support	support	students	students	building	service
leadership	building	trust	students	modify	building	students	collab	disability	concepts	students
respect	concepts	assist	model	isolation	exceptional	parents	parent	special	students	disability
concepts	service	team	trust	students	service	assist	language	behaviors	model	reimbursement
service	disability	peers	parents	disability	students	administrator	inclusive	parents	collab	assist
students	autonomy	mentors	administrator	participate	disability	lessons	entirety	foundation	parents	money
model	foundation	efforts	hiring	foundation	trust	focus		environment	lessons	funding
foundation	push-in	goals	staff	language	participate	implementation		willingness	design	cost
language	language		help	inclusive	personalized	planning		mindset	administrator	data
hiring	funding		compliance	entirety	all	learning			design	
administrator	inclusive		interventions	team	inclusive				relationship	
all	data		accessibility	schedule	teacher				prepared	
education	technology			experiences	empathy				team	
quality	resources			uniformity	paraprofessional				we	
supports	barriers			needs	social				challenges	
legal	adaptation			perspectives	individual					
program	curriculum			classroom						
strategies	methods			approach						
roles	knowledge									
assessment	experience									
evaluation	improvement									

Table 2 categorizes the frequency of topics by participant. Participants were coded numbers 1–11 to keep identity and position protected. Of the 96 original thoughts, 11 emerged as topics and these are listed in the table.

**Table 2**

*Analysis of Interview Topics by Frequency*

Interview topics	Frequency by participant no.										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Leadership	11	7	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Training	4	1	2	1	7	5	1	1	1	1	1
Peer support	1	4	1	1	8	7			3	1	1
Supportive administration	6	13	8	4	12	7	3	2	1	4	2
Environment	2	8	16	7	4	3		1	4	1	1
Parent support	1	3	6		6	3	4	1			
Teacher supports	4	6	1		1	1	2	3	5	3	2
Language	6	4			3	3	1		1		
Mindset	2	1	1		1	1	2	1			
Collaboration	8	4			6	6			2	3	1
Financial	2	1		6	1	1					

These 11 topics were then identified as possible themes or components that needed to be further examined to see if they were in fact distinct. For instance, when trust was introduced as a topic, I found that among administrative interviewees and teachers, this seemed to be like peer support. Another example is that all participants mentioned attitudes and positivity and negativity, I then decided these could be grouped into the theme of mindset. Therefore, from the 11 major topics, five surfaced as categories, and possibly fundamental components to the inclusive setting at the school. These categories

are represented in Table 3 and will be further discussed in more detail in the Summary of Categories section.

**Table 3**

*Five Categories of Components of the Inclusive Setting*

Categories	Frequency of mentions
Supportive administration	62
Environment	47
Leadership	30
Collaboration	30
Teacher supports	28

Out of these five categories, I developed three themes that capture the essence of inclusive education at Public Charter School. These will be discussed later in this findings section. The following will provide details of my interviews.

***Review of the Interviews***

In this section, I will review and summarize each participant's interview by describing some key thoughts. I will provide details and quotes when appropriate to support my findings. Table 4 previews the interview participants' roles, which I summarize below.

**Table 4***Interview Participants' Roles*

Participant no.	Participant roles
1	Administration
2	Administration
3	Administration
4	Administration
5	Teacher
6	Teacher
7	Parent
8	Parent
9	Support staff
10	Support staff
11	Support staff

**Administrative Participant 1.** Administrative participant 1 emphasized modeling trust, collaboration, and being a strong leader. I asked this participant to tell me more about collaboration in the inclusive classroom setting, and their reply was, “teachers learn best from other teachers.” This participant went on to tell me about the areas in which teacher collaboration were most important. They told me that being a strong leader and setting an example meant working alongside teachers to collaborate, but also allowing them to collaborate through their own unique vantage point of the classroom and sharing different training opportunities and experiences that may be effective for other teachers at different grade levels. This participant said that the school holds weekly and monthly meetings and professional development periods that allow for a good amount of collaboration among all staff and faculty for various reasons. One example was a monthly teacher meeting that directly addresses special education and various

needs for successful inclusion and student success. This meeting was attended by all teachers and administration aside from the office manager.

**Administrative Participant 2.** Administrative participant 2 told me about the importance of “we” in the inclusive setting and how teamwork, collaboration and peer support can perpetuate this. There is only one classroom per grade at this small school, this participant expressed more inclusion is always the goal for student deliverables and learning and that the school used a “Push-In” approach. The “Push-In” approach is when the general education teacher and the special education teacher or other specialists like speech and occupational therapists work in close collaboration to ensure students are experiencing full general education in the regular classroom with the least amount of time pulled out of the classroom. This participant also discussed the coordination of academic delivery to students in inclusion. They also made an interesting point on keeping inclusion from being a distraction in the classroom while being effective for all students. The environment of the classroom is distinctly important and foundational to inclusion they described.

**Administrative Participant 3.** Participant 3 discussed the importance of IEPs for students with special needs and having a team that understands and supports the plan. The team includes the student’s general education teacher, special education teacher/director, any support staff needed like speech and occupational therapists and the parents of the student. With a clear plan in place to support the student and every person on the team involved, the student has a better inclusive experience with the least amount of removal from the classroom. IEPs are specific to the student’s needs and have specific



accommodations and modifications to support their learning. This participant also emphasized the importance of continued training for teachers in inclusion. Also noted: environment, language, mindset and hiring the best fit for the school were critical.

**Administrative Participant 4.** Participant 4 discussed the financial importance of inclusion in the school. We specifically discussed how special education is funded by billing services that are reimbursed by the state and federal government to support the program through Medicaid and other funds. This interviewee also mentioned that some schools may not practice inclusion due to funding challenges and felt that more schools needed to be informed on how to make the financial element less challenging and intimidating. They expressed that Medicaid reimbursement billing can be complex and if more information and training in this area were available, more schools would practice inclusion. This participant also took the time to tell me about the impact on parents of special education students in inclusion. Subjects shared that many parents express deep gratitude when they see their child flourish and are included when they might not be in other schools. The personal satisfaction this participant felt was the driving force behind wanting to better inclusion at the school.

