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**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' PREPAREDNESS IN  
THE AREA OF SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS  
FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

Jeanette E. Wojcik

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' PREPAREDNESS IN THE  
AREA OF SPECIAL EDUCATION LEADERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR  
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATION PROGRAMS

presented by

Jeanette E. Wojcik

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Presented to the  
Faculty of the  
College of Education, Information and Technology  
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2024 – Jeanette E. Wojcik

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**Committee Signature Approval Page**

## Dedication

To my husband, Jake: Your unwavering dedication and support over the past 25 years has allowed us to pursue our dreams and accomplish wonderful things. Thank you, I could not have done this without you!

To my beautiful boys, Luke, Jack, and Mark: Words cannot express the love I feel for you. Always know your worth, persevere through challenges, and reach for the stars. I hope my journey has shown you that when you put your mind to something, with hard work you can achieve it.

Mommy loves you!

Christian, my promise to you 25 years ago remains true. My accomplishments are because of and for you.

To my family, Sara, Joe, and John: Your belief in me and your support has been instrumental to my success. Thank you.

To the strong female mentors in my life (you know who you are). Thank you for believing in me and seeing my potential, especially when I could not. Your guidance throughout my career has been invaluable.

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the perceived preparedness of elementary school building leaders in special education leadership and its implications for school administrative preparation programs. This study aimed to address this problem by examining two research questions. The first was to investigate course offerings in administrative preparation programs in New York State (NYS) to better understand how many special education-specific classes are included in such programs. The second research question was to explore the extent to which public elementary school building leaders in Long Island, New York perceive their preparedness for managing special education issues related to their professional duties, staff, and students. Findings reveal two major themes. First, there is a lack of special education courses in administrative preparation programs in NYS. The second major theme is the significant relationship between perceived preparedness and exposure to special education coursework. The results revealed that perceived preparedness in four aspects of school building leadership in special education is significantly influenced by the number of required courses in administrative preparation programs. As the number of required courses increased, levels of preparedness also increased in the four areas of (a) completing special education paperwork and reports, (b) attending CSE meetings, (c) facilitating collaboration between regular and special education, and (d) developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices. Additionally, the average level of knowledge about providing feedback on special education pedagogy and on Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) was significantly higher for school building leaders with  $\geq 2$  courses. The implications of these findings for school administrative preparation programs are significant. Recommendations include the integration of

specific courses designed in special education leadership to enhance the preparedness of elementary school administrators. By addressing these critical gaps in preparation, educational institutions can better equip school leaders to promote equity, inclusivity, and access for all students, especially those with disabilities.

*Keywords: administrative preparation program, inclusion, instructional leadership, Least*

*Restrictive Environment (LRE), mainstreaming, special education, students with disabilities, school building leader*



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## Chapter I

Over the past five decades, great strides have been made to integrate special education students into the mainstream academic environment. Principals play a critical role in the education of all students, including those with disabilities. Legislative and educational reforms have altered the way principals lead, especially in special education. As the number of students with disabilities continues to grow, so do the demands placed upon the school principals to meet the needs of this increasingly diverse student body. However, research shows that few school leaders have sufficient knowledge of special education laws, and most are not well-trained or experienced in dealing with this student population (Billingsley, et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022; Lynn, 2015; Pazez & Yates, 2018; Rascoe, 2007). Based on this premise, it is imperative that principals feel prepared for special education as a critical component in their instructional leadership practice. Moreso, it is of vital importance that administrative preparation programs include special education-specific coursework that adequately prepares principals for the world of special education leadership.

Understanding the experiences and knowledge of special education leadership of elementary principals is important due to the inclusion of special education students both in the mainstream and in self-contained classes educated within their school building. It should be noted that the term *inclusion* is widely used within education. Inclusion as a general concept means that all children, regardless of their disabilities, should have access to and participate in educational environments with their nondisabled peers (Salend & Duhaney, 2017). In an inclusive school, principals are required to fill a variety of special education roles, many of which may be new to



them. Principals must complete special education paperwork and reports, attend Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings, allocate special education resources, attend and sometimes lead Response to Intervention (RtI) team meetings, discipline students with disabilities, supervise special education staff, communicate with parents about special education, facilitate collaboration and problem-solving between special and general education teachers, lead school change in special education service delivery, and develop and articulate a shared vision of inclusion. It is important to note this extensive list of responsibilities is in addition to the myriad of other responsibilities building leaders have when leading their schools. Given this comprehensive list of responsibilities, it is imperative that principals are adequately prepared for special education leadership.

A strong body of longitudinal research indicates that some principals are feeling significant stress regarding these new roles and the lack of preparation they have received to effectively fill these roles (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Goor et al., 1997; Lynn, 2015; Patterson et al., 2000; Williams, 2015; Witt, 2003). While it is not realistic to expect principals to be experts in special education knowledge, it is reasonable to expect that they have a foundational understanding of the education entitlements for students with disabilities receiving special education services within their buildings.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which elementary school building leaders, inclusive of principals and assistant principals in the suburbs of Long Island in New York State, perceive their preparedness for special education leadership. This includes supervising programs, staff, and addressing management issues they encounter in their public elementary

school buildings. Additionally, this study aims to investigate course offerings in administrative preparation programs in New York State to gain an understanding of the amount of special education-specific classes included in programs. To provide a historical and current context for the study, a review of the literature in the areas of special education and educational leadership is presented. The following topics are explored within the literature review:

- Historical and current special education legislation
- The principal's role as instructional leader
- Preparation of principals for leading special education programs

The focus of this study is to determine the level of perceived preparedness of elementary principals regarding special education leadership and to research administrative preparation programs in New York State to determine if they contain coursework to meet the needs of special education leadership. Given the outcomes of the review of literature and the seminal early research and subsequent additional research conducted over many decades, this study aims to determine if administrative programs have been responsive to the research by including coursework to support special education leadership and to ensure that all students are provided equal access to education.

### **Interdisciplinary Nature of the Study**

Interdisciplinary studies have become increasingly important in today's world, where complex problems require collaborative efforts from experts in various fields. The study of interdisciplinary subjects involves the integration of knowledge and techniques from multiple disciplines, often examining the interconnections between them. Interdisciplinary studies are particularly relevant in areas such as education where solutions to complex problems require the

collaboration of experts with diverse perspectives and skill sets. In order to facilitate well-rounded ideas and philosophies, different perspectives must be considered.

### ***The Civic Perspective***

The civic perspective suggests that, through a societal lens, all the processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members of communities convey values and norms. Therefore, leaders who establish inclusive values and norms will ensure equality for students with disabilities and guarantee them the full rights that belong to each individual citizen within the community.

### ***The Sociological Perspective***

The sociological perspective suggests that, through a functionalist lens, the education system and schools are a miniature society that teach universalistic values. Predicated upon this is the idea that leadership serves the function to support students. Therefore, administrative preparation programs should adequately prepare leaders to lead all those within the society, including students with disabilities.

### ***The Psychological Perspective***

The psychological perspective suggests that through the humanistic lens, the focus is the whole person and self-actualization, specifically the role of motivation in achieving one's highest potential. This perspective believes individuals have free will to grow, change, and develop to meet their personal potential and to promote resilience and self-reliance. Therefore, leaders who embody inclusive practices will support all students in persevering through their educational difficulties, resulting in achieving their highest potential.

## Research Questions

Research will be conducted to explore the specific content related to special education required in administrative preparation programs, changes in the roles and responsibilities of school building leaders due to these special education laws and mandates, and the perceptions of current school leaders regarding the adequacy of their preparation. An analysis of data that exists for current administrative preparation programs will be conducted. Additionally, a survey will be developed and administered to ascertain the following:

1. Do school leadership preparation programs contain coursework and/or practicum specific to special education program administration?
2. How do elementary school building leaders perceive their preparedness to assume leadership for special education students, mandates, programs, and staff, in their public elementary school building?

Based on the development of these research questions and the breadth of literature reviewed and outlined in the subsequent chapter, it was hypothesized that most school building leader advanced certificate programs contain little to no special education-specific coursework outside of School Law class offerings. It was also anticipated that the survey would show that most elementary school building leaders feel that while they may have experience in leading inclusive schools, they have not been adequately prepared for special education leadership from their administrative preparation program and may feel that more on-going professional development is needed in special education.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms/phrases are defined:

*Administrative Preparation Program* refers to any college, university, or online academic program that results in licensure or certification leading to eligibility for the position as an elementary school building leader.

*Inclusion* refers to the service delivery model in which there is a commitment to meet the educational needs of special education students within the regular classroom to the maximum extent appropriate, allowing for full access to the social and educational opportunities offered to their non-disabled peers.

*Instructional leadership* refers to the building leaders providing teachers with leadership, guidance, and support necessary to meet the instructional needs of all students.

*Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* is defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplemental aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (20 U.S.C. 1412 (5) (B)).

*Mainstreaming* refers to the placement of special education students in one or more regular education classes.

*Special Education* as defined by the IDEA is specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (20 U.S.C. 1401(a) (16)).

*Student with a disability (SWD)* refers to students who are classified under one of the 13 categories of disability recognized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and whose placement is in a public, school building in either self-contained special education classes in the mainstream building, or in mainstream classes.

