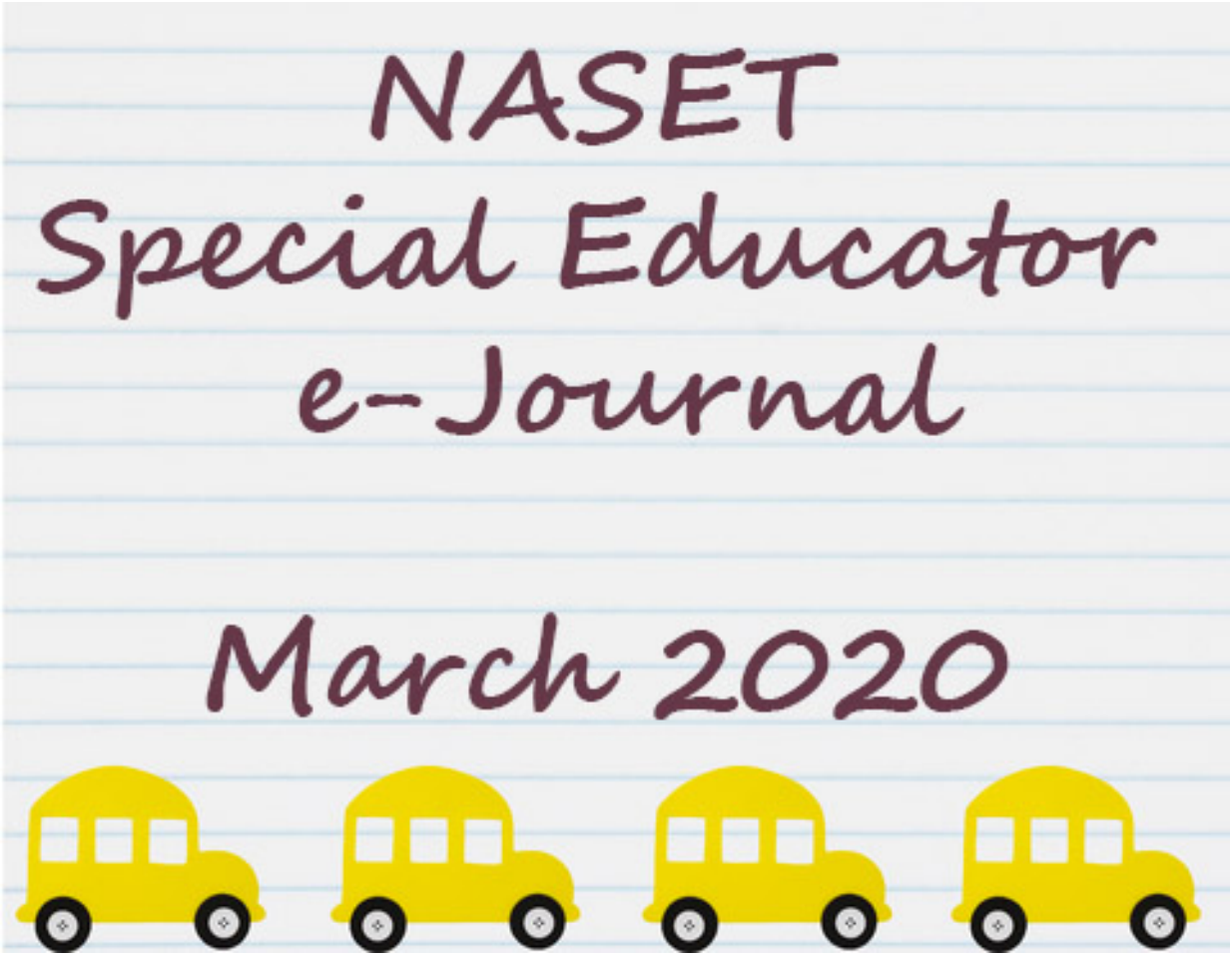

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Special Education Legal Alert

By Perry A. Zirkel

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This month's update concerns issues that were subject to recent, unpublished federal court decisions of general significance: (a) the appropriateness of a district's evaluation in the context of the parents' request for an independent educational evaluation (IEE) at public expense, (b) the reasonableness of attorneys' fees in liability litigation for alleged public school physical abuse of students with disabilities. For further examination of both of these issues, see Publications section at **perryzirkel.com**

In *A.H. v. Colonial School District* (2019), the reevaluation of an eleven-year old with an IEP under the classification of emotional disturbance included various standardized tests; a behavior rating scale and an Asperger's disorder scale; student, parent, and teacher interviews; an observation; and an FBA. Dissatisfied, the parents requested an IEE at public expense. The district denied the request. Relying on their expert, a clinical psychologist who eventually conducted the IEE and who testified that the district's reevaluation was incomplete, the parents lost at the due process hearing and the federal district court. They filed an appeal with the Third Circuit, which issued an unpublished decision.	
In response to the clinical psychologist's general contention that the the reevaluation was inadequate, the Third Circuit observed that the lower court relied on the applicable standards in the IDEA regulations, including, for example, a variety of tools and strategies and the use of technically sound instruments.	As documented in the "Law of Evaluations under the IDEA: An Annotated Update" in the Publications section of my website, this ruling is representative because courts usually apply the evaluation criteria of the IDEA regulations with deference to school evaluation personnel.
In response to the parents' argument that the reevaluation should have included additional testing, the Third Circuit ruled that "the focus was not, nor should it have been, on whether the [reevaluation] explored all facets of Student's disabilities."	The aforementioned publication shows that the courts are split in their interpretation of the IDEA statutory requirement to evaluate the child "in all areas of suspected disability," which in effect is a partial child find claim.
In response to the parents' contention that the hearing officer and lower court discounted the opinion of their specialized expert, the Third Circuit concluded that the grounds were legitimate, including her lack of familiarity	This relative deference to the school psychologist and other district professional personnel is the prevailing presumption in IDEA evaluation and IEE cases, although occasionally the parents' rebut it based on

with the child and the child's school setting.	these same grounds.

Although this court decision is unpublished and rather cursory, it serves as a reminder of the general substantive considerations for litigation concerning evaluations, including reevaluations, and also as a stimulus to reexamine the procedural considerations that are particularly prominent in cases focused on IEEs at public expense (the subject of another article in "Publications" section).

In *Hurd v. Clark County School District* (2019), the federal district court in Nevada addressed the amount of attorneys' fees in the wake of the settlement of a suit that alleged the district had failed to respond appropriately to a special education teacher's abuse of three nonverbal students with autism. The suit was for $35.8 million. In September 2017, the court denied dismissal of the Section 504, ADA, and state common law claims. Subsequently, the district entered into a settlement for $1.2 million, leaving the determination of attorneys' fees and costs to court within agreed-upon maximums of $500k and $425k, respectively. In this final stage of the litigation, the plaintiffs' lawyers submitted itemized bills for $678k and $428.5k, respectively, and voluntarily agreed to reducing these totals to the specified maximum amounts.

The defendant district contended that the hourly rates for the five attorneys (ranging from $400 to $700) and their four paralegals ($250) were unreasonable in comparison to the prevailing market rate in Las Vegas. One attorney was local; all the paralegals and the other attorneys were from the Bay Area of California.	The court ruled that the two lead attorneys were entitled to Bay Area rates of $700/hr. due to the limited availability of local specialized attorneys and the defendant's failure to show that the local attorney's $425 rate was unreasonable for the community. However, the court reduced the rates for remaining attorneys and the paralegals to the local level based on their failure to show that comparable services were not available locally.
The defendant also challenged the number of hours that the plaintiffs' billed.	The court found the number of hours billed was reasonable largely due to the voluntary reduction to the agreed-upon maximum.

The defendant additionally argued for reduction in the total amount in light of the limited success of the plaintiffs, pointing out that the settlement was only 3% of the $35.8 million that the plaintiffs had sought.	While acknowledging the relatively slight percentage, the court reasoned that (a) "an award greater than $1,000,000 cannot be deemed nominal" and (b) the award has a deterrent effect on the abuse of students with disabilities.
Finally, defendants claimed that the separate $425k for costs, which were largely for expert witnesses (75%) and depositions (17%), was excessive.	Although acknowledging that the billed costs were high even upon reduction to the maximum, the court concluded that the defendants had not met their burden to show that the net total was unreasonable.
Thus, in addition to the $1.2 settlement, the district in this case was liable for almost the same amount (specifically $500k+$425k= $925k) for the plaintiffs' attorneys' fees and costs (in addition to its presumably similar defense expense). Although illustrating the sticker shock of such transaction costs, these amounts are not entirely generalizable to IDEA-based special education litigation because—unlike federal civil rights laws, such as Section 504—the IDEA does not provide for recovery of expert witness fees and, in most jurisdictions, money damages. Nevertheless, the bottom line is that staff abuse of students with disabilities can lead, with or without settlement, to costly consequences for school districts.	

Buzz from the Hub

All articles below can be accessed through the following links:

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-jan2020-issue1/
https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-nov2019-issue2/

Learning Hub is Launched!

Great progress was made on the launching of the Parent Center Learning Hub, an online system for Parent Center self-paced learning about topics key to our mutual work. Parent Center Directors were invited to take the Learning Hub for a spin, and Parent Center *staff* will be next… Look for your personal invitation early in 2020.

Keeping the Keys to Your Parent Center

Ever had a key staff leave and take the administrative access to your website with them? Remember that time you couldn't renew your domain name because no one knew what the password was? Every Parent Center has a horror story to tell.

This organizational tool can come to your rescue. It is basically a ***road map to the important documents and other vital information involved in running your organization*** every day. The information you record herein is especially critical when succession planning is being discussed and prepared for, and/or when it actually happens. The tool is a fillable Word file, so it can be modified to fit your Center's reality and as information changes. Safe-keep it, in case you need it someday!

How to Request a Special Education Assessment

This 7-minute video from Parents Helping Parents (CA) introduces the assessment process used when considering a child for special education services. It's great for anyone who is new to the process and in need of a simple explanation.

Consent and Kids with Disabilities

Talking about consent with children may feel like a daunting task, but the speaker in this 4-minute video discusses why understanding consent is important for all children, especially those with disabilities. The video comes with a written guide, *A Step-by-Step Guide to Talking about Consent with Disabled Kids*.

Person-Centered Career Planning Exercise

This 33-minute video from Person Centered Planning demonstrates a person-focused career planning exercise.

Webinar | Cultural Competence: What it Means for Person-Centered Thinking, Planning, & Practice

Cultural competence is widely recognized as essential to delivering high-quality services and supports. This 1-hour webinar, which includes Diana Autin as a presenter, explores what this means in terms of actual practice and includes real-life examples and personal narratives.

On The Outs: Reentry for Inmates with Disabilities

This 34-minute documentary follows 3 inmates with disabilities through the reentry process. Each

person's experience is depicted at 3 points: in prison prior to release, on their release date, and life on the "outs" after release. The film can be used to raise awareness about people with disabilities in prison and to stimulate communication and collaborative relationship building for much-needed reentry reform.

Utilization of Paraprofessionals in Special Education: Challenges and Benefits

By Jeanne Dagna, Ed.D.
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Abstract

This paper explores the benefits and challenges of utilizing paraprofessionals as support for students in both general and special education classroom settings. Etscheidt (2005) expounded upon the concerns that, despite the wide staffing use, paraprofessionals are extremely under-trained and lack the formalized training necessary for the roles they are asked to perform. Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle (2010) contend that the unintended negative outcomes of using paraprofessionals in the classroom often out-weigh the potential benefits. Myriad legal cases discussed the ways in which the use of paraprofessionals can be legally challenged and shared the wide-range of concerns related to the use of paraprofessionals to support students in general and special education. Although articles vary regarding the levels of support and/or concern for utilizing this staffing method, most concur that if utilized carefully and reassessed often, these paraprofessional supports can prove beneficial.

Historical Overview

The practice of staffing school classrooms with paraprofessionals is not a new one. The use of volunteers in education actually began back in the mid 1800's, prior to the creation of what later became known as, "normal school." In the early 1940's, as part the New Deal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Works Projects Administration (WPA) and they attempted to utilize education paraprofessionals in order to provide employment opportunities for unskilled school dropouts who were in need of employment. These individuals were provided training and placement in non-professional employment opportunities in areas including health, recreation, and education, according to Lombardo (1980).

One of the first actual pieces of legal legislation directly related to paraprofessionals was included in Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, 1965) signed into law by President, Lyndon B. Johnson. Included in this Act was a component of Title I that, "…allocated approximately $75 million for programs dealing with teacher-aides (paraprofessionals)" (Lombard, 1980 p. 21). Title I determined that these paraprofessionals provide direct services to elementary and secondary level, low-income school students, as part of an antipoverty approach to education (Lombardi, 1980).

The original use of paraprofessionals in the field of education was to provide relief to special educators working in a field where terrible teacher shortages left these professionals overworked and under-supported. The idea was to use these support personnel to complete non-instructional duties, and provide general clerical support (Lombardo,1980). In the early 1960's, Jenkins and associates, (as cited in Lombard, 1980) shared that the role of these paraprofessionals had changed slightly and that their jobs were no longer limited to providing supports for clerical, non-instructional work, but now included providing tutorial instruction in resource room locations.