**Teacher Participant 5.** Teacher participant 5 focused on collaboration. This participant told me that their best source of tools for success came from talking to other teachers to find out what might be working for them in certain situations. For example, having a student with autism and a tendency to get distracted by their surroundings. This teacher confided in a teacher in the next grade up and found that where that student sat in the classroom was an easy adjustment to make so the student could focus better. A

teacher recommended that the student be allowed to take a sensory break if they started to feel overwhelmed. This could mean taking a few minutes in the hallway for a drink of water with a support staff. I asked this participant about classroom distractions for the entire class when a support staff is in the classroom with a student and the response was simply, it's very much the norm for our students, as they experience true inclusion everyday with these types of dynamics. This participant also said that having a strong leader like the principal was key to the overall success of the entire school and inclusion specifically, for without the overall success of the school, they could not practice true inclusion.

**Teacher Participant 6.** Teacher participant 6 was focused on teachers' supports in the classroom. Having support staff to help students spend time in the classroom while not distracting the classroom was this participant's number one necessary element of the classroom's success. Support staff, or paraprofessionals, are in the classroom one on one with the student they support. They are present not to deliver instruction or as an academic support, but simply to support the student. Support by these staff can be for behavior related issues or to keep the student on task and help them keep focus. This participant said this support is invaluable. Having a teacher's assistant to help with academic and schedule tasks was also mentioned. This is a general support for the entire classroom's needs. This participant also mentioned the importance of expertise in the director/administrator's methods of identifying needs, recognizing, and understanding students' diagnoses and then explaining and supporting the teacher in this knowledge.

**Parent Participant 7.** Parent participant 7 spoke of their student/child benefitting from inclusion socially. Having peer interactions and being included throughout as much of the instruction hours as possible helped their child feel welcome to participate and no different than their classmates. They attribute confidence supported by this element of inclusion. This participant said, “my child is more confident and outgoing”. I asked how they felt inclusion contributed to their child learning the material and they responded that although they may not be at grade level, they were learning at their level. They also expressed great pride in their child experiencing inclusion at school.

**Parent Participant 8.** Parent participant 8 discussed that they were impressed with leadership of the school and support from leadership of inclusion for their child. They choose the school precisely for the inclusion environment and remarked that a prior school their child attended did not practice inclusion. This participant expressed that their child had a team of people supporting them and was very happy with the support. This participant spoke of the administration being approachable and understanding of their needs in inclusion.

**Support Staff Participant 9.** Support staff participant 9 is responsible for one student but observes an entire classroom. This participant was working with a child who had high behavioral issues in a lower grade elementary classroom and said they also had multiple students in that classroom with one-on-one support. The participant said collaborating with a teacher supportive of inclusion was important and that the classroom environment was also a key factor. An example of the environment they gave was an

overall sense of total inclusion. Language used, teamwork, attitudes, and mindset were all mentioned.

**Support Staff Participant 10.** Support staff participant 10 was responsible for one child at a time but was in a substitute position and worked with a different student sometimes daily, weekly or a month at a time. This was a unique vantage point as the participant experienced different grade levels, ages and levels of need and teaching styles. This participant said that support staff training that aligned with the teacher training was a valued element. Aside from the training unique to the responsibilities of the support staff in terms of student need in behaviors and focus, etc., having training by the teachers and leaders in the school helped support being a team and having common language, mindset, and focus.

**Support Staff Participant 11.** Support staff participant 11 worked with an older middle school student about to head to high school. This participant said that socially inclusion was important to their student and contributed to confidence and social skills building. The participant stated that having a supportive and present parent that worked with them and the teacher closely was an important element of success in the classroom. Also noted was the fact that members of this classroom had been together for most of their kindergarten through eighth grade years. I thought this was interesting as it was a glimpse of the success of inclusion at this school.

### ***Summary of Topics***

In this section, I will give a brief description of each topic that derived from my original 96 thoughts. Each topic will have information on the importance it has in inclusion at the school.

**Leadership.** The data showed that leadership in the school is a critical part of inclusion. Leadership in the school encompasses many elements particularly with the principal or administrator of the school. This position sets the tone and pace by which the school functions. I found that leading by example was a commonly mentioned point. It was clear that the leader of the school sets an example in many areas, notably in inclusion, they set the example for mindset, language, positive work environment and trust. Additional administrators set other leadership examples. For example, the administrator in the position of special education director, contributes guidance and leadership to teachers in academic instruction and support under a student's IEP and provides ongoing training for teachers and support staff. Additionally, the administrative position held by the assistant principal supports academic delivery and teacher collaboration and peer mentoring among teachers. One administrative participant said, "How can I expect my staff and faculty to conduct the day any differently than I do?" This quote was expressed as an important cornerstone for all aspects of success in the school and inclusion.

**Training.** Ongoing training for all staff and faculty is an integral part of inclusion at the school. The data showed that training for administrators, teachers, and support staff supports inclusion. Training can include multiple areas such as legal compliance,

financial support, special education topics and academic delivery as well as social inclusion aspects. It was often noted among participants that continued training helped ensure the success of the students. A support staff participant said that they enjoyed when they had a monthly meeting for ongoing training in special education. They described it as being multifaceted and boosting their confidence in the classrooms. A select administrator would run the meeting. Or, a teacher or guest would contribute their expertise in their training.

**Peer support.** Peer support was a term used often among the teachers to describe not only how they collaborate, but how they interact with one another, even how they discuss and vent about teaching inside and outside of school. This data was expressed with importance to teachers feeling fulfilled and positive, as it felt they were describing that it gave them a way to socialize about teaching with those who truly understood what their jobs involve. Teacher participants said that being able to collaborate ideas and problem solve with each other was effective not only in classroom implementation, but also allows them to vent in a constructive way or simply understand the day in and day out challenges they face.