*School building leader* refers to individuals who have been or are currently employed as a principal or assistant principal in a public elementary school building.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study's design and focus limits its ability to be generalized as reliable and valid for the purpose of examining the perceptions of principals and assistant principals in elementary buildings in Long Island, New York public school districts. Additionally, this study was limited to administrative preparation programs in New York State which culminates in an advanced certificate in School Building Leader (SBL) and whose coursework is available online. Due to variations in course offerings, titles, and descriptions, coursework consisting of leadership of special education populations, laws, and programs may be embedded into existing courses on topics such as School Law, Educational Leadership in Public Schools, and Organizational Leadership as well as within internships and practicum.

Depending on the size of the district in which they work, some school building leaders may have significantly different experiences based solely on the size of their special needs

population, the nature of the disabilities within their schools, and whether their special education director or coordinator is located within their school or in another building in the district. Some districts may have a large enough special education population to run their own in-district programs that support students with significant disabilities located in self-contained classes, creating the need for school building leaders to have an enhanced knowledge of special education issues, laws, and management. A smaller district may find it more cost effective to place their students with significant disabilities into larger districts or to specialized programs and thereby have less need for school building leaders with specialized knowledge and experience in special education. Larger districts are also more likely to have their special education directors or coordinators located at the district office, whereas smaller districts may have special education coordinators housed in the same building with the students and able to provide stronger on-site support for their school building leaders.

The survey instrument used to collect data about principals and assistant principal's level of preparedness was limited to selected response items and did not include open-ended responses. The selected response items on the Likert scale were limited to whole numbers and did not account for any number in between. Use of a Likert scale may not accurately reflect the nuances to some answers, as beliefs and attitudes are multidimensional aspects (Smith, 2021).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations of the study are a result of the study design. These delimitations are factors that can be controlled by the researcher to establish parameters for the study. Delimitations are characteristics such as demographics, population and sample, number of participants, gender, and

instrument style. This study is delimited by the geographic limits of the survey participants and the courses in administrative preparation programs within New York State. This study only investigates the principals and assistant principals within one geographic location within the United States, which may not be generalizable to other school building leaders. It is also delimited by the fact that building leaders were surveyed during one time period and not longitudinally. Finally, the research was delimited by limiting the survey investigation to principals' level of perceptions and knowledge of special education regulations.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter one introduces the reader to the context of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, definitions of relevant terms, limitations, and delimitations of the study. Chapter two provides a comprehensive review of the literature that is relevant to the components being studied within this research. The literature pertaining to the key concepts of special education, its historical foundations, principal preparation, and instructional leadership are detailed. Chapter three addresses the methodology and procedures for collecting data. Chapter four presents the data analysis and conclusions from the study. Chapter five discusses the findings, implications of the research, and suggestions for future research.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

Only classroom instruction has a greater impact on student learning other than leadership. Research has shown that school leadership has the second greatest impact on student learning of all school-based factors only behind classroom instruction (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2014). These authors found that school leadership impacts students indirectly since leaders generally do not have significant contact with students. However, the indirect activities that leaders engage in include developing a school mission, engaging in shared decision-making, building relationships with parents, coordinating ongoing professional development, and aligning goals with district programs, policies, and practices (2014, 2021). Because of this impact, it is imperative that principals be well-versed in all aspects of learning that takes place each day. This includes being informed and able to support educators who work with special education students and families whose children have learning differences.

This comprehensive review of the literature is situated within both the historical and current issues in the areas of special education and educational leadership. It is important to note the literature that is reviewed in this chapter, which spans decades, demonstrates a lack of responsiveness from administrative preparation programs. This is articulated by the findings of many research studies, highlighting the ongoing need for support in special education leadership. The review of the literature encompasses three main areas of research. The first section explores the historical foundations of special education in the United States. The second section explores the role of the principal as an instructional leader. The third, and final, section will review

previous research completed which demonstrates the preparedness of principals in special education leadership as well as trends in administrative preparation programs.

By investigating this research base, the examiner sought to establish the history and rationale for the following research questions aimed to be answered:

1. Do school leadership preparation programs contain coursework and/or practicum specific to special education program administration?
2. How do elementary school building leaders perceive their preparedness to assume leadership for special education students, mandates, programs, and staff, in their public elementary school building?

In the following section, historical foundations will be set to establish the significant groundbreaking changes in special education and its impact on special education leadership.

### **Historical Foundations of Special Education in the United States**

According to the United States Census Bureau (2021), over 3 million children (a little more than 4% of the under-18 population) have a disability. Special education in the United States has come a long way in ensuring that students with disabilities receive an appropriate education. This section explores the history of special education in public schools, tracing its early origins and significant milestones. It highlights the legislative acts, court cases, and influential events that have shaped the landscape of special education.

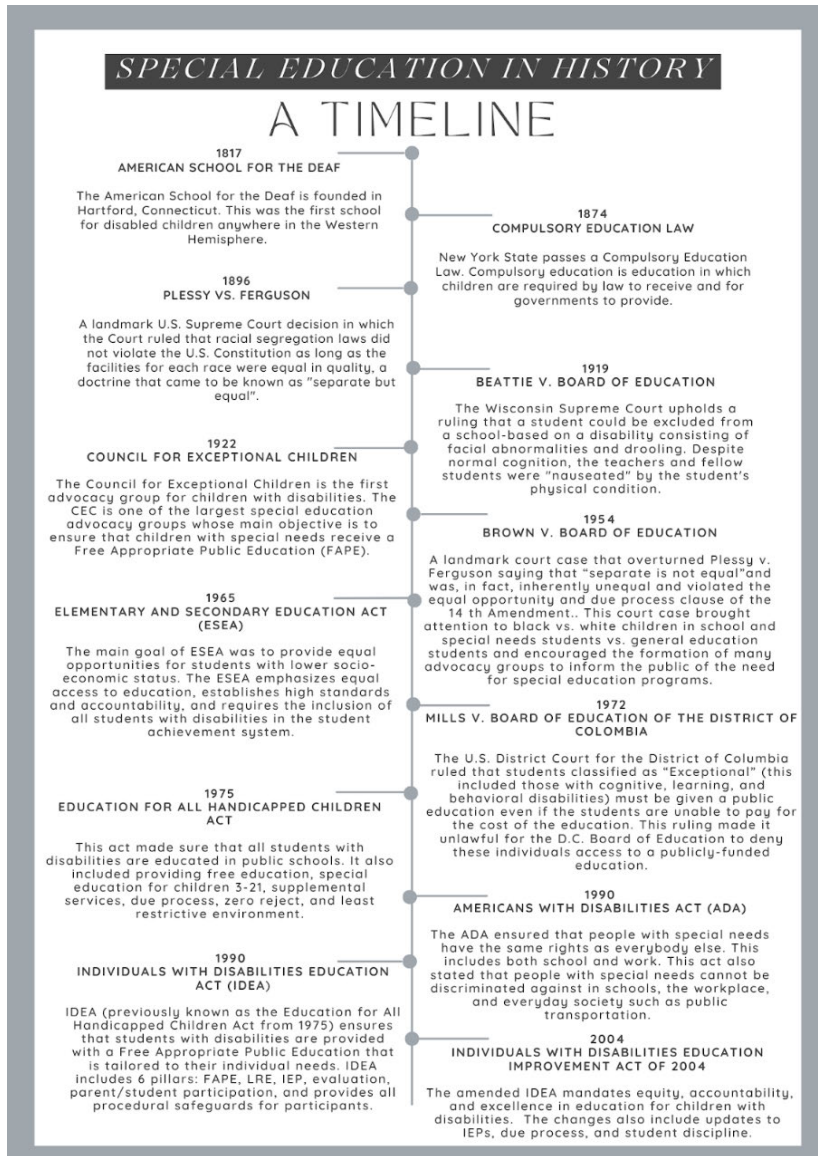
Special education refers to the provision of educational services for students with disabilities to address their unique needs and promote their academic, social, and emotional development. Before the establishment of special education programs, individuals with disabilities

often faced exclusion, neglect, or institutionalization. Before the 1950s, Americans with disabilities had little to no rights in the United States. Court cases during the last fifty decades of reform shaped the way students with disabilities are treated in schools in the United States.

Local, state, and federal legislation strengthened the real-world impact for people with disabilities which, in turn, created a pathway for protections and benefits for students in education, affording them an opportunity to have access to learning. Historically, students with disabilities have been hindered by the extent to which their institutions of education lack responses to their needs (Matthews, 2018). To understand current trends in special education, we must first look back at its history. Figure 1 illustrates a timeline with significant events and landmark legislation that highlight the forward, and sometimes backward, movement of progress for equality for those with disabilities and their entitlement to a free appropriate public education.