Historically, all of these practices preceded the actual passage of Public Law 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which was created and designed to provide for, "Free and Appropriate Public Education" (FAPE) to the nearly four million handicapped students who were not receiving a public education designed specifically for them to achieve to their individual abilities. Prior to the passage of all of these mandates, students with significant disabilities were generally educated either at home, in segregated school settings, or oftentimes institutionalized (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). Causton-Theoharis shared that before the passage of PL 94-142 in 1975, paraprofessionals were utilized largely because it was, "…believed that students with disabilities could not learn as much as students without disabilities and that they did not need certified teachers to support them; therefore students with disabilities were typically supported by people in paraprofessional roles" (p. 3). In the 1980's, parents fought for their disabled children to be educated in the general education classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers and this shift in location and program design brought about the practice we now know of as *mainstreaming* or *inclusion* (Will, 1986 as cited in Causton-Theoharis, 2009).

As a result of these laws and parent-driven staffing requests, the role of the paraprofessional changed when children with disabilities began participating in general education classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). Subsequently, trained paraprofessionals readily became recognized members of their school-based team(s) focused on providing support to overcome the "previous injustices done to the handicapped children and youth of this nation" (Lombardo, 1980, p. 26).

The current reauthorization of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004 (IDEIA, 2004). A key piece of this reauthorization continues to be the requirement that all schools provide special education supports and services within the least restrictive educational environment (LRE) to all children with disabilities (Breton, 2010). ESEA-1965 was later amended to become the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; Pub. L. No. 107-110) and it required strict academic rigor for all students, not just those identified with disabilities, and here is where the role of the paraprofessional changed becoming much more complex and moving from that of a clerical worker or physical caregiver to that of an educational facilitator (Causton-Theoharis, 2009).

Historically, disabled children were segregated in rooms where educational expectations were limited to the provision of life skills and job-related training with other disabled children and the roll of the adults supporting them was one relegated to "providing personal care and keeping them occupied" (Causton-Theoharis, 2009, p. 5). Economics have forced schools to consider alternative ways and means by which to provide all students with an education, but most specifically how best to support students with Individual Education Programs or Plans (IEP). Breton (2010) wrote that the creation of different service delivery models occurred to meet the varied and ever-challenging prospect of supporting students with significant disabilities within the general education curriculum. Breton contended that this was where these paraprofessional(s) were best utilized. Whether you call them paraprofessionals, para-educators, teacher aides, or instructional support staff, they all provide the same basic supports, and when properly trained and supported, these paraprofessionals deliver a more cost-effective method of supporting students with disabilities (Breton, 2010). Breton also

noted that the reauthorization of IDEA 2004 required that all personnel providing supports within special education are, "…adequately prepared and trained and, in addition, that paraprofessionals be appropriately supervised" (IDEA 20 U.S.C. 1412(a) (14) (pg. 34). Although IDEA mandated the provision for training to ensure that all staff, including paraprofessionals, had the skills necessary to support students with disabilities, they left the specifics of meeting this mandate up to the individual states (Breton, 2010). Additionally, Picket (1999) as cited in Breton (2010) noted that minimal guidance was ever provided to states to even define the phrase, "appropriate training and supervision," thus training, supervision and employment requirements and qualifications for paraprofessionals differ from state to state.

Given the mandates of both IDEA and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001), children with disabilities are having their educational needs met within the least restrictive environment (LRE) with their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms (Patterson, 2006). Under IDEA, all services and supports must be carefully delineated in the child's IEP, and should be "provided by individuals with the highest qualifications" (Patterson, 2006, p. 1).

The Role of Paraprofessionals Today

Paraprofessionals currently play a huge role in the provision of special education services and supports to students with disabilities (Stockall, 2014). There is no one definition of the role of a paraprofessional because, as Stockall explained, they can provide services ranging from assisting students in both maintaining and generalizing learned concepts and skills to helping students organize their environment, as well as to support students as they learn greater independence and self-advocacy skills, while simultaneously supporting the classroom teachers instructional teaching time. Causton-Theoharis (2009) wrote that the role of the paraprofessional may include supporting children socially, academically, physically, and behaviorally; including social supports, such as working with students to find and select a peer or group for classroom work, or in choosing a friend to play with at recess.

A paraprofessionals role also might include providing physical support in the form of supporting activities of daily living (ADL) skills to students who need help with eating, dressing, transfers from chairs or wheelchairs, and supporting toileting needs (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). Another role a paraprofessional might play is that of providing behavioral supports to students, both inside and outside of the special education classroom. Causton-Theoharis found that paraprofessionals were often asked to take and maintain behavioral data on specific behavioral goals in a student's IEP. Sometimes this data is in the form of noting each time a specific behavior occurs or includes specific forms of interventions when a student is exhibiting an identified behavior that is under review or modification. Another area of support provided by paraprofessionals is with technology. Causton-Theoharis explained that these technological supports might range from helping students to access classroom computers and or actually supporting the students with the use of assistive technology (AT) in the form of some type of device to improve their ability to communicate and access their education. As outlined in IDEA 2004, the term assistive technology refers to, "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities

of children with disabilities" (20 U.S.DC.§ 1401 [a] [25]) as cited in (Causton-Theoharis, 2009, p. 89). From providing academic, social, emotional, behavioral, and physical supports to supporting students' specific life skill needs, such as ambulation, eating, and toileting, the job of a paraprofessional today is quite varied, extremely skill-laden, and requires the requisite training to adequately prepare these paraprofessionals for their specific roles (Breton, 2010).

Patterson (2006) surveyed 22 paraprofessionals asking for them to talk about their jobs and needs. All of the participants worked in K-12 schools and the majority of these paraprofessionals worked with students who had, "low-incidence" disabilities, such as autism, Asperger's syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, developmental disabilities, and Down syndrome (Patterson, 2006). The participants in this study were employed in three different school districts. Patterson found that the paraprofessionals shared that their jobs included a range of responsibilities and or expectations throughout the work day; that they were required to understand the basic tenets of behavior management strategies; that they needed a much more clearly defined job description; that they voiced wide-spread concerns surrounding the high job expectations and low monetary compensation, and finally, that they discussed the need for greater partnership and collaboration time with the teachers in whose classrooms they worked, both special educators and general educators (Patterson, 2006). Patterson noted that these paraprofessionals spent most of their workday with their assigned students or classes, but 54% noted that they had never received any training prior to assuming the responsibilities of their specific jobs and, at best, they were expected to learn, "on the job." These same paraprofessionals shared that they felt that their financial compensation was very poor for the types of job expectations and responsibilities they were asked to perform (Patterson, 2006). There were also positive responses shared by the participants. Some expressed thanks to the supervising special education teachers who were supportive of their work and success in the classroom, and, as one participant shared, "…role models who inspired him to want to continue in his role as a paraprofessional" (Patterson, 2006, n.p.).

French and Picket (1997) as cited in Stockall (2014), found that just as paraprofessionals have not been prepared for their roles in supporting students, the majority of special education professionals have not been provided sufficient time and training to supervise these paraprofessionals. In the end, adequate training is necessary so that these paraprofessionals who assume the roles of providing full-time support to students with disabilities are able to work more proactively and from a place of knowledge and training (Patterson, 2006).

Training Needs for Today's Paraprofessionals

The training needs of today's paraprofessionals varies as much as the jobs that they perform. Etscheidt (2005) discussed how "The training needs of the paraprofessionals differ for paraprofessionals working at different points along the grade span" (p. 346) since the needs of students typically changes, "…as well as the contexts in which they receive instruction, which may necessitate paraprofessionals assuming different roles requiring distinctive competencies" (p. 346).

Etscheidt (2005) surveyed 313 paraprofessionals regarding their job-related tasks and asked them about their perceptions of their training needs. These paraprofessionals worked in grades K-12 and of the 313 participants, 281 were female and 30 were male. Although the participants worked in all types of classroom settings with students who had varying diagnosed disabilities, the majority of these paraprofessionals worked with students who had autism, cognitive disabilities, emotional disturbance, or were deaf-blind (Etscheidt, 2005). The top-ten roles and responsibilities these paraprofessionals shared as normal parts of their working with special education students included: "Providing one-on-one instruction; facilitating social relationships; providing instructional support; providing behavior management; completing clerical skills; teaching self-management skills, modifying or adapting materials; meeting teachers; monitoring hallways; and preparing instructional materials" (Etscheidt, 2005, p. 351). The participants shared that they completed these tasks anywhere from 67% to 97% of the time, each day or week. They also shared that, without training, they felt most readily prepared to do the following jobs: "monitoring hallways, study hall and lunch, or detention," as well as completing "clerical work, like photocopying, typing, or filing, and providing one-on-one instruction" (Etscheidt, 2005, p. 352). The job tasks which these paraprofessionals shared they didn't feel prepared to support included, "completing disability related paperwork, assisting with speech therapy, writing lesson plans for students, assisting with physical or occupational therapy, and participating in planning for students' IEP meetings" (Etscheidt, 2005, p. 353). Thirty-nine percent of the paraprofessionals in this study agreed that they needed more and specific training to assist students with the use of assistive technology (Etscheidt, 2005).

Pinpointing the training needs of paraprofessionals is not an easy task. Etscheidt (2005) found that paraprofessionals often provide, "educational supports to students with a broad range of needs across multiple contexts within varied instructional formats" (p. 353) and that the average paraprofessional might be supporting students who, "collectively were being served under five different disability categories" (p. 353) and noted that these, "Heterogeneous learners are likely to require a wide array of academic, social and behavioral supports" (p. 353). The heterogeneity of these students, in addition to the wide range of "instructional delivery formats" means that the paraprofessional must possess a sufficient knowledge of these students' needs in order to successfully fulfill their role in providing academic, social, and emotional/behavioral supports (Etscheidt, 2005).

Etscheidt (2005) posits that the disparity of self-reported knowledge might be directly connected to the paraprofessionals years of experience, which was found to be a significant predictor of their overall knowledge, "Suggesting that paraprofessionals may be acquiring this core knowledge gradually over time as they accrue experience working with students and attain veteran status" (p. 354). Etscheidt found that, despite the knowledge gains made over time, most paraprofessionals shared they felt they were expected to possess much of this knowledge when they began their employment and that on-the-job training was the method used most often preparing them for the jobs they were already doing. Just as Etscheidt noted a heavy reliance on informal or individualized training approaches for paraprofessionals was, "…likely to be very idiosyncratic and

characterized by quality that is highly dependent on the special educator or general educator who is assigned to provide such coaching, feedback, and supervision" (p. 354).

Giangreco, Broer and Edelman (2005) noted that special educators readily agree that the paraprofessionals who support their students do not receive enough formalized training, with one special educator sharing that paraprofessionals are always assuming more and greater roles and, "We just sort of threw them into another job and said, 'OK, now do it!'" (p. 59). Ghere & York-Barr, (2007) as cited in Garwood, Van Loan, & Gessler Werts (2018) shared, "The level of cohesion regarding work-related responsibilities between special education teachers and paraprofessionals has significant implications for paraprofessionals' views of their value and for the success of the students they serve" (p. 209).

Legal Implications Regarding the Use of Paraprofessionals

"The use of paraprofessionals in the education of students with disabilities has not been without its controversies" (Breton, 2010, p. 36). According to Giangreco et al., (2002), that there has been a bit of a double-standard in the fact that general education students get their education from certified educators, but students with disabilities often receive their direct instruction from paraprofessionals. As a result, many legal concerns have arisen regarding the use of paraprofessionals in special education classrooms and with students with disabilities (Etscheidt, 2005). Etscheidt determined that the most pressing of concerns expressed in the research regarding the legal implications of utilizing paraprofessionals in special education classrooms includes the following: utilizing the least qualified/trained personnel to support the needs of the most challenging students; the use of paraprofessionals in the implementation of specific teaching strategies or behavioral techniques for which they have received minimal education or training; utilizing paraprofessionals to support academic courses where they lack the academic qualifications or subject-area competencies to support the student; and finally, asking special education teachers or general education teachers to provide oversight and supervision when they are, at best, under trained to take on this responsibility. Ashbaker and Morgan (2004) found that, "The responsibility of school administrators to oversee the effectiveness of teacher-paraprofessional teams delivering instruction to students is crucial" (p. 1) and that failure to fully examine the roles these educators play in the provision of education to students with disabilities, and their roles on the instructional teams, could easily put the school and district at legal risk. Federal requirements mandate that the paraprofessionals must be working under the direct supervision of a "Highly Qualified" teacher. Ashbaker and Morgan shared, "classroom teachers are challenged to find time to train and supervise a paraprofessional while continuing to perform their primary responsibility; instructing students effectively" (p. 3).

An analysis of court cases found that the provision of 1:1 paraprofessional support was required if it was found to be necessary for a student to "benefit meaningfully from his or her educational program" (Etscheidt, 2005, p. 72). However, Etscheidt reported that if the provision of a paraprofessional had a potentially negative impact on a students' social benefit, then requests for 1:1 supports were denied. Other legal decisions determined that the provision of classroom-based

paraprofessional supports available on an "as-needed" basis could prove to be more beneficial than the provision of a continuous, 1:1 support (Etscheidt, 2005).

Court cases where the staffing of paraprofessionals has been challenged illustrate the myriad reasons that these cases can readily end up as legal challenges. Ashbaker and Morgan (2004) shared the 1992 story of a family in Michigan who filed a due process complaint citing that the district reassigned the paraprofessional who had been supporting their child with another paraprofessional the parent believed to be less qualified. The parents cited that the child and paraprofessional had not developed the right type of bond, noting their belief that the change of aide had adversely impacted their child. The Hearing Officer (HO) did acknowledge that there was a bond between the student and the former aide, but found that the new aide was 'duly qualified,' and required the district to provide counseling supports to the student to better deal with the change of paraprofessional staffing (*Ludington Area Schools, 1992*, as cited in Ashbaker & Morgan, 2004).