**Supportive Administration.** The data collected showed that supportive administration involves making decisions in the best interest of the school's inclusion. A teacher participant mentioned an example of this method. Administration supports inclusion in the school when they hire individuals who are a good fit, hiring those who share views on the importance of inclusion and how it is supported in the environment with language and mindset. Supportive administrators are available to the teachers to hear

them, trust them, and guide them and support them in all elements. The teachers noted an approachable administration that they could access easily for support.

**Environment.** A positive environment in the school, particularly the classroom, was a common mention and data showed the importance of this. A positive environment with focus on all students being able to flourish is supported by use of positive language, having a positive mindset regarding inclusion, as well as the physical environment of the school. Classrooms that are designed with all students in mind that allow for easy accommodation when needed. For example, if a student needs preferential seating, or a quiet corner for behavioral support. Using appropriate positive terminology was mentioned as important, as students may not understand the impact of using negative words or labels regarding students who may have special needs.

**Parent Support.** Parent support involves the parent supporting their student, the teacher and the teacher supporting the parent and student. Interview data made a clear connection between parents' support and inclusion. The communication between the parent and teacher is a collaborative one, and the parent is part of the IEP team. Communication supports students academically, behaviorally, and socially in the school. A parent participant said that being part of the team made them feel more confident their child was getting their academic and social needs in school met.

**Teacher Supports.** Teacher supports in the school's inclusive classrooms range from leadership supports to ongoing training and personal development to teacher's aides and special need student support. Teachers are supported by administration in the areas of leadership and training or personal development time. Other areas of teacher supports are

collaboration and peer support. Teachers collaborate on needs in the classroom and share training when beneficial. Teacher peer support is slightly different and is a social support.

They are supplied classroom aides for the classroom that have an overall position and are an assistant to the teacher and support to all students. These support staff may assist in grading work, watching the classroom if the teacher needs to step out delivering and helping with academic instruction or tutoring. They may have other duties like making copies, etc. Other support staff in the classroom are one on one aides for each student that needs this support as decided by the IEP team. While one classroom may have one student with a support staff, another could have multiple students with support staff. These support staff only work with the student they are assigned to and do not deliver academic instruction or academic support in anyway. This staff supports the student based on need and disability. For example, a student that may have behaviors that disrupt the class, the staff would redirect the student and possibly remove the student from the classroom for a break.

**Language.** The use of positive language in inclusion at the school was important on a social level but also noted that the use of correct terminology regarding special needs, disabilities and differences was critical to providing a positive setting for all students. Language in the inclusive setting contributes to a positive environment and the success of all students. A parent participant referenced their child's disability having outward appearing differences and the importance of students not using negative language.



**Mindset.** Positive mindset or attitude about inclusion in the school is valued as a priority. Teachers set the tone for the entire classroom with positive mindset and can lead to positive and supportive student interactions and academic success. A positive mindset is, along with language, built on the importance of environment in inclusion. Every morning for student arrival, a selection of staff and faculty stand out front to greet arriving students with silly dances or songs or just to wish them a wonderful day. I was told that the students love this, and it starts the mindset of the day in a positive way.

**Collaboration.** Collaboration among staff and faculty at the school appeared often in interviews as an integral part of inclusion. Teachers collaborate on what works in the classroom, for all students, but also for students with special needs. Inclusion at the school is a “team” approach and can include not only the teacher, but the special education teacher/director, support staff, speech, occupational and physical therapists. Collaboration also involves students and parents help support the student on a more personalized level. For example, a parent and teacher may collaborate on transitions that work best for the student from home to school.

**Financial.** The financial aspects of running an inclusive school are complex. The school enrolls as a Medicaid provider and can receive reimbursement for school-based services provided for special education students. These services can include health and rehabilitative services and be medically necessary for the student to participate in the school. The student must also be eligible for Medicaid and have an IEP in place. An example of this reimbursement of services in reimbursement for one-on-one support staff wages. Some support staff of this type in the school are directly employed by the school

and some are employed by an agency that contracts with the school for services. The business manager is responsible for reimbursement billing and services or other needs that may not be covered by Medicaid.

### ***Summary of Categories***

In this section, I will describe each category. These 5 categories are narrowed down from the previous 11 topics above. I will describe in more detail how they are important to the school's inclusive academic setting.

**Supportive Administration.** All 11 of my participants mentioned the importance of having a supportive administration. Parent participants expressed an appreciation for support of administration particularly regarding the principal and assistant principal. They felt having a leader that their student could approach and interact with helped their student be better learners and socialize more and feel like part of the overall community. Teachers and support staff said that having strong administrative support helped them do their jobs more effectively. One support staff said they felt like part of the team even though they were a contracted staff from an agency. Teachers mentioned trust, the administrative positions of principal and assistant principal being a role model and setting a positive example while providing resources in training and academic support. Administrators also discussed other administrators and the importance of them working as a whole team. For example, special education director supporting academic delivery to the assistant principal, who's focus is academics. Whole administrative team support to inclusion supports its success.

**Environment.** The school's environment needs to foster a positive place for students to learn. The environment of the school overall in attitude and community plays an important part of supporting inclusion by keeping negative perceptions out of the school. An administrative participant that directly works in special education expressed the importance of using positive language and verbiage regarding students who may have disabilities or differences. I asked about new students entering the classrooms and how they adjust to inclusion. The response was "students model what they are experiencing in the classroom and although it takes time, most students adjust well to the environment". Parent participants wanted their students to experience classrooms just as their peers and feel included and "normal". One parent said it wasn't about the grade, it was about the interactions for her child to feel less different.

**Leadership.** Leadership comes from administrative support, and from teachers to other teachers. Teachers at the school have a monthly meeting to discuss topics and organize teacher mentor pairing. For instance, a newer teacher might be paired with a senior teacher as a mentor for a period to help lead them and guide them. The teachers also, alongside administration, lead support staff.