**Figure 1**

*Timeline of Special Education History*



*Note:* An historical perspective of events and landmark legislation impacting special education in the United States. Adapted from <https://www.preceden.com/timelines/326448-history-of-special-education>

In 1817, the very first school for students with disabilities was opened when The American School for the Deaf was founded in Hartford, Connecticut (Filiaci, 2017). Throughout the 1800s, care for those with disabilities were often a function of socioeconomic conditions of the times where students with disabilities were relegated to poorhouses or almshouses, an early form of institutionalization rife with deplorable living conditions (Filiaci, 2017). In response to those living conditions, many activists sought change. As a result, several legislative events contributed to the push and pull of educating children with disabilities. In 1874, The Compulsory Education Act was passed in New York State. "This new law mandated school attendance for children between the ages of eight and twelve. Children between the ages of twelve and fourteen could go to work only if they had a "permit" and could prove that they had attended classes for eighty consecutive days during the school year" (Filiaci, 2017, Background 1874-1898 section). Children who were over 14 years of age did not have to attend school at all. There were no provisions in this act for students with disabilities and often they were institutionalized or kept hidden away because of their differences. People with disabilities were exploited in various ways, including abandonment in orphanages, exclusion from everyday life, displayed as attractions for public entertainment in circuses and sideshows, expulsion from society, and even execution in certain cases (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

Some court cases and arguments that advanced the rights of African Americans and other marginalized communities were used by advocates of children with disabilities. Gollnick and Chinn (2013) posit that "The plight of persons with disabilities has, in many respects, closely paralleled that of oppressed ethnic groups." (p. 176). They examined the court case of *Plessy v.*

*Ferguson* (1896) and found that the ruling contributed to institutionalizing children with disabilities when it stated that segregation did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of 14th Amendment, therefore establishing that separate but equal could exist if the facilities for each race were equal in quality (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013). The passing of the Social Security Act of 1935, (49 Stat. 620 (1935)) provided some limited benefits for people with disabilities. This act established a system of benefits for workers as they reached an advanced age, benefits for victims of industrial accidents, unemployment insurance, aid for dependent mothers and children, and for people who are blind or had other disabilities.

The road to equality was fraught with battles in the courtroom. Several influential court cases have played a crucial role in shaping special education policies and practices and led to landmark legislation. In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*, a groundbreaking Supreme Court case, paved the way for desegregation and had implications for the education of students with disabilities. The decision determined that separate was in fact not equal, overturning the decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* and setting the legal precedent that segregation of any kind was unconstitutional. *Brown v. Board of Education* also established education as a property right per the United States Constitution. This was pivotal, as it established that this property right (i.e., education) cannot be taken away without due process.

Another revolutionary court case that impacted the rights of those with disabilities was *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971). In this case, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) sued the state of Pennsylvania for not providing education for students with intellectual disabilities. The ruling was in favor of

PARC and stated that the more appropriate place for disabled students was in an educational setting with their non-disabled peers, not in segregated classrooms, programs, or schools (De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019; Gollnick & Chinn, 2013). This court case established the right for students with disabilities to have a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) from age six to twenty-one. This court ruling set the stage for students with disabilities to be educated in mainstream environments and set the expectation for principals who lead general education schools to be well-versed in special education leadership.

Shortly after that, *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (1972) was brought to the United States Supreme Court on behalf of seven children who were denied education based on being “exceptional.” At the time “exceptional” was defined as mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, physically handicapped, hyperactive, and/or having behavioral problems. While this lawsuit was filed on behalf of seven, the exact number of children impacted could not be counted because the District of Columbia repeatedly failed to conduct a census of all children aged 3 to 18. It was estimated that there may have been close to 22,000 “exceptional” children in the District of Columbia when the lawsuit began (*Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*, 348 F. Supp. 866 D.D.C. 1972). It is believed that as many as a staggering 18,000 students were not able to attend school because of their disability (De Los Santos & Kupczynski, 2019; Gollnick & Chinn, 2013; *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*, 1972). In this case, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and required the District of Columbia to provide an appropriate public education to all students with disabilities. This court case also established that districts were required to provide due process procedural safeguards for labeling, placing, and excluding students

with disabilities. This allowed families the right to appeal, access records, and to have written notice of all stages of the process.

Because of the previously discussed court cases, legislation to support those with disabilities was enacted. In 1973, Congress passed Section 504 of Public Law 93-112 as part of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. While the language was brief, its implications were significant. It prohibits exclusion based on disability from any programs or federal financial assistance. Should these rights be violated, public institutions run the risk of losing federal funding. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was signed into law. This legislation was more comprehensive and included provision for children aged 6 to 21. FAPE was enacted as was the idea of educating students in their least restrictive environment (LRE). Additionally, the inception of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) was adopted and based on criteria met on fair, accurate, and unbiased evaluations (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013).

However, it was not until the last decade of the 1900s that students with disabilities really began to have access to education in the most appropriate and least restrictive way. With the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 1990 OR United States, 1991) individuals with disabilities gained significant protections and benefits. The ADA was the most significant civil rights legislation since 1964 and was designed to end discrimination against those with disabilities in private employment, public services and institutions, transportation, and telecommunications (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013). According to the law, the ADA of 1990, (42 U.S.C. §§ 12101–12213, 2012), was meant “to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against



individuals with disabilities.” In passing the ADA, Congress explicitly found that “physical or mental disabilities in no way diminish a person’s right to fully participate in all aspects of society,” and that “historically, society has tended to isolate and segregate individuals with disabilities, and, despite some improvements, such forms of discrimination against individuals with disabilities continue to be a serious and pervasive social problem” (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101–12213, 2012). Additionally, the law established that:

Individuals with disabilities are a discrete and insular minority who have been faced with restrictions and limitations, subjected to a history of purposeful unequal treatment, and relegated to a position of political powerlessness in our society, based on characteristics that are beyond the control of such individuals and resulting from stereotypic assumptions not truly indicative of the individual ability of such individuals to participate in, and contribute to, society.

The most important provisions of the ADA applied to any public entity, which included state or local governments. Under § 12132, “no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity” (Pub. L. 101–336, title II, § 202, July 26, 1990, 104 Stat. 337). The ADA defined and illustrated discrimination as a concept of exclusion. To prevent exclusion, states were required to modify their programs to facilitate and ensure access to education for those with disabilities (Matthews, 2018). With this modification of programs came the vitally important need for the education of principals in special education leadership.

Following this, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990* (IDEA) (previously *The Education for All Handicapped Children of 1975*) was passed and subsequently amended in 2004. This law requires all public schools to admit and educate students with disabilities. IDEA expands the previous provisions of the law that states that students are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). FAPE and LRE are the foundational principles that public schools must follow and consider when making educational decisions for students with disabilities. When establishing the LRE, IDEA stipulates that the baseline for this should be the general education classroom where the student can be educated as much as possible in the classroom alongside their non-disabled peers.

Additionally, through this act, school districts are required to form a team, or committee, which includes the student and their parent/guardian to make determinations about eligibility of services and to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP is a legal plan between the school and the student that outlines and defines the need for the program, the effect of the student's disability on their ability to learn, their present levels of performance, goals for addressing the needs, and any specific programs, accommodations, and modifications necessary for the student to have equal access to learning. IDEA established funding grants to support states with the implementation of special education programs within its districts. Should a state be in violation of these laws, it runs the risk of losing funding. Not only does IDEA require districts to support students with disabilities within their schools, but they are also required to identify, locate, and evaluate all children suspected of having disabilities within their boundaries, known as Child Find. IDEA reflects many children who this affects. According to the Individuals with

Disabilities Act website, "The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 7.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities" (<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>, 2023, About IDEA section).

More than ever, children with disabilities are an integral part of our education system and are finding their rightful place in society. Although the progress in recent years is promising, there is still work to be done to ensure that those leaders who are responsible for carrying out the legal mandates within our educational system are educated in a manner that supports equity and inclusion for all students. The next section of this literature review discusses the role of the principal as an instructional leader underscoring the importance of the need for responsive pedagogy and practices.

### **The Role of the Principal as Instructional Leader**

Given the plight of those with disabilities in society and within the educational system over the past 225 years, it is imperative to closely examine the role of the principal in the educational environment and their impact on learning and student outcomes to see if leadership really matters. Principals are uniquely positioned to either promote or undermine equity in their schools. It is evident that leadership not only matters, but it is also second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2014; Pollack, 2020). From the mid-25th century, the role of an elementary principal as the pedagogical head of a school was defined and boosted by the effective schools' movement which subsequently institutionalized the term *instructional leadership* into the vocabulary of educational

administration. At that time, instructional leaders were described as strong, directive leaders who had been successful at turning their schools around from being ineffective schools (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Bossert et al., 1982; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985a, 1985b, 1986). Mostly this extensive body of research determined that leaders contribute to student learning indirectly, through their influence on faculty, staff, and through effectively managing specific aspects of their schools.

Understanding the history of instructional leadership is important as we define the role of the elementary principal. As we studied the landmark legislation that reforms and promotes inclusive education, we must also look at the current role of instructional leadership. Often, principals are considered instructional leaders; however, as the forces of our current political climate impact leadership, elementary principals are finding their responsibilities shifting from instructional leadership to more managerial and political tasks. Despite this shift, the mandates require principals to be well prepared in special education, specifically in inclusion, data-driven decision making, and instructional leadership (McHatton, et. al, 2010).