Research quantifying the effectiveness of paraprofessionals and academic outcomes for students with disabilities is almost non-existent. Giangreco, Suter and Doyle (2010) stated,

> We continue to assign the least qualified personnel to teach students who present the most challenging learning and behavioral characteristics. Not only do such practices reduce the probability of insuring that students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education, but this practice continues to indicate that we, as a society, still undervalue students with disabilities and have unnecessarily low expectations for them. (n.p.)

Giangreco et al., (2012), reported that students voiced that they felt that paraprofessionals got in the way of their opportunities to connect during learning activities, social opportunities, and with their overall ability to access their education in the general education classroom. Research indicates that students with disabilities working one-on-one with a paraprofessional often exhibit more challenging behaviors and are often seen as less-engaged academically and socially than their disabled peers who do not receive one-to-one support (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). Giangreco et al. also found that an unintended outcome of employing paraprofessionals in general education classrooms was that the general education teacher routinely engaged less directly with the identified students because of the presence of the paraprofessional assigned to support that student.

Myriad court cases delineate the ways in which the use of paraprofessionals can be challenged in Due Process cases. Etscheidt (2005) presented multiple examples of Due Process cases, nationwide, that challenged a school districts ability to meet the provision of FAPE to students with disabilities. As far back as 1982, the case of *Hendrick Hudson District Board of Education v. Rowley* defined an appropriate education as one that provides, "Access to specialized instruction and related services which are individually designed to provide educational benefit" (p. 63). Court decisions which followed *Rowley* found that educational benefit is not necessarily limited to academic gains, but can also include non-academic areas, such as improved social interaction and

self-esteem (Etscheidt, 2005). Both the case of *Polk v. Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit 16 (1988)* and *Rowley, (1982)* determined that the services provided must be, "more than trivial or *de minimus*" but do not need to be, "optimal or maximum" (Etscheidt, 2005, p. 63).

In *Lake Travis Independent School District, 4 ECLPR 500 (SEA TX 2003),* the parents argued that their five year old child who was diagnosed with a Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) was capable of full-time academic inclusion with the services of a 1:1 paraprofessional who had been trained in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) methodologies. The School District proposed a plan where the student would be spending 1/3 of their day in different levels of programming, in and out of general education, without a 1:1 aide, but with the provision of a classroom aide, to provide general support. The Hearing Officer (HO) found for the parent finding that this student would not "reasonably benefit from instruction without a 1:1 support" (p. 61), despite the districts assertion that the student would become dependent upon the aide (Etscheidt, 2005).

In the case of *Harris County School System, 26 IDELR 193 (SEA GA 1997),* the parents of an eleven year old student diagnosed as having a Specific Learning Disability (SLD) with ADD and dyslexia requested a full-time paraprofessional in both his special education and general education classes. The HO found for the school district since the parents did not show that the IEP could only be implemented through the hiring and provision of a full-time paraprofessional (Etscheidt, 2005).

In the case of *Molly L. v. Lower Merion School District, 36 IDELR 182 (ED PA 2002),* the parents of an 8 year old girl with asthma, gross motor difficulties, and a sensitivity to sensory stimulation believed that the school districts 504 plan stated that an aide would be available throughout the school day in support and intervene on an as-needed basis was not providing enough support and they wanted a 1:1 for their daughter. Parents objected to the supports on an as-needed basis citing that this provision was not "educationally appropriate" since it would "restrict their daughters ability to develop coping skills" (p. 62). The HO found for the district stating, "the provision of the aide who intervenes on an as-needed basis serves the dual purpose of allowing the student freedom to develop coping skills while also ensuring the student's safety" (p. 62).

Etscheidt (2005) expounded upon the case of the *Freeport School District 145 (2000)* where the parents requested a change of aide believing the new aide lacked the connection necessary for their daughter to clearly communicate her medical needs. The District held that personnel decisions/appointments were at the district's discretion and that their choice of aide was "exemplary." The HO found that the district's choice of paraprofessional did not interfere with, 'the implementation of the IEP and was not a danger to the student, therefore the school district had discretion to assign, providing the paraprofessional was qualified and adequate" (p. 67). Ultimately, after many cases, hearing officers were finding that although the IEP required school districts to provide a paraprofessional to support a student, it didn't require a specific aide in order for the student to receive FAPE, and the paraprofessional was not required to be the parent-preferred paraprofessional (Etscheidt, 2005). Giangreco et al. (2010) held that a student's perspective must be taken into consideration, especially when the students are older. They reported that although many paraprofessionals have the "qualities of nurturing mothers," some teenagers found this level of

constant mothering extremely intrusive, with one young man sharing, "That's why I didn't have any best friends or a girlfriend in high school because I always had a mother on my back" (p. 44).

Oftentimes IEP teams inherit recommendations for paraprofessional supports and services through an IEP brought from another school or district. Although many students with disabilities receive related supports and services in order for them to receive FAPE, in the *Board of Education of the City of New York, 1998*, as cited in Etscheidt (2005), "IEP teams must explore a variety of supplemental aids and services other than the provision of a paraprofessional to meet the student's needs and facilitate inclusion" (p. 78). Etscheidt opined that, "Duties delegated to paraprofessionals must be supplementary and not supplant the special education or related services specified in the IEP. An overextension or over reliance on paraprofessional support may result in denial of FAPE" (p. 75).

Although, as Etscheidt (2005) explained, the literature is replete with research supporting that paraprofessionals must work closely under the direction and supervision of qualified professionals, paraprofessional self-reports clearly indicated that this is not the case and they are functioning independently and autonomously, oftentimes in almost total isolation of the direction and supervision they should be receiving. Etscheidt (2005) wrote, "As the analysis of administrative and court decisions indicated, adequate training and supervision of paraprofessionals will ensure compliance with both the procedural and substantive requirements of the IDEIA" (p. 77).

Can Paraprofessional Staffing be Counterproductive?

Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron and Fialka (2005) noted that parents are oftentimes the driving force behind the consideration of assigning a paraprofessional to support their child in an inclusive setting, but,

Parents seeking inclusive education through the assignment of an individual, full-

time paraprofessional may be working at cross-purposes with themselves, since

having an adult by a student's side for all or most of the day can actually interfere

with the student's inclusion as a participating member of the classroom community.

(p. 28)

Giangreco et al. (2005) reported cases where students were assigned paraprofessionals, as determined by their needs, related services, and goals in their IEP, and the student themselves spoke against having that level of support. "Beth" was a high school student with Down syndrome who entered high school with one-to-one paraprofessional support. This support worked well during her freshman year, but that specific paraprofessional was well-skilled at reading when to step-in and when to back-off, so this arrangement worked well for both of them. Giangreco et al. explained that during her sophomore year "Beth's" paraprofessional staffing changed and the new staff member stuck to her too closely, didn't give her enough space to be a typical high school student, and, according to "Beth," **"**was always telling her what to do, insisting that she leave class early and generally making a spectacle of their interactions" (p. 29). "Beth" reacted

uncharacteristically and started having behavioral outbursts, including running away from school to escape her paraprofessional (Giangreco et al. 2005). As Giangreco et al. shared, although Beth's communication was not socially or behaviorally appropriate, her "intent and frustration" were obvious and with support Beth was finally able to tell everyone that she didn't want an aide, anymore. The IEP team was concerned about removing this level of support, but honored her wishes and Beth ended up more academically active in her classes, since she no longer had an "intermediary between her and her teachers" (p. 29) and successfully finished high school without further need for that intensive level of support.

Giangreco et al. (2005) discussed the positives of staffing with paraprofessionals, given the provision that they are being utilized appropriately and receive both the necessary training and supervision. Giangreco et al. noted that paraprofessionals can be very helpful supporting clerical needs allowing teachers more time to engage in direct instruction, complete follow-up instruction, provide homework help, provide supervision during less structured activities, facilitate social skills experiences with peers and provide and assist with personal care needs. Ashbaker (2000), as cited in Giangreco et al. (2005), noted that most often, paraprofessionals live in the communities in which they are employed and they can help provide "cultural perspectives or speak the primary language of non-English speaking students" (p. 29).

Another issue related to successful staffing using paraprofessionals includes research supporting that some paraprofessionals are not themselves academically capable of supporting the curricular subjects their student study and that this has become more of a significant issue in subjects, such as foreign language, math and science (Giangreco et al. 2005). "Academic mismatches were illustrated further by situations where a student in need of support in Spanish class being assigned a paraprofessional who did not speak Spanish, or paraprofessionals assigned to students in math class who "…don't do algebra" (Giangreco, et al., 2002, pg. 61). Giangreco et al. (2005) shared that one general education high school teacher noted, "Since the paraeducators go to classes with the kids, we assume that they are able to grasp the content of the class and then review it with the student," (p. 61) which might not be a valid conclusion or outcome when providing direct staffing supports for academically-included students.

Where Does This Leave Us?

"Collaboration between a paraprofessional and a teacher promotes effective communication; proactively minimizes conflict; and builds rapport, trust, respect, and a professional relationship" (Gerzel-Short, Conderman & DeSpain, 2018, p. 153). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (as cited in Gerzel-Short et al., 2018), approximately 1.3 million paraprofessionals were employed in public schools throughout the US in 2016, with more than 400,000 of those 1.3 million specifically hired to support special education programs and students.

Patterson (2006) determined that the following must be taken into consideration when hiring, assigning, and supporting paraprofessionals in schools: School districts must clearly determine their job responsibilities, as well as the job descriptions of these paraprofessionals, and these paraprofessionals must begin to get the training and supervision necessary to maximize their hiring benefits. Patterson also noted that professional development must be geared to their job

responsibilities and include things such as research-based behavior management strategies, as well as academic/organizational strategies. Patterson contends that financial compensation needs to better align with the skills and jobs required of these paraprofessionals to lessen staff turnover and there needs to be much more organized collaborative time for these paraprofessionals to work with the general education teachers in whose classrooms they provide the support. As Patterson wrote, "Policy makers and educational team members must ask if best practice is being demonstrated when paraprofessionals who are unqualified or untrained are asked to assume full-time responsibilities for supporting students who may require more specialized care and instruction" (n. p.).

Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco and Pelsue (2009) and Patterson (2006) contend that the low salaries and limited opportunities for advancement in the profession directly impact the high turnover staffing rates of paraprofessionals. They also believe that improved training practices coupled with more clearly identified and supported job descriptions have shown to have positive implications for job retention, as well as improving the overall job satisfaction among paraprofessionals.

Giangreco, Doyle and Suter (2012) cautioned schools and IEP teams to carefully consider the needs of the student and the role(s) of the paraprofessionals when it comes to staffing classrooms and individual students.

While acknowledging a real concern exists, we should not simply ask for a

justification of the request in an effort to approve or disapprove it- that would be

asking the wrong question. Rather, teams need to ensure there is a clear and accurate

understanding of the issues and engage in processes designed to select solutions that

match the need. (Giangreco et al., 2012, p. 364)

As schools and IEP teams staff classes and support students, it is integral that they fully understand the staffing request since the last thing any educational professional wants to do is to mask the underlying issues which, in turn delays attending to what needs to be addressed (Giangreco et al., 2012).

Bryan Johnson, assistant director for Certified Recruitment with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) oversees their STEP UP and Teach program; a LAUSD program designed to provide financial support and mentoring supports to paraprofessional staff who want to further their educations and become full-time teachers, especially in the tough to fill positions, such as special education (Jacobson, 2017). Johnson shared with Jacobson statistics related to the STEP UP and Teach program noting that in their first year, 150 paraprofessionals enrolled in the program, which provided $4800 in the form of tuition reimbursement to paraprofessionals for support in furthering their education. In 2017, Jacobson noted that the STEP UP and Teach program had 260 candidates enrolled and that over 100 new teachers have graduated from the program and now have their own classrooms in the District.

As educational standards change based on sound research and the demands of a

complex world, the delivery of educational services to students with diverse demographics, experiences, and ability levels and therefore the preparation of personnel who provide these services must change as well. (King-Berry & Boone, 2012, p. 169)

Paraprofessionals are both valuable and essential members of the school community and when well utilized, their services and supports offer many benefits to teachers, students and parents (Goe and Matlach, 2014). After all, as stated by Gertzel-Short et al. (2018), taking purposeful actions to collaborate, train, coach, and support paraprofessionals allows everyone to work together to assist students in reaching their academic, social and behavioral goals. In the end, Breton (2010) concluded, "…these efforts will justify the financial commitment by improving the quality and efficacy of special education paraprofessionals which will unquestionably improve the educational programming for all students with disabilities" (p. 44).

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Book Review: Relentless: Changing Lives by Disrupting the Educational Norm

By Stephanie Estrada

As a child growing up in New Zealand, Hamish Brewer never saw his life as that out of the ordinary. He was part of a family that he considered not to have much, but that had enough to make financial ends meet. At a young age, he did not see any error in his upbringing, but as he transitioned into adolescence, he began to notice the abundance of drug and alcohol use in his home as something that was not only abnormal, but dangerous. While the situation felt uncontrollable as someone who was not yet an adult, he noticed the way his life around him slowly came crumbling as his mother eventually left his father, forcing him to take up odd jobs in order to keep food on the table at home. To further this turmoil, this father eventually battled depression during this time of adveristy, going so far as to attempt an unsuccessful suicide. While some assume that as a result of this Brewer may have found school as a safe haven, he notes that it was quite the opposite, as he often found schooling tedious and oppressive in nature.

Later on in life, Brewer incorporated his love for skateboarding into his other passion: teaching, quickly gaining the title of the "relentless, tattooed, skateboarding principal." What ensued at this point is what many see as a relentless pursuit toward greatness, bypassing educational and social norms to make the educational process one that students are drawn to in every sense of the word.