**Collaboration.** Teachers collaborate with other teachers about their classrooms and teaching in the inclusive setting. They collaborate at the meetings mentioned above, as well as daily, to support student success. Teachers mentioned ongoing training and professional development. They often attend diverse types of training and bring new knowledge back to share with other teachers who might benefit. Collaboration in inclusion at the school is a focus when students are transitioning from one grade level to

another. For example, the fourth-grade teacher may want or need to know specific needs and traits of a student entering from third grade. This collaboration helps the student with a more seamless transition. A student with autism may not like change in routine and environment, this collaboration can support success for that student.

**Teacher supports.** Teacher supports are important to inclusive and can be training, classroom aides and volunteers, further education, leadership, and administration and even parent support. Classroom aides (support staff and regular classroom aides included) are supportive to teachers, as they support teachers' ability to deliver academic instruction to the classroom. They may be the one-on-one support for special education students or a teacher's aide that has multiple classroom support tasks. Further education and training support teachers by training in new and evolving areas of inclusion or education in general. This can also include support of a teacher to continue to achieve higher education of a master's degree or Doctorate/PhD in education. One area noted by teachers and valued was parent support. Parent support often was volunteer time in the classroom to support teacher and student needs, but during the COVID 19 pandemic, the school is no longer allowing outside volunteers. Teachers adjusted by utilizing classroom aides in more areas. One teacher noted that they could not wait for classroom parent support to return but appreciated parent support in other ways. Parents are still supporting the classroom teachers in other ways remotely. I was able to understand how all areas of teacher support are critical to inclusion. The entire classroom must be supported appropriately for inclusion to be successful.

### *Summary of Themes*

Table 5 represents how I grouped the five categories into three major themes.

**Table 5**

#### *Categories into Themes*

Themes	Supportive administration	Environment conducive to inclusion	Teacher supports and collaboration
Categories	Administration Leadership Training Financial	Environment Language Mindset Environment conducive to inclusion	Teacher Parents Collaboration Peer Support

In Table 5, I identified the themes with a short phrase, however I decided to list these cryptic themes as more complete sentences, and they are as follows:

1. Attitude and Operational Leadership of the Administration is Critical to Successful Inclusive Education
2. Physical and Social Environment Must Be Noticeably Inclusive in the Education Setting
3. Teachers Must Have Supports and Practice Collaboration to Have Successful Inclusive Education.

In the following section, I describe in more detail these three themes that emerged from the interviews as fundamental to inclusion at the school, and which I identified as the components of successful inclusion at Public Charter School.

## **Interpretation of Findings**

In this section I report my interpretation of the study's findings and will do so by listing the themes now as the key components of inclusive education.

### ***Component #1—Attitude and Operational Leadership of the Administration is Critical to Successful Inclusive Education***

Having a supportive, strong, experienced, and educated administration was the most frequently mentioned topic in all the interviews. The administrative roles in the school are large and varied. Having a successful inclusive environment requires administration to have expertise in operational areas, including setting goals, budgets and adhering to state and federal laws and regulations, hiring, training, and policy review. In addition, attitude and leadership are important to successful inclusion and these important aspects are just a small part of what it entails to run an inclusive successful school. Having an inclusive academic environment adds responsibility and challenges that need administrative leadership and positive attitude and mindset. Below I will discuss my interpretations of the components in more.

**Leadership Through Attitude and Example.** Administration sets the tone of the school by being an example in multiple areas that support inclusion, not only operationally, but also through attitude. One participant said, "If you don't have a strong administrative support, with a positive leadership mindset, that stresses the importance of teaching to every student through individualized learning, then we will not succeed." Administrative positions in the school build the culture of inclusion from the bottom up

by leading by example, starting with attitude. I interpreted this as an overall importance that without, inclusion could not be successful.

As I arrived to the school one morning for an interview, I witnessed an administrative staff greeting each student upon their arrival for the day. I wondered about this and asked my scheduled interview participant whether this happened every day. They told me that it did, and further told me how it helped set a positive attitude to start the day. I considered how this related specifically to inclusion and interpret this as the daily beginning of a positive attitude which is then perpetuated by students walking into inclusive classrooms. I found an overall sense of pride and satisfaction by interview participants during our discussions, and the data revealed a drive to not only practice inclusion, but to do it well and excel.

Participants had attitudes that reflected their administrators, and it was my perception that participants wanted everyone to know about inclusion, and to share what they know and experience so inclusion could happen for more children. My interpretation of this component is that the administration, particularly the principal and assistant principle, have effectively modeled positive attitudes and it is a critical element of the atmosphere of the school. Having leadership with a positive mindset and attitude helped to perpetuate positivity throughout the inclusive setting of the school.

**Operational Leadership.** Administrative operational support of inclusion was evident throughout the school setting. Leadership, training, finance, resources, policies, hiring, setting goals, budgets, adhering to state and federal laws and regulations, hiring, and policy review are all part of the administrative job to support inclusion. The entire

inclusion program is reliant on the ability of the administrative staff to be strong leaders and skilled in each area of expertise. One example of the importance of the school administrator having strong skills to support inclusion, is with possible legal issues related to practicing inclusion. Legal issues pertaining to inclusion are important to the implementation of IEPs and adhering to IDEA laws. Additionally, expertise in finance for the school's inclusion program is important to support inclusion. Funding through government billing and calculating reimbursement from Medicaid are critical elements of the program and must be financially balanced. Participants holding administrative positions at Public Charter School express a drive to be a resource to other schools and to teach and support them in practicing inclusion. One participant told me that they often visited other schools or took phone calls from other administrators about inclusive implementation and troubleshooting or brainstorming.