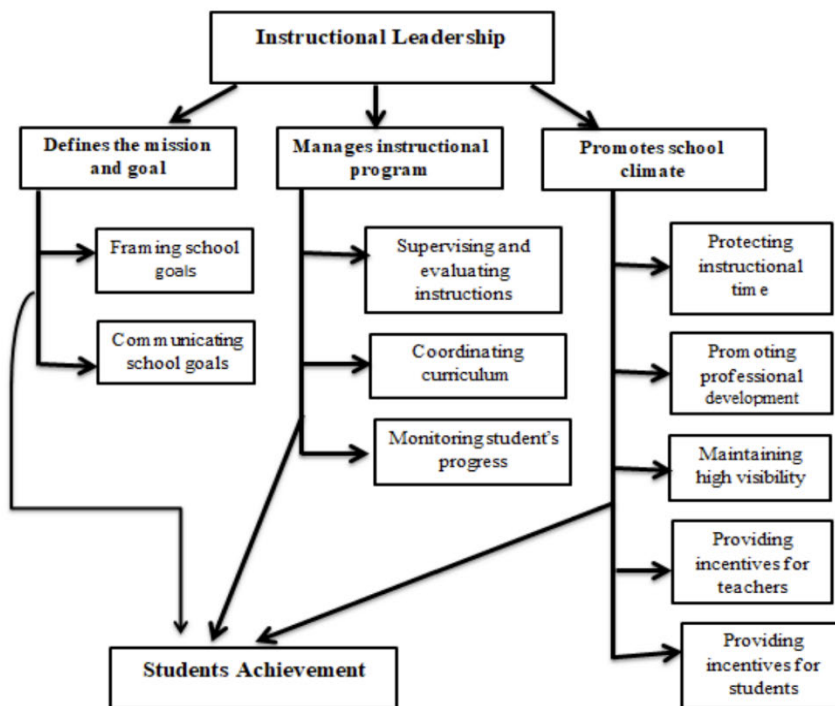
But what characteristics define *instructional leadership*? Instructional leadership, of which its original moniker has undergone many iterations including leadership for learning, distributive leadership, and learning-centered leadership to name a few, encompasses many components, with the highest priority being that teaching and learning remain at the forefront of decision-making. There are several theories or models that identify and describe specific leadership practices and provide evidence of the impact on both organizations and students. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985ab) model of instructional leadership has been the most researched and referenced,

consisting of three sets of leadership dimensions: defining the school's mission and goals, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate. (Bogale & Lodisso, 2019; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger et al., 2020; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985a, 1985b, 1986; Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2014).

Within this model of instructional leadership, the core components listed above expand on the specific elements engaged in accomplishing successful leadership practices, as seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Hallinger & Murphy's Model of Instructional Leadership*



*Note:* Image from Bogale & Lodisso (2019)

Clearly defining a school's collaboratively developed mission and goals allows leaders to frame the values on which they are predicated. The manner with which principals communicate

school goals includes both implicit and explicit ways. Explicitly referring to them in a variety of contexts throughout the school year establishes rationale and connection to the work being done. Additionally, leaders demonstrate the values of the developed mission and goals implicitly by the decisions made during the school year. Staffing, resource allocation, professional development, and curricular decisions all reflect the operational priorities of principals.

Promoting school climate is important and known as one of the more political aspects of instructional leadership. Maintaining visibility promotes connection amongst the principal and teacher, where the teacher feels that the principal values their instructional practice. Providing incentives for both teachers and students allows for extrinsic motivation which can improve student achievement. Achievements such as school-wide incentives including honor rolls, bulletin boards with student achievements adorning them, and letters of commendation in personnel files promote buy-in from the learning community. Incorporated in this area of management is communicating and enforcing policies and mandates related to all facets of education. Instructional leaders should be required to understand the history of education, mandates related to specific legislation, and to be well-versed in compliance with these legal mandates.

Lastly, and most importantly, managing instructional programs is at the heart of instructional leadership. This includes supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, monitoring student progress, and maintaining high expectations for teaching and learning. This strand of instructional leadership is where pedagogical expertise plays a tremendous role in building teacher capacity. Principals observe classroom instruction in their role as supervisors, where they work with teachers to ensure that classroom objectives are directly

connected to the school's goals. As head educator, instructional leaders analyze and evaluate how teachers deliver instruction, in the process providing feedback and as many resources for highly effective teaching as possible. They offer concrete, constructive suggestions to teachers, assisting them in improving their instructional practices (Bogale, & Lodiiso, 2019; Grissom et al., 2021; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Leithwood et al., 2014).

Additional aspects of managing instructional programs include knowing how to personalize instruction to support the varied needs of the student population. To do this, principals need to be familiar with a myriad of strategies and accommodations that embody inclusive education. Espada-Chavarria, et al. (2023) define inclusive education as “the process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities and reducing exclusion from education and from within education” (p. 1). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is one such framework for educators that supports inclusive education in the classroom setting to promote acceptance of those with learning differences. This framework explores barriers to education with the understanding that those barriers exist because of the learning environment, not within the students' abilities. Inclusive pedagogy, such as UDL, is a component of instructional programming intended to allow access to curriculum for those students who have learning differences. For educators to engage in UDL practices, there needs to be a shared vision, promoted by leadership, of learning diversity where learning differences are valued and core competencies center around the acceptance of those with educational needs (Espada-Chavarria et al., 2023; Nic Aindriú et al., 2023; Rusconi, & Squillaci, 2023).

Given the vitally important need for leadership to understand and value those with learning differences, to demonstrate responsive pedagogy, and to create educational environments that promote inclusivity, we must evaluate the structure of leadership for education policies, practices, staff, and students. Although principals are the instructional leaders of their building, Bateman & Bateman (2014) posit that many principals face special education as one area of responsibility in their position in which they feel less confident:

They are suddenly thrust into situations in which they must be the final arbiter on matters related to strange-sounding issues such as IEPs, 504 decisions, due process hearings, and IDEA compliance. These responsibilities are very time-consuming. Moreover, there are few places to turn for help in making such new decisions, because everyone assumes the principal has expertise in these matters. Unfortunately, most new principals come to their positions less prepared than they would like to be in special education matters (p. 1).

Witt (2003) has stated that “due to the organizational structures that were established during the initial phase of implementing Public Law 94-142 in the late 1970’s, special education was seen as a specialized field somewhat separate from general education administration” (p. 13). No such leadership existed for students with disabilities in mainstream schools and classes as principals were trained solely for the administration of mainstream students, their curriculum, discipline, and staff. Because of this lack of training at the mainstream level, oversight of specialized programs was solely left to administrators trained and responsible for all facets of special education, from ensuring compliance of an IEP, hiring qualified staff, to effective inclusive pedagogy (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Goor, et al., 1997; Lynn, 2015; Witt, 2003). In most cases,



management of special education departments within public schools is found to be at the district office level. "District office administrators have historically managed special education programming, staffing, training, financing, testing, and facilities, but the burden of managing special education policies and practices is increasingly placed on the shoulders of the principals" (Patterson et al., 2000, p. 10). Fifteen years later, Lynn (2015) reported that "many school systems rely on one director of special education to lead all of the special education programs in all schools for the entire system" (p. 6). However, despite there being one central office administrator whose general oversight is relied upon, the principal remains the leader in each building who is responsible for the daily operations of inclusive instruction and explicit compliance of legal mandates. Additionally, with the inception of Response to Intervention (RtI) in 2010, principals facilitate many aspects of data driven decision-making which includes implementing a universal screener to establish baseline achievement, progress monitoring student learning, identifying and implementing specialized interventions designed to remediate learning gaps, accurate and targeted data collection, and systematic review of students holistically to determine if referral to special education is appropriate.

When looking at the various special education leadership roles of the principal, Durtschi (2005) identified five key themes related to special education leadership: (a) legal compliance including attendance at CSE meetings, (b) hiring and supervising qualified staff, (c) allocating resources, (d) facilitating collaboration, and (e) vision development and articulation. To be an effective leader of policies, practices, and pedagogy, principals must be informed of the legal aspects of special education. It is imperative that principals be well-versed in the tenets of IDEA to

make certain that students are placed in the least restrictive setting with the most opportunities for access to the curriculum provided. Additionally, principals should be expected to have a working knowledge of how an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed, implemented, and enforced to ensure that both the procedural and substantive requirements of the IEP are met.

Compounding the exigency to understand the legal aspects of leading a learning community with specific and varied needs, is the challenge principals face recruiting and retaining highly qualified special education teachers. Difficulties in finding qualified candidates to hire, retaining these new special education teachers continues to be an equally challenging task (Billingsley, 2002, p. 62):

The lack of qualified special education teachers threatens the quality of education that students with disabilities receive. Attrition plays a part in the teacher shortage problem, and efforts to improve retention must be informed by an understanding of the factors that contribute to attrition.

Despite the shortages of qualified special education teacher candidates, it is important that principals continue to hire staff willing and able to teach a diverse range of students in inclusive school environments. Capper et al. (2000) expressed the need for principals to remain committed to hiring staff who are qualified for the positions, have the necessary skills, or are willing to gain those skills. Even if principals can find qualified staff to hire, retaining them remains a barrier to effective instruction. For the past twenty-five years, lack of school principal support has been and continues to be frequently referred to by special educators as a significant factor in low levels of job satisfaction or even the reason for leaving the field. Principals are responsible for providing a

myriad of support to special education teachers. Those supports include professional development, resources and materials, time to plan, as well as emotional support (Ax et al., 2001; Beck et al., 2020; Durtschi, 2005; Harris, et al., 2019; Mrstik, et. al., 2019; Stempien & Loeb, 2002).