This book goes on to detail how being in an administrative position does not necessarily mean there is a need to give up one's passions, or hobbies, but that being in an administrative position and showing all stakeholders and especially students, that being yourself, flaws and all, is the best way to rear in success.

Main Themes

Relentless relies on the element of unpredictably and going against social norms. While most educational leadership books may reflect on specific success stories relying on data, this one hones in on how to build and maintain pivotal relationships in the school system.

Hamish Brewer stresses that while his hardships defined the individual he has become as an adult, his reason behind success as an educator and administrator has to do with his ability to be himself and be original, at that. He stresses that educators and administrators should not be afraid to be unapologetically themselves in the classroom, and rather than giving students the idea that they are being led by unattainable figures, allow them to understand that just like the students, adults can be successful and yet humanly imperfect.

An ideology that successful leaders "go one more round" is stressed throughout the novel (Pg. 27). The concept that those who are given unviable cards in life should continue to unabashedly continue on the journey they desire is at the heart of this novel; not giving up and pursuing one's dream is encouraged, as unconventional as it might be. He continues to encourage that educators be the one to teach this very similar concept to all students, noting that they should count all failures as a learning lesson and one more step towards their path to success. As the role of the educator, he

encourages an eclectic persona to reel students in and make them accountable in all parts of the learning process.

In order to be successful in rallying student loyalty, Brewer encourages educators to display the following nine traits: humility, attitude, persistence, accountability, sacrifice, focus, no fear of failure, no excuses, and character. While one character trait overpowering all the rest may become too overbearing for students, it is important to be eclectic in educational execution and learn to understand what each individual student needs in order to be successful, as all students do not learn the same, and all students do not respond equally to specific personalities in an individual.

More so, in regards to the educational outlook, he urges all parties to see things for what they are: opportunity, not obligation. While some days in the educational field may feel like a burden more than they do a gift, Brewer credits his humble thoughts on education to the stories of his students that continues to drive him to do better as an administrator and role model. It is not often that one sees the fruitfulness in teaching, but when one does, it is often substantial. Hamish Brewer stresses that educators hold out for success stories, and know that even students who do not publicize it really do appreciate educational efforts, whether it is an instantaneous thought or one that takes years of realization.

Controversially, Brewer repetitively stresses what some may see as a taboo statement throughout *Relentless*: "Unless the actions are egregious and harmful to others, suspending students does not work." (Pg. 79) While many schools struggle with discipline, this administrator does not believe in the typical confinements of what defines it. He feels that any time away from the school system may be a dangerous, damaging time for students. While what is being done on school grounds can be controlled - what is happening at home is often not. While violent, disruptive behavior is not accepted under his authority, he believes students should be allowed to make mistakes and display growth from them.

Alternatively, Hamish Brewer has developed a recreational program of sorts at his own school, where students who are recommended for suspension are instead sent to an off-campus (though nearby) fitness center where said students were to participate in crossfit style activities. The turnout, he says, was surmountable. The students loved it so much that on days where they had no behavioral infractions, they still asked if they could attend. The program became so popular that Brewer has now received funding to install a personal center in the school which will allow any and all students to receive fitness training. The success behind it amounts to "hard work, sweat, and tough love." (pg. 82). Not only did students love it, but parents raved about the program and the fact that is was eliminating their child's stress and defiantness. While it may be difficult to relate one to the other, Brewer's evident success with the program is something to consider.

A palpable call to action is resonated throughout the novel, asking that educators and administrators alike learn to value the mental well-being of students over test scores. Though it is predictable to fear and be intimidated by stats the dictate teacher positions, raises and school funding, it is pivotal to have the mindset that each individual student comes first. Combining this with all other cultural concerns, he agrees, will best serve the children not just for future schooling, but for life beyond institution.

Key Quotes

"*If we make love the center of our school, we will win every time because love turns us into a family*." (Pg. 43) - This quote puts Brewer's full expectations and thoughts of the education openly on display, resonating with readers that at the end of each day, his largest priority will always be the safety and well-being of the student.

"*I know that every day I'm alive is an opportunity to live with passion and purpose - to relentlessly live life to the fullest*." (Pg. 60) - Furthering Hamish Brewer's uncommon pedagogy, he very forwardly values the idea of incorporating his passions and innovativeness into the educational field, where many are wary to display their true selves.

"*Unless the actions are egregious and harmful to others, suspending students does not work.*" (Pg. 79) - Many may see this comment as defiant towards what the typical construct of reprimanding is in the public school system. Where Brewer makes his point, though, is when he adds that taking students out of the classroom not only eliminates the learning process, it potentially puts the student safety at risk, seeing as educational leaders cannot control what goes on outside of school.

"*We need to make our students' mental health and well-being a greater priority than their test scores*." (Pg. 89) - Brewer brings to light a growing problem many United States public schools are currently facing: the uncertainty of students' well-being and mental health in and out of the classroom. While educators may greatly fixate on student data and standardized testing results, they may fail to take into consideration when a student may be suffering. This encourages educators to remember pay closer attention to the mental state of their students, not only to guarantee an academically successful student, but a happy one, as well.

"*The key development started by ensuring that every single adult in the building was on the same page, walking to the same beat, sharing the same mission and vision.*" (Pg. 147) - Accounting for all stakeholders is where many schools fall short, as it is frequently difficult to involve families and parents in the decision-making process. This reminds educational figures that parental involvement should not only be put on the shoulders of the educator, but administrator, as well. Hamish Brewer sets up a meeting for each family when he receives a new student at the school, giving him the opportunity to involve parents and discuss expectations, serving as a great means of preventing disciplinary issues in the future.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Hamish Brewer's breakthrough novel stands alone in its attempt on various levels, serving as one of the many few leadership novels that stresses the idea of cultivating student and personnel support through building school culture. Brewer stresses many various ways in which educators and administrators can collaborate in order to build up rapport with parents and teachers, with many being ways that many educational leaders may steer clear from even attempting to approach.

The idea that being "relentless" in the pursuit of educating the youth can be seen as a proposition to all stakeholders to alter the way they see education, not eliminating any options, farfetched as they may be, in quest to create a lifelong learner. The strength in this specific theme comes from Brewer's

element of asking all those involved to call upon their passions, hobbies, originality, and innovativeness to create a learning experience that is so much more than enjoyable to students, but *memorable* for a lifetime to come.

As educators and parents continue to battle against rising technology, trends, and unexpected outliers, it is hard to think otherwise. This can be beneficial to all, as education is not what it once was. This is only solidified by the author's success in the many unpredictable, yet engaging strategies he uses in and out of the classroom to build students' confidence.

While this novel may resonate with many future educators and administrators, where it lacks is the idea that while each individual student matters, there is a focus on school culture that may not transfer over into the analytical side of education. There is plenty of talk of rallying personnel support and student loyalty, but less so as to how to keep students engaged in the classroom and academically on point. While it is easy to see that these broad topics may be able to intersect, there is room for interpretation that leads the reader to wonder whether testing is taken very seriously at Brewer's school.

Additionally, it may have been beneficial for the reader to have been given steps on how to work towards these unusual mindsets and strategies, in order to begin implementing tactics to assist in the creation and further building of school culture. Specific ways in which administrators can introduce these tactics to their leadership teams would have been even more intriguing, and would give school officials a guide map of sorts to begin successful implementation.

Though Brewer does note that there was evident progress in schoolwide data when he became an administrator at Occoquan Elementary in Prince William County, Virginia, he credits this to thorough stakeholder involvement, and so this leaves much for the reader to question in regards to how to implement this successfully.

Comparison to Fullan

While *Relentless* focuses on how educators can better themselves for the sake of their students, Fullan's text relies more on teambuilding and how administrators should work collaboratively with all stakeholders to create successful leadership teams within the ranks of the education system. Throughout Fullan's text, it is simple to understand how one can orchestrate a plan, put it to paper, and then bring it to fruition.

Fullan's descriptions and vivid pictural tables make the essence of putting together successful strategies seem rather simple, while Hamish Brewer solely tells his success story with small tips scattered throughout the novel to lead educators to trust in their passions and use this to rein in student involvement in the learning process. Fullan's text may be best utilized as a supplementary resource for those who are just beginning their journey as educational leaders. While Hamish Brewer's piece has strengths of its own, Fullan provides concrete detailing that those who are new to the profession will best respond to.

Contrarily, Brewer's strengths as an alternative administrator may better influence those who have been in leadership positions for stretched periods and need a refreshing outlook on how to be an

effective leader. The eclectic methods he uses to further engage students may be helpful to leaders who are experiencing a drastic cultural change in their school population and aren't sure how to handle these new personalities. When executing Brewer's methods on top of a solid educational leadership foundation, it may be an effective model. For beginners, on the other hand, it may be too much to take on the idea of reforming a school culture while solely relying on Hamish brewer's text.

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Hacking Leadership: 10 Ways Great Leaders Inspire Learning That Teachers, Students, and Parents Love

By Melissa A. Johnson

It can be assumed that every leader aspires to be a great one, but what exactly does a "great leader" exemplify? More specifically, what would a great leader look like within the context of education? Authors Joe Sanfelippo and Tony Sinanis coauthored *"Hacking Leadership: 10 Ways Great Leaders Inspire Learning That Teachers, Students, and Parents Love"*. The two authors who are well versed in education (both working as educators, administrators, and later as superintendents) address some of the common issues today's school leaders face, and provide "hacks", or unique solutions to these issues in practical and easy to implement ways. A main recurring theme is for educational leaders is to remain visible, present, and engaged-this hack is an essential part of the book and critical for any aspiring leader. To start, the authors suggest leaders "Make one consistent change at a time until it becomes a habit in your practice" (p. 20).

Section by section, Sanfelippo and Sinanis point out answers which address many of the issues educational leaders face today. The book starts off by introducing the section "A Better Way". The introduction highlights the need for (and impact of) leading with a "hacker's" mindset. Hackers are engaged, visionary leaders who empower others. "The daily work of a school leader is no longer just being an administrator or manager or even a boss; instead, a school leader needs to model transformative practices so that innovating becomes a norm and working with common principles becomes a collective goal for community members" (p. 13).

Following the introduction, the book is divided into 10 sections, each detailing: a common problem, a "hack", a "right-away" solution, a long-term blueprint, a list of possible objections with ways to overcome them, and an example of the hack being used by an educator or educators. Sections in the book cover topics like: leading versus managing, a leader's impact on school culture, relationship building, how to break down divides, creating schools that function for children, developing exceptional educators, empowering teachers, and eradicating deficit mind-sets. The first hack "Be Present and Engaged" sets the tone for the rest of the book. Without being present and engaged in meaningful ways, leaders are unable to successfully implement any of the other hacks. Simply put, being present and engaged paves the way for leaders to lead and engage in more meaningful ways. "Decisions should rarely be made in isolation; instead, all members of the school community should have some voice, and it is your responsibility to listen to others—to be present—in order to broaden your perspective and make the best decisions possible" (p.19).

Throughout the book, there is a common emphasis placed upon the importance of collaboration, communication, and the fostering relationships with staff, families, and within the community. The authors point out that the nurturing of these relationships, as well as leading with heart, can have a positive impact on leadership potential, school culture, and outcomes. "Because a school's culture extends to all of its stakeholders, effective interactions are the single most important non-negotiable in creating flourishing schools" (p. 15). The authors also make a strong point in noting the

importance of authenticity when building relationships by stating "If your attempts to build relationships are superficial or insincere, there is simply no book that can help" (p. 49).

As with Sanfelippo and Sinanis, Fullan (2001) also echoes the importance of building relationships in his book *"Leading in a Culture of Change"*. Fullan notes the close interrelation between moral purpose, relationships, and organizational success and provides examples of the positive outcomes companies, schools, and others have encountered when leaders focus on building relationships (p. 51-52). Additionally, Fullan (2001) reiterates the importance of engagement within the context of leadership, and the importance of modeling. "Leaders should be doing, and should be seen to be doing, that which they expect or require others to do" (p. 130). A point which Sanfelippo and Sinanis drive home throughout their book as well.

While the book by Sanfelippo and Sinanis has many strong points, I do wish it would have touched further upon collaborative efforts among school leaders. The section titled "Collaborate and Learn" details many useful tips on how to create meaningful professional development opportunities for educators and mentions professional learning communities. However, I feel that readers would have equally benefitted from a deeper look into inter-administrative collaborative practices in action. In his book, Fullan (2001) notes the many benefits of the different practices which support, broaden, and deepen the strategies, supports, and skills demonstrated by leaders (p. 127).

What I enjoyed most about Sanfelippo and Sinanis' book is its readability and practicality. With such great ideas, any leader (or aspiring one) should be able to read this book and immediately implement at least one "hack". The authors also present blueprints for long-term implementation, which can be tailored to address the specific needs of a school. The book takes on a more transformative and introspective approach to leadership which I think many readers will find inspiring. The advice I found most inspiring of all was to "be like water"-where too much or too little can be equally detrimental, but just the right amount can help those around you flourish.

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The ABCDEs: Five Considerations for Educating Homeless Students with Disabilities

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Abstract

This article provides a research-based discussion of the education of students who are homeless and also have disabilities. First, an overview of homeless students is provided, including recent data and legal requirements of the education of homeless students. Then, practical considerations for special educators working with students with disabilities experiencing homelessness are discussed.

The ABCDEs: Five Considerations for Educating Homeless Students with Disabilities

Corey is a 7th grade student with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and a specific learning disability. His resource room teacher, Mr. Ward, has worked with him since the 5th grade. He is making gains across all academic areas. He has also formed relationships with several peers and is well connected to his school. Recently, his father experienced a job loss and his family is about to be evicted from their apartment. They will be temporarily staying with friends who live about an hour away. These friends indicated that they will be able to stay for about two weeks. What are the school's legal obligations to Corey? How can Mr. Ward best support him and his family during this transition?