Public Charter School is an example of an inclusion program that has a well-balanced administration with a vast knowledge of administrative duties to support it. The data showed that administration is a strong component, and that success is grounded in its capabilities. Strong administrative operational leadership supports the teachers and are therefore more confident in running an inclusive classroom. The data related to special education administrative operational support included participation, development and identifying special services for children who are identified as needing IEPs. It is critical that the administrative position in special education is knowledgeable and organizationally supports teachers so they can implement inclusive academic delivery in their classrooms. The logistics of inclusive education, specifically delivering academics



and individual education plan accommodations in the classroom, cannot function without support from administration. Although administration, does not implement these in the classroom, they may be part of a team for a student's plan. For instance, the director of the special education department may be the leader of the team overseeing classroom implementation.

Operational administrative duties include hiring appropriate administration, staff and faculty that are a match for success in the schools inclusive setting. Additionally, it is important to have ongoing training along with training manual updates for success of future employees. Data strongly supported the need for ongoing policy review and changes or additions for replication or future hires.

**Accessibility to Administration.** Data strongly suggested that accessibility to administration is an important piece of the overall success of inclusion. Through interviews, I was able to better understand inclusion and how it is supported through even the smallest day-in and day-out tasks. Accessibility to administration presented as a valuable resource to teachers, parents, support staff and even students. I did not expect how the level of accessibility in inclusion impacted the parents of special education students.

For example, a parent participant told me that they appreciated having access to administration and felt comfortable asking for accommodations or questions about progress or even how the student was doing emotionally. This participant said they felt like they could walk into the principal's office at any time and feel welcome. Parents of students in special education in Public Charter School's inclusive setting need this

accessibility component to be a true part of their child's support team. Teachers and support staff discussed accessibility to administration to support inclusion. Accessing administration for quick questions or more complex direction, supports inclusion and makes a more seamless and smooth-running classroom.

Administrative persons also were accessible to each other. Four of the 11 participants were classified as administrative staff, each with unique areas of expertise and different sets of responsibilities related to inclusion in the school. Administration was accessible to each other daily for interaction and consult on various tasks or issues. Accessibility to the special education director was important, one example was from teachers getting input day to day while trying to figure out best practices for inclusive needs of specific students. Administration at this school was extremely accessible to all stakeholders in the school and could see the impact they were making in inclusion.

In summary, attitude and operational leadership of the administration is critical to successful inclusive education at Public Charter School. The inclusive setting is reliant upon the multi-faceted aspects of each administrative department and their ability to support inclusion through best practices. Without this component, inclusion could not sustain success.

***Component #2—Physical and Social Environment Must Be Noticeably Inclusive in the Education Setting***

Topics like organization, supplies, room environment and classroom setup were all mentioned as physical attributes to the inclusive academic setting. These physical

attributes along with social ones play an important part in the success of inclusion at Public Charter School.

**Physical Environment.** Physical environment plays an important part of inclusion and can include décor, furniture, and lighting as well special accommodation specific details. Data showed that the environment would need to feel inviting and supportive to all students. Having as little pull-out or removal from the regular classroom as possible, while also having a space within the classroom or just outside the classroom for occasions that a more quiet or separate space would be needed. My view of an inclusive classroom changed after this study. What I mean by this, is that I never fully considered what it meant to include all students. I was able to better understand why certain elements like preferential seating, where the one-on-one support staff operated in the room and other specifics were not only important, but also why they needed to be structured in a certain way. One administrative participant gave me great insight in how classrooms strategically accommodate unique needs and how it is balanced with all the student's needs to be successful inclusion. The balance of an inclusive classroom is ever changing, as the needs of special education students are not a one-size-fits-all solution. One thing that struck me in terms of inclusion at the school was the thoughtfulness that went into considering inclusion as a whole and not solely focused on special accommodations or needs. The physical environment of the inclusive classrooms at Public Charter School are truly important to all students in the classroom to be able to learn and find success.

**Social Environment.** When I consider environment, language and mindset and social elements that are conducive to inclusion is imperative to its success and lends to the overall environment of the classroom. Environment is critical in a few aspects, first physically inviting environment of the classroom setting, as mentioned above, this could mean décor, furniture, and lighting, etc., but participants mostly discussed language used and mindset. One goal, for example, was that language used not include derogatory or negative terms regarding special needs or inclusion. Teachers and staff set a positive example to all the students by practicing this. Mindset is an important topic that targets having a positive thoughts and enthusiasm towards inclusion. For inclusion to be successful, the environment must lend itself to all students in the classroom environment.

In summary, to be sure a student that needs special supports is getting academic delivery and social needs met, the environment must also balance to eliminate distractions and not interfere with the overall delivery of academics to all students. For example, a student that has behavioral needs and frequent outbursts may need to sit closer to the door and in closer proximity to their one-on-one support staff so they can more easily and quickly leave the classroom with the least distraction to all students. Mindset and social elements should foster positivity in inclusion and be modeled by staff and faculty. Physical and Social Environment is a critical component of inclusion.

***Component #3—Teachers Must Have Supports and Practice Collaboration to Have Successful Inclusive Education***

When teachers can practice collaboration with one another and rely on various teaching and classroom supports, they have successful inclusive classrooms.

**Collaboration.** Collaboration at Public Charter School includes communication and troubleshooting as well as regular meetings where teachers be able to discuss methods or experiences in the classroom that supported inclusion. Collaboration was a strong element of the data. Participants attending continued education or workshops and bringing back information to share with other participants was an example shown for collaboration. Effective communication was a crucial part of collaboration and the staff and faculty expressed this as such. I could easily understand through interview discussions the importance of collaboration and how necessary it is for the school to be successful. There are multiple ways to support communication including email, meetings, and casual interactions that they used, which was a necessary part of collaboration.