As evidenced by the seminal body of research and subsequent recent research conducted over time on the topic, clearly the role of the principal matters in all aspects of education. Specifically, how principals engage in and portray their beliefs and attitudes toward the comprehensive nature of instructional leadership has a significant indirect impact on student outcomes. Moreover, given the impact instructional leadership has on student outcomes and the very nature of this study on the impact on students with disabilities, it is even more urgent that we ensure that instructional leaders are knowledgeable on special education policies and practices. The next section of the literature review examines research in chronological order that exposes how administrative preparation programs do an insufficient job preparing principals for special education leadership.

### **Principal Preparedness for Special Education Leadership**

The role of principals as instructional leaders has been well established and within that role are critical assurances that principals must meet. More recently, there has been an increased emphasis on student performance measured with the use of standardized assessments, performance standards for staff with Annual Professional Performance Review evaluation criteria and implementing and supervising more rigorous learning standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). The increase in these expectations has magnified the pressure for all students to meet levels

of proficiency. As schools shift to more inclusive practices, principals are expected to be accountable for everything that takes place within the school environment. As Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) has noted, "Because of the significant role school leaders play in shaping learning environments, preparing and developing leaders for today's schools is an essential driver of change" (p. 4).

As principals must assume the position of instructional leader for the school, this also entails leadership within special education. Concern for leadership of special education in the United States can be traced back to the 1940's when Berry (1941) revealed how administrators struggled to structure learning programs in their schools to accommodate children with disabilities (as cited in, Pazey & Yates, 2018, p. 17). During this time, it became necessary for school districts to create a separate role of administration that specifically addressed students with disabilities and their varied educational needs. These special education administrators were well-skilled in the areas of mental disabilities, vocational training, and connecting students with community agencies to provide support for their disabilities. Following that, the General-Special Education Administration Consortium (GSEAC) of 1970, a small group of special education administration professors who were committed to the preparation of administrators in the area of special education, sought to address the need for principals to be prepared to manage special education students and programs. This was the beginning of the movement towards integration of students with disabilities into the general education environment. From this, specific textbooks and materials were developed to support administrators as leaders of students with disabilities. These materials emphasized special education as a concurrent discipline to general education,

strengthening the rationale for the integration of general and special education leadership preparation. In addition, simulation training materials such as the Special Education Administration Simulation in Monroe City (SEASM), Special Education Administration Training Simulation (SEATS), and State Education Agency Simulation Exercise (SEASE) were developed. These materials provided professors with practical training materials for preparing leaders to support students with disabilities (Lynn, 2015; Pazey & Yates, 2018; Pazey & Cole, 2013).

To be effective, principals need to be knowledgeable about the various laws, policies, and procedures of special education to lead the instructional team in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of all students (Billingsley, et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022; Lynn, 2015). However, administrative preparation programs and license requirements vary, with very few administrators having special education experience (Pazey & Yates, 2018, p. 30):

Prior to the passage of P.L. 94–142 in 1975, a national survey of special education administrators who administered more than two programs and who spent at least half their time administering special education programs was conducted (Kohl & Marro, 1971). The results indicated that from state to state, certification requirements varied: few administrators held special education administration licenses and less than half held regular administration certificates.

In the mid-1970s, only six out of fifty states had certification requirements for special education administration. At that time, dialogue centered around whether there was the need for administrators to receive training in special education administration with opportunities to

participate in administrative practicums and internships. As the educational landscape began to shift, so did the philosophy of the role of administrators, with the expectation that every administrator was responsible for special education programs. The 1990s marked the beginning of inclusive education and with it were more collaborative expectations for special education and general education administrators. With this expectation came the understanding that the principal would be the key person in facilitating such collaborative efforts, specifically as the one who leads in the design and implementation of educational programs for every student in the school.

With the inception of inclusive pedagogy and practices came confusion and disagreement among professionals on how best to accomplish the goal. According to Pazez & Yates (2018), “Differences in perception of practice and requirements could be attributed to minimal professional preparation for serving students with disabilities, different perceptions of special education expertise, different expectations of resource allocation, and, in general, a confusion of law, policy, and practice” (p. 32).

As we moved toward the turn of the century, Rieck and Wadsworth (2000) conducted a qualitative study of four public schools in the southeastern part of the United States. Through interviews, observations, and focus groups, the study looked at staff development, administrators’ support for teachers, collaboration, instructional strategies, and creative scheduling. The study found school principals were informed and involved whenever inclusive change appeared to be successfully implemented. This study highlighted and demonstrated a need for proper training for school principals which was essential to complete the important work of creating an inclusive environment.

Salisbury and McGregor (2002) studied five elementary schools that were in the process of implementing inclusive practices. The study employed surveys, observations, and interviews to collect data from general and special education teachers and school principals. The findings of the study included that specific leadership practices appeared to be central to the success of inclusive schools. Additionally, patterns in the overall school climate and a variety of administrative strategies used by the principals to encourage inclusion were integral to the success of all students. The study concluded that these schools were effective in large part due to the leadership of the principals and their willingness to stay true to the initiative of achieving an inclusive culture. This study illustrated that it had become more important than ever for principals to be prepared to address all the needs of general and special education at the building level. At the end of their study, Salisbury & McGregor (2002) concluded that administrative preparation programs need to provide more than a brief overview of leading special education programs and should, instead, carefully prepare administrators with the necessary approaches and strategies for effective special education leadership.

It is vitally important that principals are prepared to develop and provide inclusive practices in education. Through an extensive body of research, it has been identified that the value of special education coursework in the certification process is essential to the development of inclusive practices. Nelson (2002) aimed to determine if administrative preparation programs adequately prepared administrators to lead special education programs. The subjects were Louisiana principals who hold Louisiana school principal certificates and 37 full-time faculty members in educational administration programs. Surveys were sent seeking answers to research

questions regarding the skills and knowledge principals needed to be effective leaders of special education programs and what additional components should be added to the administrative preparation programs. The survey results found that principals reported receiving limited training in special education in their administrative preparation programs and all respondents felt that the programs needed reform to include more information and training on matters of special education.

Angelle & Bilton (2009) conducted a study that focused on school principals and the nature of their coursework in their administrative preparation program. They were asked about their perceived level of readiness to support special education matters in their schools. What they found was that only 47% of principals had received formal training in special education leadership. Additionally, the data revealed that 53% participated in no courses related to special education. The findings of the study suggest that principals believed they had not received sufficient preparation to assume a leadership role in special education. This study highlights the gap in preparation and identifies that specific skills and knowledge areas are missing from these preparation programs.

McHatton et al. (2010) conducted research that explored principals' perceptions of their preparedness for special education. Their aim was to determine if leaders were really engaged in enough learning activities in their administrative coursework and beyond to support students with disabilities. Based on their results, they concluded that despite regular involvement in their students' cases, few participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were well prepared, suggesting the need for increased emphasis in special education leadership by administrative preparation



programs. They found that only 49% of principals were trained in special education matters, and only 30% had any training on the learning needs of children who were classified with a disability. Despite this lack of preparation for special education leadership, the study by McHatton et al. (2010) indicated that principals recognized that CSE meetings, special education classroom observations, and special education lesson plan supervision comprised a large part of each week.

Rascoe (2007) studied the educational background and knowledge of principals related to special education programs, policies, and practices in Virginia public schools. She collected information from 98 principals through a survey containing knowledge-based questions and responses to specific scenarios. Additionally, Rascoe's (2007) survey contained questions regarding administrator's attitudes towards the management of special education. The results of the study indicated that most principals had positive perceptions of special education. Moreover, those with prior pre-administrative training in special education felt more prepared to lead special education programs. They scored higher on knowledge of education law, had more positive attitudes toward inclusion, and were able to respond appropriately to placement, curriculum, and management issues. Administrators without pre-administrative training in special education did not feel as competent with their special education knowledge (Rascoe, 2007).

Inglesby (2014) gathered research establishing that "principals receive little to no training in leading special education" (p. 17). He states,

For elementary principals, a lack of efficacy about their special education leadership role, a lack of familiarity with the varied and unique aspects of special education and an absence

of technical skill contribute to a diminished principal leadership role in the area of special education (Inglesby, 2014, p. 17).

Inglesby (2014) also reported that leadership for students with disabilities was problematic because of principals' lack of comfort with special education pedagogy. According to his research, this lack of technical skill led to diminished principal engagement with special education students and their tendency to be passive when making decisions about special education matters. In fact, he concluded that most school building leaders see special education as an area of need and would appreciate professional development, coursework, or training.

In addition to principals' perceived preparedness, research has also been conducted looking at licensing and certification in the United States. Currently, individual states determine the licensing and certification requirements to become a principal. According to Hackmann (2016), state education agencies typically base these qualifications on a specific number of credit hours, focusing on leadership courses within an administrative preparation program, teacher certification, previous teaching experience, and passing a state exam. As Hackman studied licensing across the United States, he noted that unlike other fields that hold licensing requirements, such as the medical field, licensing qualifications are not consistent and vary across states.

Billingsley et al. (2017) found that most states did not mandate that principal preparation programs include coursework related to special education leadership. Lynch (2012) had similar findings, determining that only eight states have special education requirements for principal certification. Auletta (2018) found that over 50% of principals in the study did not have any experience with individuals with disabilities, and nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that

they were not mandated to engage in pre-service training on special education-specific topics. When asked about their specific knowledge, principals were likely to correctly respond to knowledge items related to school discipline, but were less knowledgeable about issues of identification, placement, and programming. Additionally, according to Auletta (2018),

The research indicates that, although some special education topics might be included and embedded within courses with more generic or inclusive titles (i.e. School Law), current School Building Leader certificate programs often do not contain special education coursework sufficient to prepare administrators for the specific laws, regulations, and management of special education populations in mainstream, public school buildings (Auletta, 2018, p. 62).