While Corey and his family appear to have a housing option, he meets the legal definition of homeless under the Federal McKinney-Vento Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Experiencing the hardship of homelessness is often stressful and traumatic. It may be particularly challenging for a student in need of extensive academic and social behavioral supports, including students with disabilities. Indeed, homeless students are more likely to have disabilities (Samuels, 2018) or have significant social and emotional needs due in part to circumstances related to housing insecurity, economic hardship, or trauma (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014; Canfield, Nolan, Harley, Hardy, & Elliott, 2016). The purpose of this article is to provide special educators with important background information about homelessness and homeless students with disabilities. First, background information on homelessness is discussed. Then, legal requirements under the McKinney-Vento Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are presented. Finally, practical suggestions on how best to serve this population of students in an effective manner are offered.

Homelessness and Public School Students

According to the most recent Federal data available, over 1.3 million children in U.S. public schools experience homelessness (National Center for Homeless Education, 2019) and it appears that the number of homeless students identified has increased in recent years (Walker, 2019). There may be a misconception that people who are homeless "live on the streets." However, the Federal McKinney-Vento Act definition of homelessness is not as narrow. Specifically, "homeless children and youth include individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and include

1. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals;
2. iv. migratory children…who qualify as homeless…because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii). (National Center for Homeless Education, 2018)"
3. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
4. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings…;

Given this definition, students may be homeless for any number of circumstances. For example, a high school student may have left his parents' house, is a "runaway," and is now "couch surfing" and staying with various friends for a couple of nights at a time. A family may be living in a shelter, in a car, or spending nights in various locations on the streets after fleeing domestic violence. Or, as in Corey's case, due to economic hardship, his family lost housing and are temporarily staying with friends. Thus, it is important for special educators to be aware of this definition and listen to students and families when they describe their housing situation. Given the multiple definitions of homelessness under McKinney-Vento, a family may not even be aware that they meet the definition of homeless. Even if a family is aware, the stigma associated with being homeless may prevent them from proactively reaching out to school personnel for support (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017).

When a student is found to be homeless, school districts must adhere to a number of specific legal requirements. These include, but are not limited to:

- Being immediately enrolled in school even if they do not have documentation normally required for enrollment in school
- Enrolling the student in the school of origin (see below) unless doing so is contrary to the child's or youth's parent or guardian or, for unaccompanied youth, the youth
- Providing transportation upon request
- Ensuring that students have access to all programs and services for which they are eligible (including special education)

Figure 1 provides a list of additional resources about homeless students.

Figure 1

Additional Resources on Homelessness

Additional Resources on Homelessness

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

http://www.naehcy.org

National Center for Homeless Education

http://www.nche.ed.gov

National Center on Family Homelessness

https://www.air.org/center/national-center-family-homelessness

Five Considerations for Educating Homeless Students with Disabilities

Homeless students with disabilities are legally entitled to a number of services and supports under both McKinney-Vento and IDEA. The following is an organizing framework for educators to help implement these requirements and provide effective supports to homeless students with disabilities. In this discussion, these five considerations are referred to as the ABCDEs for educating homeless students with disabilities. They are A) Attend to basic needs, B) Begin services immediately, C) Collaborate, D) Devise plans to support transitions; and E) Engage families and children. Figure 2 provides a checklist which may be adapted to support educators with meeting the needs of homeless students with disabilities.

Figure 2

Checklist for Meetings the Needs of Homeless Students with Disabilities

Attend to Basic Needs ?Contact food service providers and ensure student will receive free meals at school ?Ensure student has access to food outside of school. Consider donations or "backpack" program ?Communicate with family to learn about student's other basic needs (adequate sleep, clothing)
Begin Services Immediately ?Meeting scheduled with parents within 30 days of arrival to determine appropriate special education and related services ?Request records from previous schools attended ?Contact special education staff at previous schools attended to gather additional information ?Schedule to collect additional academic and behavioral data to inform programming
Collaborate ?Identify school district's McKinney-Vento liaison and obtain contact information ?Obtain information about local school or district procedures for enrolling and educating homeless students ?Make contact with any new transportation providers and provide information on relevant student needs (medical, communication etc.) ?Identify counseling and social work services in school and refer student as appropriate ?Communicate with school nurse or health services to ensure health care needs are met
Devise Plans to Support Transitions ?Support the McKinney-Vento liaison with making a "best interest" determination. ?Information and data on student needs and necessary supports, including IEP, provided to liaison

?Maintain comprehensive and up to date records to share with other educators
Engage families and children ?Check in regularly with family ?Ensure contact information is updated regularly ?Incorporate student and family needs into IEP as needed ?Ensure unaccompanied youth's participation in IEP process ?Utilize best practices in transition planning process (e.g., Person-Centered Planning, RENEW) ?Provide skills and opportunities for self-advocacy ?Identify the need exists for an educational surrogate parent (ESP)

Attend to Basic Needs

Students who are homeless may be experiencing a range of physical, social, and emotional difficulties (Armstrong, Owens, & Haskett, 2018). Attending to these needs is of paramount importance. Ensuring students are adequately nourished and have enough to eat is an important first step. Food insecurity is common among homeless children (Bassuk et al., 2014). Under the McKinney-Vento Act, students who are homeless are automatically eligible to receive free school meals under the school lunch program. Depending on school rules, teachers may also want to have snacks available to students experiencing food insecurity. Some schools also have "backpack" programs where donated non-perishable food items are sent home with students for evening and weekend meals. Other issues to be aware of may include lack of sleep or adequate clothing. In such cases, having regular communication with parents or guardians is important. Similarly, some students who are homeless have experienced trauma due to domestic violence, abuse, neglect, or other challenging family situations. Ensuring that staff who work with such students and families have up to date information on working with students who have experienced trauma (Cavanaugh, 2016) is necessary.

Begin Services Immediately

As noted above, students with disabilities who are homeless need to be immediately enrolled in school and have the opportunity to receive required services, even if all necessary documentation is not provided. Often, homelessness is a sudden event and families may have not had the time or ability to obtain complete records. Thus, it may be that a student with a disability who has an individualized education program (IEP) may not arrive at school on their first day with their IEP. However, it is still a school's responsibility to educate the child. In such cases, obtain as much information as possible from the family to begin services. IDEA requires that IEP teams meet after initial enrollment and this is a good opportunity to identify previous services the student may have

had. It is important to not assume that the child's previous school attended has complete records either. It isn't unusual for homeless students to have moved multiple times in a year. Such students are considered highly mobile (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) and, in such cases, when previous IEPs are not easily located, special educators and related service providers may want to collect additional data including formative assessments and behavioral observations to gauge a student's present levels of performance.

Collaborate

Collaboration is an essential duty when educating homeless students with disabilities. It takes a team to meet all of the student's needs in such cases. The most critical partner may be the school's McKinney-Vento liaison. Every school district is required to have a liaison who is responsible for ensuring that all homeless students receive services they are entitled to. Educators should identify who this liaison is and have a plan to stay in contact with them. This liaison will have information on specific policies or procedures within your school or district pertaining to homeless students. Additionally, they are often responsible for coordinating the range of transportation, educational, and social services a student may need. Despite the responsibilities of the liaison, educators often know the students the best and can provide necessary information to ensure effective implementation of supports. For example, if a homeless student has received specialized transportation it will be important to ensure that any new transportation providers are aware of their transportation needs.

Educators may also want to consider referrals to social services or community agencies in the area which can help with obtaining basic needs and housing. Referring students to counseling or social work services in the school, even if it is not on the current IEP may be helpful, particularly during transitions between housing.

Devise Plans to Support Transitions

A student who has recently lost housing or whose living arrangement has changed, sometimes multiple times within a few weeks or months, may be experiencing a range of stressors. Some may be fearful, nervous, or experiencing significant sadness and loss. While educators may not have control over a student's housing situation, they can play a critical role in making the transition as seamless as possible. Students who are homeless are generally entitled to remain in the "school of origin," which is the school the student attended before losing permanent housing. When a student is found to be homeless, the McKinney-Vento liaison often must make a "best interest" determination to identify if it is in the best interests of the student to remain in the school of origin or attend the school in their new neighborhood. Special educators should play a central role in identifying what is in the child's best interest. Special educators and related services providers can provide information about needed services and supports that are documented on the IEP. For example, if a student has difficulties with transitions, providing that information to the liaison, with supporting data, is important.

Sometimes, the school of origin may be quite a distance away. For example, a homeless shelter may be located in one community where the child's school of origin is several towns away. This may mean that the student has a longer bus ride, is taking multiple busses, or alternative modes of

transportation (e.g., taxis, public transit) to get to school. In such situations, it is important to communicate with families and transportation providers to ensure adequate pick-up and drop-off. If a student has special medical or communication needs, all adults coming into contact with the child must be aware of such needs and be prepared to meet those needs.

Special educators always need to maintain accurate and comprehensive records on students (McCray, Kamman, Brownell, & Robinson, 2017). However, for students with disabilities experiencing homelessness, keeping such records up to date and educationally relevant is critical. A student who is homeless may be in your school one day and gone the next. Having up to date records with all relevant educational and social information is important so they can be communicated with the next school in which the child may enroll.

Engage Families and Children

Considerations A through D, while important, will likely be ineffective without maximum engagement of families and students. The mobility experienced by students is challenging and can be emotionally draining. This stress is often also experienced by the child's parents or guardians. Thus, it is important to empathize with the current situation experienced by the family. In some cases, a family may simply be trying to have basic needs met and may appear less invested or involved with the child's educational programming. Avoid making assumptions about a child or family's living situation and approach them with humility. It is very important to listen to families and ask questions to have an understanding of current needs. Living arrangements may change often and moves may be frequent. Thus, it is helpful to check in regularly and ensure that all available contact information is up to date. During the IEP process, ensure that relevant family and child needs are considered when identifying legally required supports and services such as counseling, transportation services, accommodations, and transition services.

Unaccompanied Youth

Unaccompanied youth are a specific subset of homeless students that require special attention. Often adolescents, unaccompanied youth are not currently in the custody of a parent or guardian (Aviles, 2019). They may be living on the streets, with other friends or family, or in a shelter. They are entitled to the same rights as other children who are homeless. Given that many of them are adolescents, it is critical that such vulnerable youth have access to effective transition services. Using effective person-centered approaches to transition planning are important. During transition meetings with the IEP team, ensure that relevant post-secondary and social service providers are invited to meetings to support a transition plan that considers the range of academic, social, emotional, and vocational needs such students may have. For example, if the student is living in a shelter, inviting an advocate from the shelter may be helpful. Research-based planning models such as RENEW (Drake & Malloy, 2015) should be strongly considered when supporting effective transition plans. In all cases, youth involvement and leadership in the process is critical. If their housing situation is unstable and additional changes in housing and moves across district lines are likely, ensuring that the youth has the tools to self-advocate is needed. Unaccompanied youth who have not reached the age of majority may also need representation as part of the IEP process. Thus,

special educators should contact their administrator or state department of education to identify an educational surrogate parent (ESP) for the student (see Figure 3 for additional information on ESPs).

Figure 3

Educational Surrogate Parents

What is an educational surrogate parent?

The IDEA requires that schools ensure that students with disabilities who are not in the custody of their parents receive the same legal protections as other students with disabilities. To do so, students may be assigned an educational surrogate parent (ESP) if:

1. No parent can be identified

2. The public agency cannot locate the parent

3. The child is a ward of the State or

4. The child is an unaccompanied homeless youth (Cite)

Once a child is determined to be in need of an ESP, the State has 30 days to assign an ESP to the student. ESPs represent the child in educational matters pertaining to special education including identification, evaluation, placement, and the provision of FAPE. Contact your local district or the State Department of Education in your State to learn more about ESP options available to students.

Final Thoughts

Addressing the needs of homeless students with disabilities presents a unique challenge for educators. Fortunately, well qualified special educators often have many of the necessary skills to serve homeless students, such as competencies related to data collection, collaboration, documentation and paperwork, individualizing interventions, and planning for transitions. When combining this expertise with current information on the education of homeless youth and families, effective supports can be designed, developed, and implemented.

Upon learning that Corey was homeless, Mr. Ward immediately made contact with the school district's homeless liaison. Transportation was obtained so Corey could remain in his school of origin. Mr. Ward met with Corey's father to identify what the family's current needs were. Corey's father did not have a cell phone so, with the father's permission, Mr. Ward also obtained the contact information of the family they were staying with to be able to maintain contact with Corey's father. Mr. Ward has also been keeping regular notes on Corey's progress as Mr. Ward indicated that they may be moving again into a motel in another district. The IEP team recently met and learned that Corey is having increased difficulty concentrating on his schoolwork due to the recent changes. Thus, the team has added counseling services to Corey's IEP. He will now meet with the school social worker on a weekly basis and the school social worker is also working with community agencies to obtain additional services for Corey's family. Mr. Ward will also be collecting additional behavioral data to determine if more intensive behavioral interventions may be helpful to support Corey's focus in school. While Corey's situation is still uncertain his school services will be maintained without

interruption and as effectively as possible as Mr. Ward has ensured that both legal and practical considerations were addressed as part of Corey's program.

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Book Review: Culturize: Every Student. Every Day. Whatever it Takes

By Jimmy Casas

Introduction

In a school culture that thrives for change, Jimmy Casas delivers a book about morally structuring a plan that develops leaders at every level. The development of the book begins by defining the term "culturize", leadership and more. While strategically sharing personal experiences, Casas manages to captivate an audience ready to make a change that begins with self. By providing emphasis on the power of building a community of learners, Casas raises interesting insight on what it's like to be a struggling student and how to address like students. Casas believes every individual is a leader, which is a belief he securely explores.