**Supports.** Teacher support is a component of inclusion that includes support staff or educational assistants and ongoing training and education. Teacher support is a critical component in inclusion, as it allows teachers to instruct all students in the setting. For example, although a student's one on one support staff is present in the classroom, they are not there to deliver instruction in any way, they are there to guide and support the student with special needs that may be struggling with behaviors or distraction. This support is in place to help the entire classroom so that the teacher can teach to all students with limited distractions. Teacher supports are varied and a critical part of their inclusive classrooms. Parents are a teacher support that is fundamental to inclusion. When parents are involved and communicate with teachers it helps teachers better understand their student's needs and supports successful academic and social aspects. Parents also function as classroom volunteers by supporting all students through the teacher's

instructions. An important part of teacher support that was missing during the pandemic was not permitting volunteers in the classrooms. The pandemic held much of the blame for that, and it is their hope to have volunteers back in the classroom very soon as they are discussed as a valued part of inclusion at Public Charter School. Teachers rely on this type of support for the classroom to balance inclusion. Peer support among teachers is a more casual element of this component but serves teachers as they can discuss and understand each other's unique roles as teachers in an inclusive setting. Teacher support also includes giving them the tools they need through ongoing training and personal development days.

In summary, teachers rely on support staff for students to stay focused and learn while staying in the classroom with their peers for most of their instructional day. Teachers can better serve students in inclusion when they have a collaborative relationship with other teachers. Collaboration supports teachers with troubleshooting and sharing ideas about successful inclusion for their classrooms. Teacher supports and collaboration are critical for inclusion to be successful, so the teachers and staff at the school made collaboration a priority and a fundamental part of successful inclusion.

### **Unanticipated Limitations or Outcomes**

A limitation of this study is that it might only be applicable to this school. Conducting research in this specific setting only gives insight to the school itself and does not definitively support replication. The school was approached to replicate its own model in an additional school location, but we could not know whether it could be replicated in other environments or schools.

## **Implications Resulting from Findings**

### ***For the Client Organization***

The recommendations provided from this case study will provide reference for the current staff and faculty of key components of inclusion in the school. This could also be a reference for future staff and faculty that are not familiar with the inclusive setting at the school to continue its model. The same information could be used to replicate if the school decides that expanding is a possibility.

### ***For Positive Social Change***

Student's success through their community schools can lead to higher education and in turn lead to positive social change in communities. Inclusive academic settings can support acceptance and tolerance and impact student's lives as they head on to higher education and beyond. Inclusive academic delivery and the social component of school gives students a natural setting of tolerance and acceptance and supports less division in differences and perpetuates and balance they have experienced in school into the community and beyond.

## **Recommendations**

The following are a summary of my five recommendations to the school. These recommendations are based on three components identified in my study. Further details are provided in my deliverable to the client, a Research Brief including these recommendations.

### **Create a Communication Plan Targeted at Parents Explaining the Inclusive Components of the School**

To support the parent element of inclusion at the charter school, I would recommend creating a targeted communication plan to explain the inclusive components of the school to parents. The communication plan would be outside of the IEP and act as an additional tool for success of inclusion. The communication plan would include parent communication with teachers, administration, and special education. The plan could lay a distinct map for who to contact for different issues that may need attention, but also as a constant communication for checking in on student progress and any exceptional circumstances. The plan could also lay a foundation for future staff and faculty to use as a resource and implement when training new staff. This could help solidify a plan that is implemented correctly and uniformly building a solid parent relationship by keeping parents informed and educated on the overall inclusive setting as well as their own child's experiences and progress. A parent liaison (with a child in the special education/inclusion program) could also be an element of the communication plan. A parent liaison would be someone appointed and a volunteer that could be a trusted contact for parents who may not need or want to reach out to a staff or faculty member, but a less casual connection that has a distinct and like vantage point to help parents feel supported and educated.

### **Review and Update Policy Manuals to Emphasize the Findings of this Study**

My recommendation to the charter school is to use this study to create and update policies that directly addresses inclusion in the school. Having these additions or modifications supports inexperienced staff, particularly in administrative positions as



leadership is a strong component. Having updated and new policies that are directly targeted at inclusion could also support the school expanding and making the possibility of replicating the inclusive environment successfully.

### **Develop a Training Manual for New Employees that Emphasizes Critical Inclusion Components Found in the Study**

In my recommendations would be a training manual for inclusion specific components. Having this would support new employees in understanding the components prior to spending time in the classrooms, playgrounds and other school environments and would best guide them on how to support inclusion and effectively do their jobs in the inclusive setting. This would be a useful tool for administration to implement with new hires in all positions and support inclusion throughout the school as well as continued training.

### **Develop a Model School Improvement Plan That Captures the Key Components of Inclusive Education**

The school should review and update their improvement plan on a regular basis to include vision and mission statements that reflect an inclusive environment for all learners. Does the improvement plan have inclusion actions and practices as part of the strategic plan with measurable goals for sustaining and building a better inclusive school?

### **Develop a Plan to Disseminate Results to Outside Parties**

A plan to share the results of this study to other audiences should be written. This plan for dissemination would support the school's desire to aide other schools in implementing inclusion. This plan could work as a tool for other audiences in the state,

northwest region and nationwide as the school supports others in implementing and improving inclusion. Not limited to schools, this plan could be shared at conferences, board of directors' meetings and state and federal government levels to support inclusion policy.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

This study might be able to be replicated for the school to open an additional location. I could not say from this study that it could be replicated for a new and separate school. One strength of this study is that it provides key components for inclusion to support current and future staff and faculty. It would be my recommendation that this study be used to help create policy for the school and therefor be referenced in the future as needed.

### **Summary**

In Section 4, I presented the findings of the study which resulted in findings of three strong components of inclusion in the school, and I made recommendations based on those findings. In Section 5 I will explain how the results of the study will be disseminated to the organization and additional audiences with which they may share the results.

### **Section 5: Dissemination Plan**

Public Charter School agreed prior to this research study to receive the results and recommendations in the form of a research brief to be presented to the administrator of the school. I will be available for questions and follow-up at that time.