As evidenced by the body of research above, and to lead responsively and to promote a culture of inclusivity and acceptance, it is imperative that principals be exposed to and engage in coursework that prepares them for the dynamic landscape of special education leadership. Throughout this extensive body of research, there was a theme of positive correlation between increased special education coursework during administrative preparation programs and subsequent professional development and a principal's attitude and perceived efficacy regarding their ability to effectively lead in the domain of special education. The literature clearly emphasizes the importance of exposing principals to special education coursework to help them meet the demands of special education leadership. It is not surprising that many principals feel they are inadequately prepared to meet the changing demands of the job. Considering the amount of coursework necessary to receive a degree or license in administration, it is difficult to add even

more classes or requirements. However, administrator preparation programs, like the jobs they are trying to prepare leaders to fill, must address special education in a more comprehensive manner. Including more coursework specific to special education leadership, encompassing how to lead inclusive schools, and revamping existing content of current required courses are imperative. These changes will help to prepare future school administrators to promote inclusive pedagogy, to meet the needs of students with disabilities within the least restrictive setting, and to better build and support teacher capacity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Policy and governance regarding school building leadership provide a theoretical framework for this study and will be used to help understand the results of the research and its broad implications. It was hypothesized that policies related to educational standards and regulatory requirements at the district, state, or national level directly impact leadership practices and decision-making and levels of preparedness (Grindal & Jordan, 2017). For example, school building leaders are required to navigate and implement a wide variety of educational reforms and initiatives. Therefore, differences in the amount of required coursework in administrative preparation programs likely impact not only the effectiveness of school building leaders but also their perceptions of preparedness for their role.

Education and training programs for school building leaders result from policy decisions and governance. Knowledge on the impact of such policies is needed to help promote best practices and effective learning mechanisms. This study assessed the extent to which school building leaders perceive their preparedness to implement special education policies and practices

within their schools. School building leaders are required to manage resources while navigating competing priorities and fostering a culture of inclusion. Applying this theoretical framework to the results of this study helps provide a better understanding of the complexities of educational leadership.

## **Conclusion**

In response to landmark legislation and the development of inclusive settings, public schools across the nation have witnessed significant changes in the delivery of special education services to students with disabilities over the past fifty years. These changes underscore the need for principals to engage in responsive leadership that encourages inclusive practices and pedagogy. The comprehensive review of the literature presented encompassed both the historical and current issues in the areas of special education and educational leadership and included three main areas of research: exploring the historical foundations of special education in the United States, the role of the principal as an instructional leader, and the roles, responsibilities, and preparedness of principals in special education leadership with a focus on trends in administrative preparation programs.

As mentioned at the end of chapter one, the focus of this study is to determine the preparedness that elementary principals feel regarding leadership in the area of special education and to research administrative preparation programs in New York State to see if they contain coursework to meet the needs of special education leadership. Given the outcomes of the review of literature, year after year, research has shown that principals do not feel prepared for special education leadership. Because of these outcomes, this study aims to determine if administrative

preparation programs have heeded the recommendations provided by previous researchers by being more responsive in their coursework to support special education leadership resulting in the guarantee that all students have an opportunity to be provided equal access to instruction.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Method**

Chapters one and two reviewed the importance of principals and assistant principals as leaders of special education and of the differing levels of knowledge of special education that they may possess due to limited exposure to coursework in their administrative preparation programs. As a result of the extensive body of research that exists in these areas, this study aimed to determine elementary school building leaders' feelings toward their preparedness of special education mandates, programs, staff, and management issues they may encounter throughout their day. Concurrently, this study aimed to examine the extent to which administrative preparation programs contain coursework specific to special education leadership. The survey portion of the study involved school principals and assistant principals with differing amounts of special education experience to better understand their level of perceived preparedness for special education leadership. Due to the complex nature of both special education knowledge and of special education leadership, it was vital to examine these important areas.

All public-school districts serve students with special needs and nearly every school has a principal, with many employing assistant principals to support them. The more information that is available about school building leaders' levels of preparation and perceived preparedness for special education leadership, the better administrative preparation programs will be informed on how to address their needs to support students with disabilities with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes and instruction (Billingsley et al., 2017). It is expected that this research will contribute to the growing body of research on leadership and special education and

that it will also prompt further research into the inclusion of special education coursework in their leadership programs. In this chapter the overall design of the study, participant selection, procedures, and the method for data analysis are presented. The following sections of this chapter outline the research questions explored in this study, the hypothesis being considered, and the structure by which this study was designed.

### **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

Research was conducted to explore the specific content related to special education courses required in administrative preparation programs, knowledge about the roles and responsibilities of school building leaders associated with special education laws and mandates, and the perceptions of current school leaders regarding the adequacy of their preparation. A review of research which contained analysis of current administrative preparation programs was conducted. Additionally, a survey was developed and administered to ascertain the following research questions.

#### ***Research Question One***

The first research question was, *Do school leadership preparation programs contain coursework and/or practicum specific to special education program administration?* This addressed a primary aim of this study, which was to determine if SBL administrative preparation programs have been responsive to the research by including coursework to support special education leadership and to ensure that all students are provided equal access to education. It was hypothesized that most SBL advanced certificate programs contain little to no special education-specific coursework outside of School Law class offerings. To answer this question, data provided



by Feeley (2023) were examined. This data was obtained through an online search of course catalogs for relevant administrative preparation programs in NYS for SBL/SDLs (Feeley, 2023).

The raw data were assessed, and a summary of the findings is presented.

**Research Question Two**

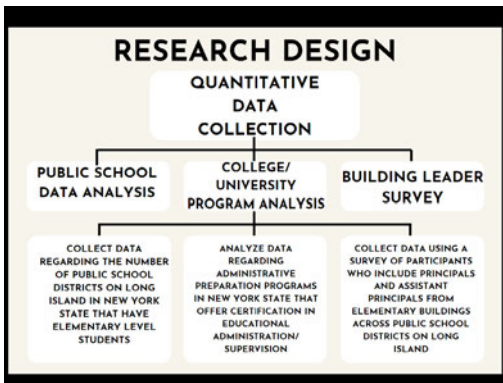
The second research question was, *How do elementary school building leaders perceive their preparedness to assume leadership for special education students, mandates, programs, and staff, in their public elementary school building?* It was hypothesized that the survey would show that most elementary building leaders feel that they have not been adequately prepared for special education leadership and may feel that more on-going professional development is needed in special education.

**Research Design**

The research design and collection of quantitative data for this study were based on models utilized by Auletta (2018), Rascoe (2007), Williams (2015), and Witt (2003). As seen in Figure 3, quantitative data were collected in three areas to conduct a comprehensive analysis.

**Figure 3**

*Research Design Methodology*



### ***Public School Data Analysis***

A collection of quantitative data regarding the number of public-school districts on Long Island in the suburbs of New York State (NYS) that have elementary level students was conducted. The aim was to see if each building has a principal only or if there are any assistant principals who support the principal in leading their building.

### ***College/University Program Analysis***

The quantitative raw data provided by Feeley (2023) were analyzed regarding administrative preparation programs using the NYS Department of Education's inventory of registered programs offering certification in Educational Administration/Educational Supervision. The data were collected using online course catalogs.

### ***Building Leader Survey***

The data were collected from a quantitative, non-experimental survey developed by the researcher and disseminated using an online survey platform (see Appendix D). Surveys were sent to principals and assistant principals currently working in elementary buildings of 126 school districts on Long Island in New York State. Data were summarized using descriptive statistics.

### **Setting and Sample**

A series of demographic variables were used to collect data about respondents, to help describe the obtained sample and to understand aspects of their educational and professional backgrounds that were relevant to the research questions. This included the number of years teaching, education and background, and the training, background, experiences, and responsibilities of the principal and assistant principal(s) in each building.

To identify potential participants, various methods were used including a review of the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents' Directory of Public Schools 2023-2024 and SCOPE's Directory of Suffolk County Public Schools and Educational Organizations Servicing Long Island directory as well as the local principal associations within the surrounding area. Contact was made using mostly emails sent directly to participants from the researcher; however, follow-up phone calls to increase participation were made. No recruiting occurred from elementary schools that have only specialized, self-contained, special education buildings with no general education component. Moreover, socioeconomic status, gender, race, religion, and other personal attributes were not considered for student populations or school building leaders. This helped ensure respondents' privacy and anonymity.

### **Data Collection**

Using the approach indicated above, there were multiple sources of data collected and analyzed. As part of the research, analysis of school districts, coursework in administrative preparation programs were obtained and analyzed, and a survey was sent to elementary school principals and assistant principals. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to Long Island University's IRB was submitted. Approval of Long Island University's IRB was required so that research could commence. This practice ensured that the study followed the ethical principles and guidelines for protecting human subjects and was approved by Long Island University IRB as indicated in Appendix A.