Jimmy Casas was a school leader for twenty-two years. He is a best-selling author, speaker and leadership coach. Currently, Casas is an adjunct professor at Drake University, teaching a graduate course on Educational Leadership. With his level of expertise and exposure in the area of school leadership; Casas is qualified to provide insight and advice on how to build productive school culture. His collection of written books include his number one selling book "Culturize- Every Student. Every Day. Whatever It Takes" along with "What Connected Educators Do Differently" and "Start. Right. Now. – Teach and Lead for Excellence". As an award winning principal, Casa offers strategies that have proven positive results with simple and realistic systems.

Culture is different across disciplines. In reference to Casas's book "Culturize- Every Student. Every Day. Whatever It Takes" he defines the term "culturize" as a way to "cultivate a community of learners by behaving in a kind, caring, honest, and compassionate manner in order to challenge and inspire each member of the school community to become more than they ever thought possible". Setting the definition for the term "culturize" as the tone of the book propels interest for leaders to explore. In a culture that is ever-changing, Casas poses an intriguing thesis as he unpacks a guide on how to create a culture that is accepting of students regardless of abilities. The position of the book reinforces the need for leaders of the school to breed intentional and realistic connections with students.

The flow of the book refers to core principles that good leaders should follow. In addition to the core principles, Casas provides "culture builders" at the end of each chapter which act as the applicable changes referenced per chapter. The first core principle is referred to as a Champion for Students. This part of the book explores how to build a culture that is student centered by recognizing how leadership should be implemented and carried through. He selflessly describes how to accomplish a culture of accepting students for who they are and what they may be going through in their personal lives. Casas paints the picture of an accepted classroom environment by stating "if we want kids to take responsibility for their own learning, we must provide an environment where their curiosity is nurtured and developed- where they want to learn simply for the sake of learning". To support this idea, Casas provides a framework that is comprised of methods to achieve becoming a champion for

students. To establish this, he elaborates on how to address student misbehavior and underwhelming urgency of participation. His methods are achievable and realistic. It is with confident voice that Casas explores the mindset of adults by asking "if adults buy into mindset that kids can't, then how can we complain when kids won't?". In this case, being a champion for a student is believing their abilities and not focusing on their weaknesses. It is the responsibility of a leader to inspire and dig deeper into the abilities of a student that they themselves begin to see that they can achieve.

Being a champion for a student provides the foundation for what to expect from them once you establish this expectation. At this point, Casas introduces the second core principle which is: expect excellence. This chapter's tone is set by the quote by John Wooden; "a leader's most powerful ally is his or her own example". Digging into this quote; Casas reveals an important lesson to be learned as a leader. The principle is founded by the idea that leaders do not need a title. For example, the mere fact that you are a secretary doesn't discount you from upholding the role of a leader. Your job responsibilities are important as the principal of the school. Casas delves in by expressing that leaders are responsible for building capacity. What he means by this is that every organization operates with multiple functions. By employing leadership skills in each, the organization will function properly and effectively. This principle is effectively implemented through the ability to effectively share your abilities to uplift and generate an open culture. According to Casas "building a community of leaders is how we create school cultures where everyone, from the youngest student to the most seasoned educator, believes they have an obligation to be a culturizer with the power to impact the school in a positive way.". However, Casas responsibly identifies how being a culturizer is evident when you're not physically in the building of your organization. Following this concept, he firmly addresses the inevitable responsibility to say "no". According to Casas, the ability to say no is unavoidable in the role of any leader. This principle is outlined by four concepts. The first concept is to pay attention to how you say no and what you do afterward. The second concept is that power and rightness aren't the same. The third concept is to accept that dealing with stressful situations is a part of saying no and lastly; sometimes a "no" is the beginning of a deeper relationship. These concepts are important because they explore the meaning of the expectations of a good leader. Casas reinforces his position for expecting excellence when stating "they understand that expecting excellence from themselves is a choice but striving for excellence each day is a lifestyle and the first step in modeling what they expect from others."

Culturizing is accomplished in more ways than one. Following the core principle of expecting excellence is core principle three- Carry the banner. This part of the book explores and identifies ways in which to build culture mainly by collaboration. When considering collaboration in leadership, Casa recommends building a collaborative model, acknowledging certain behaviors by students and telling your school's story. A certain depth is revealed by the way Casas takes his experiences in all stages and recreates them for his audience. It shows how humility and structure work together to bring results.

Casas concludes his book with a fourth core principle: Be a merchant of Hope. To establish the tone for this principle, a quote is outlined on the first page of this chapter, written by Salmone Thomes-EL "It's one thing to say we have high expectations for kids…. But another to say I will be here to help

you… no matter your struggles!". This quote emulates the finesse of this book. The fourth principle focuses on the notion that a merchant be considered the leader. In this case, assuming you are the merchant offering hope for the students. To accomplish this task, Casas outlines student interviews, home visit mentor programs and teacher calls. All of these ideals map out the success of how leaders become personal to each of the students. They can feel welcomed and heard by their leaders. In turn, this encourages a culture of acceptance and hope for all students. Consequently, these kinds of interactions inspire leaders on a different level of understanding of their student body. It becomes a way to get closer to them.

Culturize brings brilliant light to moral approach in uprising a strong school culture guided by strong effective leaders. It exposes real-life scenarios and concrete examples of the reality in schools across the nation today. An easy read and ultimately friendly in the way it defines professional growth that is both easy and attainable. Casas is sure to deliver a strong disposition on who plays the role of a leader. This was personally gratifying in every sense. Casas addresses challenges exposed in education which he believes everyone is a leader whether good or bad, administrative or non-administrative, teacher, student, etc. He generates a motivational voice when he states "everyone here has the capacity to lead, and everyone here is responsible for the culture and climate of your organization. No one person is responsible for your success or failure but you and no one is responsible for your moral but you". By stating such a position, Casas introduces the motivation to become a successful leader. The book is comprised of endless inspiration in becoming a leader. According to Casas, being a leader mirrors someone who is willing to share their abilities with others. He establishes this belief by outlining ways in which different people who play different roles in your organization can emulate the role of a leader. Casas states "Everyone in an organization has the fundamental capacity to lead. Yes, Everyone. That includes teachers, students, counselors, nurses, assistant principals, paraprofessionals, directors, and so on without exception". By stating his position about leadership, he strikes a large playing field of possibilities. When one considers leadership in a school usually the assumption is administration. After reading Casas's take on leadership it offers a broad perspective on character and leadership alike.

When considering an ever-changing culture, one might consider principles that are less moral based. In the book "Leading in a Culture of Change" by Michael Fullan, he outlines ways in which culture is changing and ways to change with it and demand effectiveness without being under or over aggressive. Fullan and Casas both believe in effective leadership and the power of change. Casas offers a moral based approach to culturize your school, while Fullan addresses culture as ever-changing. Where Casas reminds culture to be in the hands of leaders, Fullan identifies how a leader is to evolve with change detouring being over-exerted. More specifically, Fullan explores a characteristic of an effective leader as someone who isn't so much concerned with the time it takes for a situation to resolve, but rather to know that it takes time for things to gel. Adversely, Casas outlines the role of a leader to have the responsibility of identifying where average exists and changing it, not just managing it. One might take into consideration both viewpoints because they are both valid in the light of culture and change. However, depending on your personal leadership style, you could consider either.

Although Casas truly delivers a bold outlook on leadership and how to culturize a school, he doesn't identify how to address specific departments of a school system such as Exceptional Student Education (ESE). Today, more than ever, ESE is prevalent and having strong leadership to guide this department is scarce. Room for improvement is found in this area of Casas's position. Perhaps he would consider writing a section about Special Education and the unique leadership skills required to advocate for teachers and students, as well as how leadership is paramount for the department's success. As an ESE teacher, it is difficult to find effective leaders in this area with a strong sense of connection and urgency to lead the ESE department. Consequently, special education teachers are leaving the school system due to quick burn-out. According to Casas's book; building culture is the center of success which he could delve deeper into explicit review on how to culturize special education. When considering leadership, there is a need for stronger effective leaders in special education. However, thankful for the insight Casas produces through his years of effective leadership. Culturize is a book that serves as a professional development that is altogether inspiring and challenge provoking.

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General Educator Perceptions of School Support in Teaching Students with an IEP

By Faith Kenny
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Abstract

Historically, researchers have focused on the perceptions of special education teachers regarding inclusion. Research has shown that general education teachers who feel supported by their schools provide better classroom experiences for all students (Hwang and Evans, 2011). This study expanded upon this thinking by asking general educators what they felt were the most beneficial supports in meeting the needs of students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Results indicated that general education teachers viewed their ability to meet the needs of diverse learners positively. Respondents felt they had a positive relationship with special education teachers, even though little collaborative planning time was given Respondents additionally affirmed that smaller class size, more paraprofessional assistance, and more individual planning time were needed. These findings powerfully suggest that general educators value collaborative and individual planning time to meet the needs of their students. Overall, this study provides tangible ways that school administrators can provide desired support to general education teachers.

General Educator Perceptions of School Support in Teaching Students with an IEP

Historically, researchers have focused on the perceptions of special education teachers regarding inclusion and, to a lesser extent, general education teachers. Research has shown that general education teachers who feel supported by their schools and administration provide better classroom experiences for all students (Hwang and Evans, 2011). This study sought to expand on this thinking by asking general educators what they felt were the most beneficial supports in meeting the needs of students with an IEP in the classroom. Administrators and policymakers can then use this information to influence how they best support teachers through desired resources and aid.

Synopsis

In classrooms across the United States from preschool through high school there are 6,464,000 students with an Individualized Education Plan (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that these students be placed in the least restrictive environment for their learning (Taylor, Smiley, and Richards, 2008, p. 20). Therefore, 95% of these 6.46 million students are served in a general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). With a shortage of qualified special education teachers these classrooms are being taught by general educators **(**Brownell et al., 2014, p. 2**)**. How do these general educators perceive they are being supported by their schools in meeting the needs of a student with an IEP? What types of IEP classifications do general educators find most supported or least supported in teaching? Do general educators feel that their school is offering appropriate and successful special education related services? How can school administration and school districts best support general educators in meeting increased demands in the classroom? These questions were answered in a survey which explored general educator perceptions regarding related services in their schools. The survey was

administered through social media. The study itself was organized in such a way as to have the survey, literature review, results and discussion all follow the same five topic areas: (1) demographics and general information, (2) teacher perceptions on inclusion, (3) teacher perceptions of related services, (4) teacher perceptions of their own inclusive teaching practices and (5) teacher perceptions of school support.

Definition of terms

For the purposes of this survey and paper the subsequent definitions from Taylor, Smiley, and Richards (2008) were adhered to unless otherwise noted for important terminology.

- **Individualized Education Plan** (IEP) - statement of a student's educational program written by a multidisciplinary team (pp. 20-21)
- **Inclusion** - the IEPs of students with disabilities will be implemented primarily by the general education teacher in the general education classroom (p. 51)
- **Pull out services** - a therapist or educator provides intervention to an individual or small group outside the classroom (pp. 228-229)
- **Push in services** - services or supports that are delivered to the student with a disability in their regular classroom (Tourette Syndrome Plus, 2002, p. 14)
- **Related Services** - those activities or supports that enable a child with a disability to receive a free, appropriate public education (p. 9)

Historical Findings

The researcher began a literature review investigating the previously referenced five categories, (1) demographics and general information, (2) teacher perceptions on inclusion, (3) teacher perceptions of related services, (4) teacher perceptions of their own inclusive teaching practices, and (5) teacher perceptions of school support. This categorical research ultimately led to the organization of the review. The researcher also used this research to inform survey questions. The goal of this survey was to either confirm or deny historical findings as well as expand upon the ideas previously researched.

Little research was found that spoke to the general educator's perceptions of inclusion and specifically how successful perceived related services were for students with an IEP. Most research found focused on special educator or pre-service educators' perceptions of inclusion. Any research that did address general educator's perceptions were from countries other than the United States. A lack of available information points to the importance of completing this study. This bottom up understanding of general education teacher feelings and attitudes towards inclusion and best practices will only strengthen the field of education for both students and professionals.

Demographics and General Information. There is a chronic shortage of qualified special education teachers in the United States based on recruitment and turnover issues **(**Brownell et al., 2014, p. 2**)**. Many inclusive general education classrooms are being taught by general educators, not specifically trained or possibly enthusiastic about managing students in special education.

Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion. Research has shown that the number of inclusive classrooms has grown dramatically over the past two decades (Rosenzweig, 2009). In theory, most

teachers believed that both special education students and general education students benefited from being in an inclusive environment, however, inclusion places additional burdens on already overtaxed teachers (Fuchs, 2010, p. 34). Logan and Wimer (2013) even found a correlation between student age and how positive teachers were towards the practice of inclusion. As students grew older teachers held a more positive belief regarding inclusion (p. 6).

Teachers may believe that inclusion is a positive concept, but be reluctant to put this concept into practice. Limited planning time, the demands and pacing of curriculum, lack of formal special education training, the challenges of collaboration have all been noted. As Logan and Wimer (2013) state, "Teacher attitudes matter in the classroom. Attitudes impact how teachers communicate with students as well as how curricular decisions are determined in the classroom" (p. 13).

Outside of the United States other countries each have their own perspectives on inclusion. A study in Korea completed by Hwang and Evans (2011) indicated that while general education teachers are favorably disposed towards the theory of inclusion, they are concerned about its practical implementation. Hwang and Evans (2011) went on to say, "the majority of teachers (75.85%) felt that students with disabilities would receive a better education in a special education classroom" (p. 140). Another study from Ghana identified barriers to inclusion in a preschool setting.