## **Dissemination**

### **PAS Deliverable to the Client is a Research Brief**

The deliverable of my study is in the form of a research brief and will be presented in document form for my client in June 2022. The brief includes the background of the study, the purpose and basic procedures of the study, the findings, and an analysis of the findings with conclusions and recommendations. The research brief is in Appendix A.

### **Other Audiences Appropriate for Dissemination**

Based on the nature of my study, it is most appropriate to disseminate my research study to the Public Charter School's administrator, who could then decide how and if it would be beneficial to share it to a broader audience. A broader audience may include staff, faculty, or other stakeholders. The administrator would also be best suited to decide whether it would be beneficial to share with other schools to support additional inclusive academic environments. The administrator of Public Charter School makes conference appearances and speaks in the northwestern region of the United States and could possibly share this study to perpetuate inclusion not only regionally, but also on a national level. Table 6 is a representation of additional audiences for potential dissemination.

### **Table 6**

*Additional Audiences for Dissemination by School Administration*

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Additional  
audiences

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Stakeholder audiences	Parents Teachers Volunteers Staff Faculty
Outside audiences	State schools Regional schools Nationwide schools Government Conferences Board of Directors

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### **Summary and Conclusions**

In conclusion, this qualitative study worked to identify components of the inclusive academic environment at a small charter school in the northwestern United States. Interviews with a purposeful selection of participants gave me insight into the strongest components. Participants answered open-ended questions about their experiences in the school to prompt rich discussions that led to the data collected. The data identified three strong components: (a) supportive administration in attitude and operational leadership, (b) environment conducive to inclusion, and (c) teacher supports and collaboration. This study will provide the organization with information to continually improve the inclusion model through training and policy. This study may also be used to make informed decisions pertaining to replication in the future should they decide to pursue these possibilities. The study may also serve as a resource for other schools that want to implement inclusion or improve their inclusive setting, as this school provides guidance to many in the northwest and nationwide.

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## Appendix A: Research Brief for the Client Organization

**Date:** March 16, 2022

**To:** Public Charter School  
Northwestern Region of the United States

**From:** Jennifer Sweet-Fears  
DPA Doctoral candidate at Walden University

**Re: Research Brief of Study on Inclusion Components at Public Charter School**

The purpose of this memo is to provide Public Charter School administration with a summary of the findings of my research study. The study was conducted to identify the components of the inclusive academic environment at Public Charter School.

### **Summary:**

Public Charter School is a small school located in the northwestern region of the United States and serves kindergarten through eighth grades and is a model for inclusive educational settings. Inclusive education encompasses the commitment to educate each student regardless of ability or disability to the maximum extent that is appropriate while keeping the student in the school setting and the classroom that they would otherwise be attending. Public Charter School began as a small school, but now contributes on a large scale as children leave and contribute to society. The purpose of this qualitative research was to identify, explore and understand the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School.

### **Background of Issue**

The northwestern region of the United States remains underserved in charter school options, and there is a specific shortfall of schools that are inclusive (Ryan, 2013), and this cannot be remedied without a clear understanding of the components of an inclusive education model. The practice focused question was: What are the components of the inclusive educational setting at Public Charter School?

### **Summary of Data Collected**

I collected data through interviews with a purposeful sampling of participants, meaning that each participant was chosen for their unique role in and understanding of the

inclusive environment. I was able to extract 96 initial thoughts from my interviews, from these 96 thoughts I identified 11 distinct topics that represented them. The 11 topics were examined and categorized into five categories. From the five major categories I identified themes that became identified as the three components on inclusion at Public Charter School.

The following is a summary of the three components found through my qualitative research study.

### **Attitude and Operational Leadership of the Administration is Critical to Successful Inclusive Education**

Having supportive administration in this inclusive school setting is a top priority and expressed by participants through the data. One participant said “If you don’t have a strong administrative support, with positive leadership mindset, that stresses the importance of teaching to every student through individualized learning, then we will not succeed. All administrative positions in the school must build the culture of inclusion from the bottom up”. One administrator participant said they stress the importance of building trust and showing empathy to everything stakeholders are experiencing and being supportive and caring which builds better relationships with students and faculty and parents. Administration sets the tone of the school by being an example in many areas that support inclusion, operationally and in attitude.

### ***Physical and Social Environment Must Be Noticeably Inclusive in the Education Setting***

Language and mindset that is conducive to inclusion is imperative to its success and lends to the overall environment of the classroom. Participants mentioned environment in several aspects, first physical inviting environment of the classroom setting. This could mean décor, furniture, and lighting, etc. Participants mostly discussed language used and mindset. Language used was advised to avoid derogatory or negative terms regarding special needs or inclusion. Teachers and staff must set an example to all the students by using proper language. Mindset was a participant topic that targeted having a positive thoughts and enthusiasm towards inclusion.

### ***Teachers Must Have Supports and Practice Collaboration to Have Successful Inclusive Education***

Teacher supports and collaboration are critical for inclusion to be successful. Teachers rely on support staff for students to stay focused and learn while staying in the classroom with their peers for most of their instructional day. Teachers can better serve students in

inclusion when they have a collaborative relationship with other teachers. Collaboration supports teacher with troubleshooting and sharing ideas about successful inclusion for their classrooms. Administrative support for teachers perpetuates overall success in the setting with leadership, training, finance, resources, policies and hiring. Parents are also a teacher support that is fundamental to inclusion. When parents are involved and communicate with teachers it helps teachers understand their student and support success. Peer support among teachers is a more casual element of this component but serves teachers as they can discuss and understand each other's unique roles as teachers in an inclusive setting.