### ***School Building Leader Participants***

The data analysis was conducted to provide information on the type of leaders in Long Island school districts in NYS to determine if they contained solely a principal or included an assistant principal. First, the name and number of districts were ascertained via internet search. Following this, each district website was analyzed to determine the number of elementary schools within the district and the levels of leadership contained in each. This yielded an estimated target population of 415 elementary principals and 191 elementary assistant principals. Invitations to the survey were sent to 606 school building leaders. Of these, 55 responded to the invitation, reviewed the Statement of Informed Consent, and agreed to participate. The survey participated in the survey yielding a 9.08% response rate.

### ***Administrative Preparation Programs***

Administrative preparation programs were identified using the NYS Department of Education's inventory of registered programs offering certification in Educational Administration/Educational Supervision. To conduct a thorough analysis, course offerings were examined on each individual college or university's public websites. The purpose of this analysis was to find the number of required courses that focus specifically on special education leadership within a given administrative program. Thirty-six colleges or universities offered administrative preparation programs. Some culminated in an advanced certificate while others were master's programs.

### ***School Building Leader Survey***

The data collection about school building leaders perceived preparedness was completed using an independently designed survey with references to the survey completed by Auletta (2018)

with permission (see Appendix E). The survey consisted of 36 multiple choice and Likert scale questions used to collect information about participants' level of special education coursework experienced in their school building leadership accreditation programs. Additionally, the survey examined the perceptions of elementary school building leaders regarding their administrative roles and duties with special education programs, students, and staff in their mainstream buildings. Also, school building leaders' perceptions of their administrative preparation programs and the extent to which they feel that the program adequately prepared them for special education issues in their buildings were included. Neither principals' names nor individual school names were requested in the survey and no identifying information was captured, rendering this survey anonymous.

The format of the survey (as seen in Appendix D) was separated into the following sections:

1. Section I: Demographic Information
2. Section II: Special Education Leadership
3. Section III: Formal Training from College or University
4. Section IV: Level of Involvement in Special Education

### **Section I: Demographic Information**

Principals and assistant principals of elementary buildings from Long Island, New York school districts were invited to take the survey. Demographics considered were years teaching, education and background, current position, and level and type of post-secondary education. Socioeconomic status, race, religion, and other personal attributes were not considered for student populations or school building leaders. High schools, schools that have no special education

population, and schools that have only specialized self-contained special education buildings with no general education population were not included in the sample. Demographics were collected through multiple-choice questions.

### **Section II: Special Education Leadership**

In this section, participants were asked specific questions that highlighted the need for special education leadership. Questions included information about staying abreast of special education mandates, grade levels within their buildings, and number of classified students. Additionally, information about special education teacher responsibilities were collected to highlight the need for principals to be well-versed in special education pedagogy and inclusive practices within education.

### **Section III: Formal Training from College or University**

Participants were asked about their university/college administrative preparation program and the highest degree earned. Emphasis was placed on the amount of special education coursework or practicum (if any) provided in their programs. Formal training from college or university data were collected through multiple choice questions.

### **Section IV: Perceived Preparedness**

In this section of the survey, questions were asked to ascertain training, background, experiences, perceptions, and responsibilities of the principal and assistant principal(s) in each building. Specific questions about principals/assistant principals' feelings of being prepared by their administrative program in relation to special education students, issues, academic

requirements, behaviors, and management were asked using a Likert Scale from 1 (*not enough or not knowledgeable*) to 4 (*very much or very knowledgeable*).

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data collection and survey were complete, a thorough data analysis was conducted using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Using descriptive statistics, the data set were reported using mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and percentiles. Simple t-tests were employed to determine if there were significant differences among item means. Correlations were used to determine how many elementary principals and assistant principals felt they were adequately prepared for special education leadership.

Every effort was made to enhance the effectiveness of the research completed. This was accomplished by continuing to increase the sample size, increasing randomization to reduce sample bias. Simple descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data including frequency, mean and standard deviation. Finally, a content analysis of data was performed to determine the methods by which colleges and universities are preparing future education leaders.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the data analyses according to the research questions. Content validity was established by using the theory explored in chapter two to develop the research questions and the questions for the survey. According to Ary et al. (2002), the researcher must move from the theoretical domain surrounding the construct to an empirical level that operationalizes the construct. Therefore, it was important that the survey that was developed measured the constructs previously described.

**Conclusion**

This study utilized quantitative methodology to ascertain whether elementary school building leaders were exposed to special education coursework within their administrative preparation program. Additionally, this study explored principals and assistant principals perceived preparedness in special education leadership. Data for this study were collected over approximately a four-month period. Subsequent chapters will present the research findings, implications of the findings and recommendations for future research.



## Chapter Four

### Results

This chapter includes the results of the study based on the quantitative data obtained from the survey (Appendix D). The first section of the chapter provides a review of the preliminary data analysis procedures. The second section includes a description of the participants of the study. Finally, the last two sections consist of a description and analysis of responses to Likert scale questions and open-ended questions in relation to each respective research question.

#### Preliminary Data Analysis

Data were collected through an online survey hosted on Survey Monkey from November 13, 2023, through January 22, 2024. All individual responses were downloaded from the survey platform into an Excel spreadsheet and the data were inspected for potential errors and missing values. Fifty-five respondents started the survey and 52 completed it. One was disqualified since they were not currently a principal or assistant principal at a school on Long Island. Data for the remaining sample ( $n = 51$ ) was uploaded into IBM SPSS Statistics (version 28) for the analysis. All applicable coding was applied, and the item response categories were combined, as needed. Frequency tables were then created for all survey items and the data were summarized. Finally, a series of statistical tests were conducted in SPSS for the primary variables of interest, in relation to preparedness for eight special education-related areas:

1. Completing special education paperwork and reports
2. Attending CSE meetings
3. Disciplining students with disabilities

4. Evaluating, supervising, or observing special education staff
5. Communicating with families of students with disabilities
6. Facilitating collaboration between regular and special education
7. Developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices
8. Attending Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)/ Response to Intervention (RtI)/Instructional Support Team (IST)/Child Study Team (CST ) meetings

An additional analysis of the research using a one-way ANOVA determined if mean levels of knowledge in the following four areas differ based on the number of required courses for school building leaders' administrative preparation programs:

1. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
2. District's continuum of special education services,
3. Inclusion and inclusive practices
4. Special Education pedagogy

### **Summary of Demographic of the Sample**

Of the 51 respondents who completed the survey, 35 (68.63%) indicated that they are currently a principal at a public elementary school on Long Island in New York State (NYS) while 16 are currently an assistant principal (31.37%). Most respondents are somewhat new in this role with only one to five years of experience ( $n = 21$ , 41.18%) or 6-10 years of experience ( $n = 16$ , 31.37%). The remainder ( $n = 14$ , 27.45%) have worked as a principal or assistant principal for 11-25 years. Respondents were also asked how many total years they have worked in the field of education. None had less than six years of experience and only two (3.92%) had 6-10 years. Nine

respondents had 11-15 years (17.65%). The most frequent response was 16-20 years ( $n = 17$ , 33.33%) followed by 21-25 years ( $n = 14$ , 27.45%). Nine (17.65%) reported  $\geq 26$  years of professional experience in education.

Most have worked full time in general education for 6-10 years ( $n = 23$ , 45.10%) or 11-15 years ( $n = 10$ , 19.61%). Only three (5.88%) reported working one to five years, while six (11.76%) have 16-25 years of experience. Nine (17.65%) have no experience working in general education but a majority have either no full-time experience working in special education ( $n = 33$ , 64.71%) or have  $< 1$  year ( $n = 4$ , 7.84%). Five (9.80%) have one to five years of experience and six (11.76%) have 6-10 years. Only 3 (5.88%) have  $\geq 11$  years of special education experience.

### ***Education, Training, and Professional Experience***

In terms of respondents' education levels,  $n = 12$  (23.53%) have a doctorate,  $n = 18$  (35.29%) hold a master's degree, and  $n = 21$  (41.18%) have a professional diploma. Only  $n = 14$  (27.45%) hold a degree or certification in special education, but nearly half ( $n = 24$ , 47.05%) have had mandatory in-service/professional development as support in meeting the specific needs of students with disabilities. Approximately 53% ( $n = 27$ ) have had no such mandatory development support, but nearly all ( $n = 42$ , 82.35%) have taken optional in-service/professional development support. Areas of undergraduate and graduate degrees are summarized in Table 1. Twenty-nine (50.00%) majored in general education, either elementary ( $n = 22$ , 37.93%) or secondary ( $n = 7$ , 12.07%). Fewer majored in either elementary special education ( $n = 4$ , 6.90%) or secondary special education ( $n = 2$ , 3.45%).