Even though teachers were positive about inclusion, the challenges they faced every day with children with less severe disabilities (in Ghana inclusion is only for those with less severe disabilities) made them feel that inclusion at this point in their classrooms was not working. The need to complete the syllabus makes it difficult to spend more time with those with disabilities. Teachers mentioned that because of their class size it was difficult to spend more time with those with special needs and give them one-on-one attention (Ntuli & Traore, 2013, p. 54).

What has also been shown to negatively affect teachers' attitudes towards inclusion is the intensity of a student's IEP classification and that student's ability to affect the classroom environment. As Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin (1996) found in their seminal study, while 78.8% of 578 general education teachers in North America showed positive attitudes towards inclusion…this willingness appears to vary according to the type and severity of disability (pp. 29-30). Additionally, in a study completed in the United Kingdom, Avramidis, Brownell, Sindelar, and Waldron (2000) reported that regardless of the positive overall value assigned to the concept of inclusion, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities were seen as creating more concern and stress than those with other types of disabilities (p. 193).

A strong school community and administration can also greatly impact both a teacher's view of inclusion and her very direct ability to effectively teach students with an IEP. School administration, responsible for both tangible and intangible items (such as morale and resource allocation), can influence feelings on inclusion. As Cook, Semmel, and Gerber's (1999) study maintains "Principals held generally optimistic views regarding the benefits of inclusion. Yet it should be recognized that although principals' positive attitudes may influence whether and how schools adopt inclusion policies, they do not guarantee that such policies are successful" (p. 205).

The educational system displays a discrepancy between the administrators' role, which directly affects the architectural, and programmatic factors of inclusion, and the teachers' role. The former is required to address the various needs of diverse populations, while the latter handles the needs of an individual child. This role discrepancy may affect teachers' versus administrators' viewpoints and attitudes, and those of the teachers' may well serve as distinctive factors (Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010, p. 91).

Both studies show the importance of administration leading with a positive attitude towards inclusion, but just as important is supplying teachers with desired types of support. More information on this topic can be found in a subsequent section of this study.

Teacher Perceptions of Related Services. General education teachers, special education teachers, and service providers must work closely to meet the needs of students with an IEP. Therefore, related services directly affect the teaching, scheduling, and planning of a general education teacher. Much discussion and research has been performed from the viewpoint of a special education teacher, but as Brownell et al. (2014) noted in their study 95% of students with an IEP spend most of their day in a general education classroom.

A positive working relationship between general education and special education teachers and service providers is key to successful teaching. As Vakil, Welton, O'Connor, and Kline (2009) observed, "Successful inclusive practice requires collaboration between the class teacher and the wider school community, including support and specialist staff, as well as parents/carergivers" (p. 53). Successful relationships thrive on non-intimidating conversation and mutual respect for abilities. Hwang and Evans (2011) found that 51.72% of general education teachers in their study were "sufficiently involved in the inclusion process" (p. 141), but 17.23% of survey respondents "reported feeling some degree of intimidation in collaborating with special education teachers" (Hwang and Evans, 2011, pp. 140-141).

As Hwang and Evans (2011) noted administrators can encourage a strong relationship between general education and special education teachers by allocating more collaborative planning time. A recent study completed by Mackey (2014) used qualitative interviews with teachers to explore this idea. In each example teachers who used collaborative planning time effectively felt more successful in their teaching than did teachers who were either not given time or used their collaborative planning time to discuss off-topic content. Effective collaborative planning time focused on differentiating lesson plans, considering roles and responsibilities of each teacher, and discussing the needs of special education students.

Little research was found that explored the idea of general education teachers' perceptions of specific related services. One could argue who better would know the positive, neutral or negative effects of services and service providers than the teacher of record in a classroom. This study attempted to supply this missing piece of key research, as the reader will find in the results section.

Teacher Perceptions of Their Own Inclusive Teaching Practices. Because of the push towards inclusion in recent decades, general education teachers "play a primary role in the education of students with disabilities…[but] often they report feeling unprepared to undertake this role"

(Adams, Brownell, Sindelar, Vanhover, & Waldron, 2006, p. 169). Monson, Ewing and Kwoka (2014) stressed that "the success or failure of implementing inclusive educational policy and practice is dependent upon what the classroom teacher believes" (p.114). How teachers feel about their own inclusive teaching practices offers administrators another glimpse into how best to support educators in successful teaching.

Teacher attitudes towards their own inclusive teaching practices have grown more positive over the past two decades. Center and Ward's (1987) study of general education teachers "indicated that teachers' attitudes to the integration of individual disabled children reflected lack of confidence in their own instructional skills" (p. 41). Avramidis, Brownell, Sindelar, and Waldron (2000) then found that "teachers with active experience of inclusion held significantly more positive attitudes" (p. 200). These two viewpoints, 13 years apart, illustrate that the mandate of least restrictive environment has compelled teachers to learn to differentiate and with this experience came a more positive reflection of their own teaching practice.

Key to increasing teacher competence and confidence are professional development opportunities and planning time. As Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) found "high-quality professional development results in the acquisition of teaching skills necessary to meet the needs of all students" (p. 205). Their study, showed that teachers who had been trained to teach students with learning difficulties expressed more favorable attitudes and emotional reactions to students with special education needs (SEN) and their inclusion, than did those who had no such training. "Our study supports these findings because it not only revealed that teachers with substantial training were more positive to inclusion, but also indicated that their confidence in meeting IEP requirements was boosted as a result of their training", (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000, p. 207).

Planning time, too, plays a crucial role in teacher perceptions. Time needs to be given to meet the extra demands of quality differentiation. Maeng (2011) found, "lack of planning time was a barrier to full enactment of differentiation" (p. 40). Mackey's (2014) study also provided a qualitative illustration of this statement:

The math teacher felt that the hour of planning she was allotted each day was woefully inadequate…she acknowledged that the inclusion of students with disabilities in her classroom forced her to think through her lessons more thoroughly in order to make sure she presented the material in such a way as to help every student understand it. (p. 10)

Teacher Perceptions of School Support. Numerous studies conducted over the last 20 years have come to the same conclusion - teacher attitudes towards inclusion become more positive the more support they receive from schools. As Monsen, Ewing, and Kwoka (2014) illustrate:

findings suggest that teachers who feel inadequately supported are less likely to hold positive attitudes towards including pupils with special education needs (SEN). Those with less positive attitudes are also less likely to provide classroom learning environments suitable for pupils with SEN (and all pupils). It is therefore imperative that adequate internal and external supports are made available to teachers to mediate these effects. (p. 124)

The options for teacher support vary widely and are based on many factors including teacher willingness, administrative support, and school district funding. Studying perceived adequacy of support would enable school administrators to find the most meaningful and appreciated practices in which to focus time and effort. Burnstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, and Spagna (2004) observed that teachers felt they lacked the in-class supports necessary to implement the practices that characterize inclusion. Alternatively, Campbell, Gilmore, and Cuskelly (2003) found preservice teachers' attitudes were more positive immediately after completing coursework. So, what are the best ways to provide support for inservice teachers? Fuchs (2010) attempted to answer this question by highlighting areas of needed support. These included inservice training, smaller class size, more collaboration and planning time, less curriculum demands, better college training in special education, less struggle between special education and general education teachers, and a higher quality of assistance offered by special education support staff in classrooms. Hwang and Evans (2011) surveyed teachers in Korea who reported that "they needed more systematic support and resources such as teaching materials, training and smaller class size" (p. 141). Smith and Tyler (2011) found that as "teachers gain experience, professional development activities enhance their ability to apply research to become more effective instructors, resulting in increasingly better outcomes for their students. Web-based technology is one vehicle through which current information on evidence-based practices can be disseminated" (p. 336).

Historical context provided, the reader will now find information on the organization of this study's survey in the following section.

Methodology

Participants. Demographic information was found within the first section of the survey and was used to determine if there was a link between age, gender, experience or education, and participants' feelings on inclusion and school support. Survey participants provided their own demographic information. The first question asked was age. Fifty-four point five percent of participants were 35 - 50 years old, 40.9 percent of participants were 26 - 34 years old and 4.5 percent of participants were over 50 years old. No participants were under the age of 25. The second question asked gender. Ninety-five point five percent of respondents were female, and 4.5 percent were male. Graduate degree holders accounted for 86.4 percent of respondents with 13.6 percent undergraduate degree holders making up the rest of the sample. Participants were well balanced regarding teaching experience. Thirty-six point four percent of respondents have taught for 4 - 6 years, another 36.4 percent of respondents have taught for over 15 years, and 27.3 percent of respondents have taught for 7 - 15 years. Finally, this sample was most represented by elementary school teachers. Sixty-one point nine percent of respondents taught Kindergarten through 5th grade, 23.8 percent taught 6th through 8th grade, 9.5 percent taught 9th through 12th grade, and 4.8 percent taught preschool.

Survey organization. This survey was created to ascertain general education teacher perceptions regarding special education support services from their respective schools. Research conducted in the literature review was used to inform survey questions. Based upon the literature review, questions were asked to confirm previous findings and to expand upon ideas touched upon in other

studies. Anonymity was guaranteed to ensure open sharing from participants regarding their feelings.

The survey opened with a statement on participant requirements and participants determined their own eligibility. The survey asked for general education classroom teachers of record, preschool through high school, who teach students with an IEP. Next the purpose of the survey, to ascertain general education teacher perceptions regarding school support in teaching students with an IEP, was highlighted. A disclaimer followed stating that results were aggregated and there were no benefits or punishments for completion of the survey. To ensure shared common knowledge, the survey then defined certain terms used within the questions. Defined terms included: IEP, inclusion, pull out services, push in services, and related services.

The survey focused on 36 quantitative questions and was broken down into five sections. The first section (1) focused on demographic and general information including age, gender, highest level of education achieved, current grade level taught, "how many students in your class require mandated special services" and "how many students need additional help not mandated by an IEP". The survey then moved on to cover four additional categories: (2) teacher perceptions on inclusion, (3) teacher perceptions of related services, (4) teacher perceptions of their own inclusive teaching practices, and (5) teacher perceptions of school support. These categories reappear within the body of this text for organizational purposes. Within each category it was important to formulate two types of questions. Type one established the current situation of special services in respective schools. Type two then asked respondents for their opinions on how to improve the situation. The dichotomy of these question styles was intended to fulfill the goal of this paper.

This survey used a Likert scale style of responding. The most common scale used was 1 - 5 from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". By using a Likert scale style of responding the researcher was able to mathematically analyze the feelings and emotions of general educators to create trends. This survey also asked a 6-point Likert style scale question with possible answers ranging from "Extremely Effective" to "Extremely Ineffective" to "Not Provided". "Not provided" was an important option as the intent of this question was to discern teacher perceptions of how effective different services were for special education students. Also included were "check all that apply" multiple choice questions. These questions allowed multiple answers where respondents could have felt there was more than one disability category or more than one special service to be affirmed. Finally, there was one "fill in the blank" question. Respondents could include any service they wished their school offered, whether a commonly occuring related service or a need that the teacher had witnessed.

Survey Creation and Dissemination. The survey, General Educator Perceptions of School Support in Teaching Students with an IEP was created using Google Forms. As stated above, survey questions were created from research found within the literature review. The survey was anonymous, and results were aggregated. No IP addresses were captured, and no identifying questions were asked of respondents. There was no reward for taking this survey nor was there a penalty for non-completion. The survey was distributed through social media using the Google Forms link on October 23, 2017. The survey closed on November 2, 2017.

Data Collection and Analysis. Survey data was collected using Google Forms. The survey was open for responses for ten days. After ten days the survey was closed, and Google Forms aggregated the data by item. Google Forms presented findings in figure form for 35 questions and as a list for one fill in the blank question. The researcher analyzed trends in the data to shape a discussion. Aggregated data was also reviewed to either affirm or attest statements that were made in multiple studies in the Literature Review section. Examples of these statements include such questions as "I believe my school administration tries to provide support to teachers" and "I believe inclusion in an effective practice".

This study's survey provided relevant data that aligned with previous research and contrasted other research. The next section will offer a narrative of survey findings organized within the same five categories as the literature review and survey.

Results

The purpose of this study was to ascertain general education teacher perceptions regarding school support in teaching students with an IEP. Twenty-two people responded to the survey. Results of the survey were organized within the same five recurring categories seen throughout this study. Results from the anonymous survey were aggregated by Google Forms and reported below.

Demographics and General Information. Survey respondents were overwhelmingly female with only one male respondent. Over half of survey respondents, 54.5%, were between the ages of 35 - 50. Forty point nine percent were between the ages of 26 - 34. Eighty-six point four percent of people held graduate degrees. "Years of teaching" was almost a complete three way split between the categories of 4 - 6 years, 7 - 15 and over 15 years of experience. Grade level taught was also scattered between nursery school and high school with the highest category, 3rd - 5th grade, representing 38.1% of respondents.

Over 80% of respondents' classrooms contained 1 - 6 students with an IEP. All classrooms had at least one student with an IEP. All but one respondent reported that their classroom contained students in need of additional help not mandated by an IEP. Forty-two point nine percent of respondents reported that they had over six students in their classroom in need of additional help not mandated by an IEP (see Figure 1 on the following page).

Figure 1. How many students in your classroom need additional help not mandated by an IEP?

Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion. Overall, 54.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that inclusion was an effective practice. The survey then broke the effects of inclusion down between students with an IEP and general education students. Sixty-three point seven percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that inclusion benefitted students with an IEP in a classroom setting, however, only 54.4% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that inclusion was beneficial for all students in a classroom. Based upon the ultimate purpose of this study the survey then moved on to target questions regarding school administrations' attitudes towards inclusion. Seventy-seven point two percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school administration valued inclusion. Almost all of those who indicated that their school administration valued inclusion also

strongly agreed or agreed that they supported inclusion. Thirsty-one point eight percent disagreed with the statement "I believe that my school administration does not understand the pragmatic concerns of inclusion". Since inclusion aims to foster the idea of least restrictive environment, respondents were asked to indicate which official IEP classifications they felt would be better served in a special education classroom or school. Respondents could choose more than one category. Eighty three point three percent of respondents indicated that students with an Emotional Disturbance would be better served in those alternative learning environments. There were also four classifications (Hearing Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment, Visual Impairment and Other Health Impairment) that no one felt would be better served outside a mainstream classroom (see Figure 2 below for a detailed list).

Figure 2. I believe students with these IEP classifications would be better served in a special education classroom or school. (Check any or all that apply.)

Teacher Perceptions of Related Services. This section asked respondents to reflect upon the effectiveness of related services within their school and the respondents' relationship with related service providers. Sixty-three point six percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that related service providers provided the mandated services listed on their student's IEPs, however, 59.1% of respondents also disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. "Push in or pull out services are provided on a set schedule and are not affected by other meetings or teacher absences". Furthermore, 54.6% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that special education teachers and service providers provided quality push in or pull out services. Eighty-six point four percent believed that they have a positive working relationship with special education teachers and service providers.

Ninety point nine percent of respondents were given less than one hour of planning time per week to collaborate with special education teachers and service providers. Responses to the question, "I use collaboration time with special education teachers and service providers to focus on the needs of students with IEPs" were scattered across the response categories with the highest response, 36.4%, being in the neutral category. Eighty-six point four percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the belief that collaborative planning time produced better overall teaching for students with an IEP. Respondents also felt strongly with 90.9% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement, "I feel intimidated in discussing special education topics with special education teachers and/or service providers".

Finally, respondents were asked how helpful they felt specific related services were for students. Answers can be viewed in Table 3 below. Respondents were then given the opportunity to list any services they felt were missing from their school that would be valuable for their students. Only one person responded commenting, "We have inclusion classrooms, but I would love to see more co-teaching models."

Classroom Aides/Paraprofessionals	50% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Student Aides (1:1, 2:1)	50% responded with Not Offered
Resource Room/Pull Out services	72.8% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Push In services	40.9% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Collaborative teaching with a Special Education teacher (one or more periods a day)	40.9% responded with Not Offered
Co-teaching	47.6% response split between Extremely Effective/Effective and Not Offered
Speech and Language services	59.1% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Occupational Therapy	59.1% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Physical Therapy	50% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Behavioral Counseling	54.5% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective

. How helpful is this specific special service for your students?

Teacher Perceptions of Their Own Inclusive Teaching Practices. This section began by asking respondents for an honest reflection upon their own teaching practices. Beginning historically, respondents were asked if their undergraduate/graduate work prepared them for working with students with an IEP. Answers were almost evenly scattered across response categories strongly agree, agree, neutral and disagree. Only one respondent answered with strongly disagree. Moving to the present situation, 86.4% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they effectively taught students with an IEP in their classroom. Ninety-five point five percent of respondents also strongly agreed or agreed that they have improved in teaching students with an IEP

over the course of their teaching career. Seventy-two point eight percent strongly agreed or agreed that one way to improve, "professional development opportunities related to special education", allowed them to be more effective teachers.

The survey then moved on to more straightforward questions on allocated planning time. Fifty-nine point one percent of respondents were given 2.5 - 5 hours of planning time each week. Drilling that down respondents were then asked how many hours of planning time they spent differentiating lesson plans for students with an IEP. Sixty-six point seven percent of respondents spend 1 - 2 hours of their allocated planning time differentiating lesson plans (see Figure 4 below). Finally, 77.3% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "I feel that curriculum demands and pacing make it hard for me to differentiate".

Figure 4. I spend ____ hours of my planning time each week differentiating lessons for students with an IEP.

Teacher Perceptions of School Support. This section began broadly by asking respondents about their school community and administration. Over half of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school community was supportive in teaching students with an IEP. Additionally, 59.1% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school administration tried to provide support to teachers. Narrowing down questions to the classroom, an even 50% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that they had access to necessary technology and material resources to effectively teach students with an IEP. Respondents were then asked to indicate by recognized disability category which students they felt most supported by their schools in teaching. More than one category could be chosen per respondent. Seventy percent of teachers felt supported in teaching students with an Intellectual Disability, followed by 55% of teachers feeling supported in teaching students with Autism and students with Other Health Impairment (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5. I feel most supported by my school in teaching students with (check any or all that apply)

In a similarly formatted question, respondents were then asked to indicate which offered supports they would find most effective in helping to teach students with an IEP. Over 90% of respondents indicated that they would like more collaborative planning time between teachers and special services. Seventy-one point four percent felt that smaller class sizes would be beneficial and 66.7% felt that more classroom aides or paraprofessionals would help in teaching students with an IEP. On the other end of the spectrum the options of web-based professional teaching tools, a more involved administration and supported interactions with parents garnered very little interest with the former at 4.8% and the latter two at 14.3% each.

A discussion of these findings can be found in the next section.

Conclusion

The conclusion is organized within this study's five recurring categories.

Demographics and General Information. Supplied demographic information both agreed and disagreed with other studies. While the male/female ratio of 4.5% to 95.5% was comparable to the field of education and other studies, including Hwang and Evan's (2011), the level of education did not correspond. Survey respondents overwhelmingly held graduate degrees (86.4%). In other studies, like the one completed by Fischer (2013), the balance between Bachelor's degrees and Master's degrees hovered around 50%. This demographic was notable because it could explain further findings in the study such as a "higher perceived level of successful inclusive teaching" and the "lack of intimidation in discussing special education topics with special education teachers", as further study would expose teachers to more (and arguably more current) special education training.

Additionally, a question missing from other literature and highlighted in this survey was the number of students receiving mandated special services and the number of students needing additional help in the classroom not mandated by an IEP. Over 80% of respondents had between 1 - 6 students in their classroom receiving mandated services. In addition to these students, 42.9% of respondents had over six students in their classroom needing additional support not mandated by an IEP. This finding is astonishing when one contemplates the average class size. Within a classroom community a teacher could have nearly half the class needing differentiation to better learn curriculum. This study's findings on the lack of given planning time, discussed later, further exasperate this situation. Teachers are not given enough time to meet the needs of diverse learners and students are the ones missing out.

Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion. As expressed in the Literature Review, inclusion in the United States is largely viewed as a positive concept that is difficult to implement. The first three questions in this survey section asked teachers their perceptions on inclusion. Each question had roughly the same support from respondents, 54.5% found inclusion an effective practice, 54.5% found that it benefited all students and 53.7% found that it benefitted students with an IEP. These finding align with other research and the idea of concept vs. implementation; as noted by Hwang and Evans (2011).

This study did not correlate grade taught with feelings towards inclusion, but as Logan and Wimer (2013) found a correlation between older students and more positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion, it would have been an interesting question. As noted in the demographics of this study 85.7% of respondents taught students in grades K - 8. Perhaps this study's perceptions of inclusion would have been more positive if there had been an equal number of respondents from each grade level, rather than a majority representing younger grade levels.

School administrative and its perceived support of inclusion also greatly affects schools. As pointed out by Gal, Schreur and Engel-Yeger (2010), role discrepancy may affect teachers' versus administrators' viewpoints. In terms of inclusion this survey's respondents stated that there was no discordance between administrators and teachers. Respondents were positive regarding inclusion and school administration from concept through application. Seventy-seven point two percent of

respondents felt their school administration valued inclusion, 68.2% reported that their administration supported inclusion and respondents overwhelmingly felt that administration did understand the pragmatic concerns of inclusion in a general education classroom. No research could be found to corroborate or contradict with these statements as other studies did not address teacher perceptions of their school administration.

Finally, perceptions on inclusion also vary based upon the special education classification given to a student. Respondents of the study were asked by category which IEP classifications they felt would be better served in a special education classroom or school. This study's findings correlated with other studies, like Hwang and Evans (2011). Eighty-three point three percent of respondents felt that students with an Emotional Disturbance would be better served in a different environment. Given the nature of Emotional Disturbance and the impact this student could have on classroom management this finding could correlate with later findings that respondents wanted a smaller class size and more paraprofessional help.

Teacher Perceptions of Related Services. This section of questions was often overlooked in previous research studies. The feelings of general education teachers towards related services has a direct impact on special education students. This survey's questioning began with the relationship between general education and special education teachers and service providers. Unlike Center and Ward (1987), almost every respondent (86.4%) affirmed that they have a positive working relationship with their counterparts. Concurring with this was another question that asked respondents if they felt intimidating in discussing special education matters. Only 9.1% of respondents felt intimidated in discussing special education topics with special education teachers and service providers. High confidence levels could correlate to the large number of survey respondents with an advanced degree and more time spent in formal education. General education college coursework has evolved to include differentiation and teachers are becoming more prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners, IEP or not.

The ability to collaboratively plan with service providers and special education teachers was strongly affirmed by survey respondents, just as Mackey (2014) found. Eighty-six point four percent of respondent believed that being given time to collaborate produced better overall teaching, but 90.9% of respondents were given one hour or less per week to achieve this ideal. Collaborative planning time would be an easy solution for administrators seeking better teamwork within their schools as there was a clear desire for time and a clear belief that all parties benefit from collaboration.

Finally, respondents were given a list of related services and asked which service they found most effective for their students. Seventy-two point eight percent of respondents felt that Resource Room/Pull Out instruction was beneficial. Interestingly, even though respondents voiced a positive association with inclusion and felt that they met the needs of their students with IEPs, the idea that the Resource Room/Pull Out services was most impactful could stem from the old ideal that someone else, more qualified, was better suited to instruct students with an IEP.

Teacher Perceptions of Their Own Inclusive Teaching Practices. This survey asked respondents to self-reflect on their own inclusive teaching practices. Eighty-six point four percent of respondents felt that they effectively taught students with an IEP in their classroom and 95.5%

believed that they have improved in teaching students with an IEP over the course of their career. As found in the demographics of this survey, over half of respondents were between the ages of 35 - 50 and had taught for several years. This fact agrees with the argument made in this paper that as inclusion becomes more commonplace, teachers have more experience in differentiating, thus leading to a positive outlook and improvement in effectively teaching diverse learners.

Respondents also reflected upon professional development related to special education. Consistent with the findings of Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000), 72.8% of respondents agreed with the statement that professional development allows me to be a more effective teacher.

Finally, the importance of collaborative planning time has been addressed between general educators and special educators. So to is the importance of individual planning time, especially for the purposes of differentiation. Fuchs (2010) recorded that teachers expressed a lack of planning time. Correspondingly, 59.1% of this survey's respondents stated that they were given 2.5 - 5 hours of planning time a week and 66.7% of respondents used 1 - 2 hours a week of this planning time to differentiate. For the majority this means that they spent roughly half of their planning time each week differentiating instruction. Like collaborative planning time, teachers need to be given adequate time to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Teacher Perceptions of School Support. Study after study has noted the positive effects of school support for educators. Overall, 68.2% of respondents revealed that they were supported by their school community in teaching students with an IEP. This positive response could be affected by this study's other findings that teachers feel that they have a positive working relationship with special educators and they do not feel intimidated in speaking about special education topics. Respondents felt supported by their coworkers thus affecting the whole school community and the learning that takes place there. This agrees with Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka (2014) who found that teachers who feel supported by their community provide better classroom learning environments which create better outcomes for their students.

No previous research was found that addressed the question of IEP classification and support felt by teachers. This survey question asked teachers to indicate how supported they felt by their school community in meeting the needs of students with different IEP classifications. Respondents felt the most supported in meeting the needs of students with an Intellectual Disability. This question aligns with respondents' own feelings in teaching students with different IEP classifications. As stated in 'Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion', respondents felt the most hesitant in having a student with an Emotional Disturbance in the general education classroom due to disruption. Perhaps schools as well are first addressing the needs of students felt to be 'easier to manage' and 'more difficult' students are being left out.

This study then went on to ask teachers to choose from a list of supports typically provided in a school and indicate which were most beneficial for them. Ninety point five percent indicated that they valued collaborative planning time between teachers and related services. This corroborated with earlier responses to collaborative teacher planning time and the benefit of this time in the 'Teacher Perceptions of Related Services' section. Seventy-one point four percent of respondents

valued a smaller class size. Whether smaller class size is a viable option or not for a school, it has been voiced by many studies, including Gal, Schreur, and Engel-Yeger (2010).

Limitations

As with all studies, there were limitations that should be considered when interpreting these findings. Survey sample size was small with only 22 respondents. The survey and study were completed within a 13-week time frame, allowing only ten days total for the open survey. Very little United States based research for a literature review existed on this topic. However, many studies and much research has been completed trying to understand the perceptions of special education teachers and pre-service teachers. This study begins to fill the hole regarding the perceptions of general educators. As stated in the purpose of this paper, when general educators feel supported in teaching students with an IEP then more effective teaching takes place. As well, when administrators understand the needs of their general education teachers then resources can be allocated in a meaningful way.

Recommendations for Future Research

A beneficial follow up to this study would be to further examine general education teacher attitudes with a larger and possibly more diverse sample population. Additionally, an examination of school administrators' perceptions of support services would complete the picture of general educator, special educator, support staff and administration working towards the common goal of successful inclusion.

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