### **Implications of the Findings**

The recommendations provided from this case study will provide reference for the current staff and faculty of key components of inclusion in the school. This could also be a reference for future staff and faculty that are not familiar with the inclusive setting at the school to continue its model. The same information could be used to replicate if the school decides that expanding is a possibility. Student's success through their community schools can lead to higher education and in turn lead to positive social change in communities. Inclusive academic settings can support acceptance and tolerance and impact student's lives as they head on to higher education and beyond. Inclusive academic delivery and the social component of school gives students a natural setting of tolerance and acceptance and supports less division in differences and perpetuates and balance they have experienced in school into the community and beyond.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Recommendation #1—Create a Communication Plan Targeted to Parents Explaining the Inclusive Components of the School***

Create a Targeted Communication Plan to support the parent element of inclusion at the charter school, I would recommend a targeted communication plan. The communication plan would be outside of the individualized education plan and function as an additional tool for success of inclusion. The communication plan would include parent communication with teachers, administration, and special education. The plan could lay a distinct map for who to contact for different issues that may need attention, but also as a constant communication for checking in on student progress and any exceptional circumstances. The plan could also lay a foundation for future staff and faculty to use as a resource and implement when training unfamiliar staff. This could help solidify a proper plan implemented uniformly, building a solid parent relationship by keeping parents informed and educated on the overall inclusive setting as well as their own child's

experiences and progress. A parent liaison (with a child in the special education/inclusion program) could also be an element of the communication plan. A parent liaison would be someone appointed and a volunteer that could be a trusted contact for parents that may not need or want to reach out to a staff or faculty member, but a less casual connection that has a distinct and like vantage point to help parents feel supported and educated.

***Recommendation 2 Review and Update Policy Manuals to Emphasize the Findings of This Study***

My recommendation to the charter school is to use this study to create and update policies that directly addresses inclusion in the school. Having these additions or modifications supports new staff, particularly in administrative positions as leadership is a strong component. Having updated and new policies that are directly targeted at inclusion could also support the school expanding and making the possibility of replicating the inclusive environment successfully.

***Recommendation 3 Develop a Training Manual for New Employees that Emphasizes Critical Inclusion Components Found in the Study***

In my recommendations would be a training manual for inclusion specific components. Having this would support new employees in understanding the components prior to spending time in the classrooms, playgrounds and other school environments and would best guide them on how to support inclusion and effectively do their jobs in the inclusive setting. This would be a useful tool for administration to implement with new hires in all positions and support inclusion throughout the school as well as continued training.

***Recommendation 4 Develop a Model School Improvement Plan that Captures the Key Components of Inclusive Education***

The school improvement plan should be written or reviewed to include a vision and mission that statement that reflects an environment for all learners and inclusion as a fundamental piece. Does the improvement plan have inclusion actions and practices as part of the strategic plan with measurable goals for sustaining and building a better inclusive school?

***Recommendation 5 Develop a Plan to Disseminate Results to Outside Parties***

A plan to share the results of this study to other audiences should be written. This plan for dissemination would support the school's desire to aide other schools in implementing inclusion. This plan could be used as a tool for other audiences in the state, northwest region and nationwide as the school supports others in implementing and improving

inclusion. Not limited to schools, this plan could be shared at conferences, board of directors' meetings and state and federal government levels to support inclusion policy.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I conducted this qualitative study to identify components of the inclusive academic environment at Public Charter School in the northwestern region of the United States. Interviews with a purposeful selection of participants gave me insight into the strongest components. Participants answered a range of open-ended questions about their experiences in the school to prompt rich discussions that lead to the data collected. The data identified three strong components, supportive administration in attitude and operational leadership, environment conducive to inclusion and teacher supports and collaboration. This study will provide information to continually improve the inclusion model through training and policy. This study may also influence a path of informed decisions pertaining to replication in the future should the school decide to pursue these possibilities. The study may also serve as a resource for other schools that want to implement inclusion or improve their inclusive setting, as my research subjects, school staff and administrators and parents shared that the school provides guidance to many in the state and nationwide.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

## Parents

1. What is the level of your child's development? Cognitive, social, and emotional as well as physical, an overall diagnosis of your child?
2. How does your child relate the inclusive classroom setting to home and community? Are there specific pros and cons that you see in community and family interaction?
3. What is the biggest benefit and/or drawback to having your child in an inclusive classroom?
4. What are the 2-3 key components of inclusive education that you think make the difference for your child and enhance his/her success?
5. If you were to start an inclusive education school from scratch, what are the non-negotiable components that it would need to have? In other words, what makes this type of education that you and your child are enjoying special or unique?
6. Has your child attended a school that utilizes a traditional special education resource room and if so, how would you compare the experiences?
7. Does your child enjoy school? (follow-up) And how does he show that?
8. Why is inclusion important to you and your child?
9. Would you recommend Public Charter School to other parents? Would the recommendation be the same for typical and non-typical students?
10. What is it specifically that stands out at Public Charter School as a school that makes you want to recommend it to others?

11. Would you travel to have your child attend Public Charter School if you lived a significant distance?
12. Do you have any suggestions or changes you would like to see at Public Charter School?
13. Overall, are you satisfied with your child's learning environment and inclusion at Public Charter School?

#### Teachers

1. What is your opinion—Should students who are below grade level 2 be in resource special education? Or should they not?
2. Should students that are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders be in resource rooms/special education classes most of the academic day?
3. Should efforts be made to educate all students on an IEP in regular classroom?
4. Are you supported by colleagues when faced with issues and are you able to collaborate on solutions?
5. Are you supported by administrators?
6. Are you provided continuing support and education in teaching and supporting inclusion in your classroom?
7. Do you feel you should only be responsible for students not on an IEP?
8. Should regular education teachers be responsible for teaching special education students?
9. What tools or support are you lacking in the classroom to accommodate inclusion? What would you change if you could?



10. Overall, do you feel inclusion is beneficial? If so, what specifically would you say is a benefit? A downfall?

#### Administrators

1. Do you support the teachers? How do you do that?
2. Are your teachers able to access continuing education and support to be successful in inclusive classrooms?
3. What are your thoughts inclusion? Is it successful in your opinion? Why?
4. What is your main concern for inclusive classroom setting?
5. Do you see your teachers collaborate to problem solve with one another? How do they do this?
6. Do you feel your teachers consult special education teachers and directors to support their daily class success?