**Table 1***Areas of Undergraduate and Graduate Degrees*

Undergraduate Degree	<i>N</i>	%
General Education: Elementary	22	37.93
General Education: Secondary	7	12.07
Special Education: Elementary	4	6.90
Special Education: Secondary	2	3.45
Vocational/Career Technical Education (CTE)	0	0.00
Other	23	39.66
Graduate Degree	<i>N</i>	%
General Education: Elementary	18	29.51
General Education: Secondary	6	9.84
Special Education: Elementary	7	11.48
Special Education: Secondary	6	9.84
Vocational/Career Technical Education (CTE)	0	0.00
Other	24	39.34

Respondents were also asked, to the best of their recollection, how many courses they were required to take that dealt specifically with special education programs, laws, and/or students with disabilities for their (a) undergraduate courses, (b) graduate courses, and (c) administrative preparation courses. For undergraduate courses, approximately 41% ( $n = 21$ ) reported zero courses and this was the most frequent response. For the number of required special education courses at the graduate-level, the most frequent responses were either one required course ( $n = 13$ , 25.49%) or none ( $n = 11$ , 21.57%). For administrative preparation programs, again the most frequent responses were either none ( $n = 23$ , 45.10%) or one course ( $n = 16$ , 31.37%). All responses are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Required Special Education Courses*

Undergraduate Courses			Graduate Courses			Admin Prep Courses		
	<i>N</i>	%		<i>N</i>	%		<i>N</i>	%
0	21	41.18	0	11	21.57	0	23	45.10
1	9	17.65	1	13	25.49	1	16	31.37
2	9	17.65	2	9	17.65	2	8	15.69
3	4	7.84	3	5	9.80	3	2	3.92
4	4	7.84	4	4	7.84	4	0	0.00
5	1	1.96	5	3	5.88	5	1	1.96
≥ 6	3	5.88	≥ 6	6	11.76	≥ 6	1	1.96
Total	51	100.00	Total	51	100.00	Total	51	100.00

Respondents were also asked if they had optional development in-service/professional development coursework or mandatory development in-service/professional development coursework. Most ( $n = 42, 82.35\%$ ) had optional coursework. In contrast, less than half had mandatory coursework ( $n = 24, 47.06\%$ ) and approximately 53% ( $n = 27$ ) did not have mandatory coursework (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Optional and Mandatory Development*

		Mandatory development in-service/professional development		Total
		Yes	No	
Optional development in-service/professional development	Yes	22	20	42
	No	2	7	9
Total		24	27	51

Another survey question asked if respondents had any experience with individuals with disabilities before their formal training in education, and to select all responses that applied to

them. As seen in Table 4, the most frequent response was “yes” and it occurred as part of their experience in student/substitute teaching or in field work ( $n = 25$ , 48.08%). However, the next most frequent response was no experience ( $n = 19$ , 36.54%).

**Table 4**

*Experience with Individuals with Disabilities Before Formal Training*

Experience	<i>N</i>	%
Yes, family member or close friend with a disability	10	19.23
Yes, I have had non-educational volunteer/work experience	6	11.54
Yes, during experiences in student teaching/substitute teaching/field work	25	48.08
No	19	36.54
Other	3	5.77

Table 5 presents a summary of the overall experience and qualifications of the sample. This demonstrates that most ( $n = 45$ , 88.24%) are in the mid to high range of experience, ranging from 11-30 years, and that the most frequent type of degree earned is a professional diploma ( $n = 21$ , 41.17%).

**Table 5** Years in Education by Highest Degree Earned

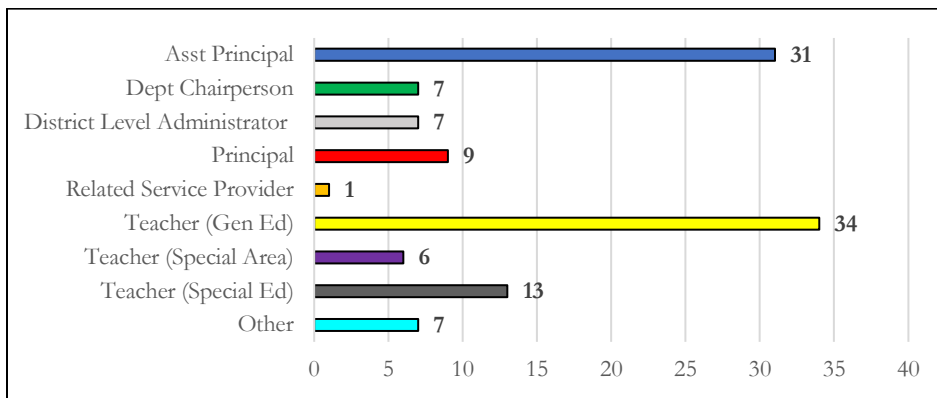
*Years in Education by Highest Degree Earned*

Highest degree	Years Working in Education						Total
	6-10 years	11-15 years	16-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years	> 30 years	
Master's	2	3	7	6	0	0	18
Prof diploma	0	5	4	3	5	4	21
Doctorate	0	1	6	5	0	0	12
Total	2	9	17	14	5	4	51

Most principals and assistant principals who provided data for this study have been in their current positions for one to five years. Respondents further indicated which professional positions they have previously held in the field of education. Most were either general education teachers ( $n = 34$ ) or assistant principals ( $n = 31$ ). Of the 36 current principals, 31 were previously an assistant principal. Thirteen were special education teachers prior to their current role (as seen in Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Previous Positions in Education*



The seven responses marked as “other” previously held positions in the field of education are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6** Previous Positions in Education

*Previous Positions in Education*

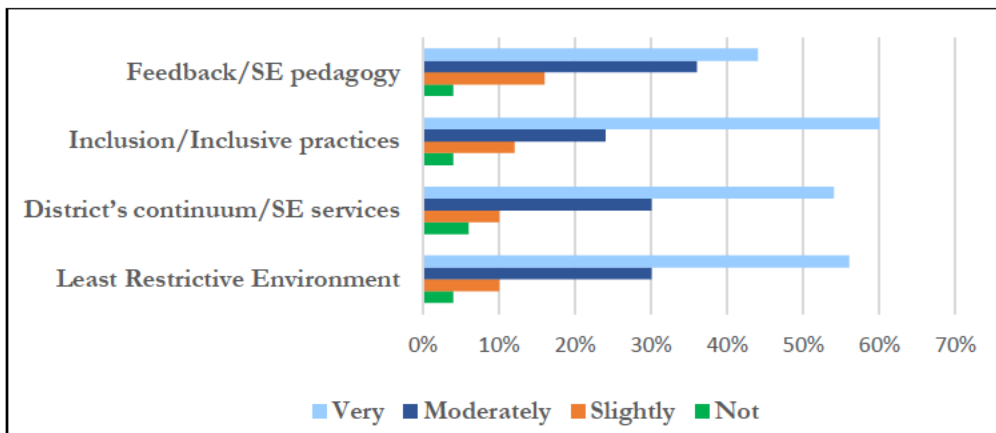
Position
1. Assistant Superintendent
2. District Mentor Teacher
3. Instructional Technology Coach
4. Integrated Class Teacher
5. Literacy Coach
6. Reading Specialist, Literacy Coach
7. School Counselor

*Special Education Knowledge*

Another area of inquiry for this study was respondents' levels of knowledge in four special education areas, on a scale from 1 (*not knowledgeable*) to 4 (*very knowledgeable*). Knowledge levels were highest for inclusion/inclusive practices and lowest for providing feedback on special education pedagogy. All responses are summarized in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**

*Knowledge in Special Education Areas*



School building leaders were also asked how they receive most of their information concerning special education and to check all that applied. The most frequent response was that information is obtained from their Special Education Department Director or Chairperson ( $n = 44$ ) or the NYS Department of Education ( $n = 31$ ). All responses are summarized in Table 7.



**Table 7***Primary Sources of Special Education Information*

Primary Information Source	<i>N</i>
NYS Department of Education	31
Special Education Dept Director/Chairperson	44
Central Office Memos/Emails	20
Workshops/Seminars	21
Federal and/or State funded Technical Assistance Centers	3
In-service Training	10
Other	8

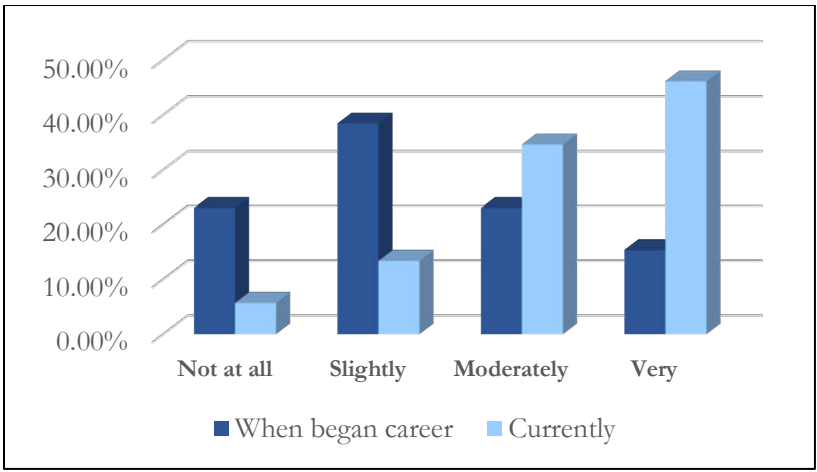
*Special Education Preparedness*

Another primary area of interest for this study was school building leaders' perceived levels of preparedness, both at the beginning of their administrative career and currently, in relation to their ability to lead special education programs and pedagogy within their school building.

Responses to survey questions about preparedness were based on a scale from 1 (*not at all prepared*) to 4 (*very prepared*) and are summarized in Figure 6. Interestingly, at the beginning of their careers, most ( $n = 31$ , 60.78%) felt not at all or only slightly prepared to lead special education programs and pedagogy. In contrast, most ( $n = 40$ , 80.00%) currently feel either very or moderately prepared.

**Figure 6**

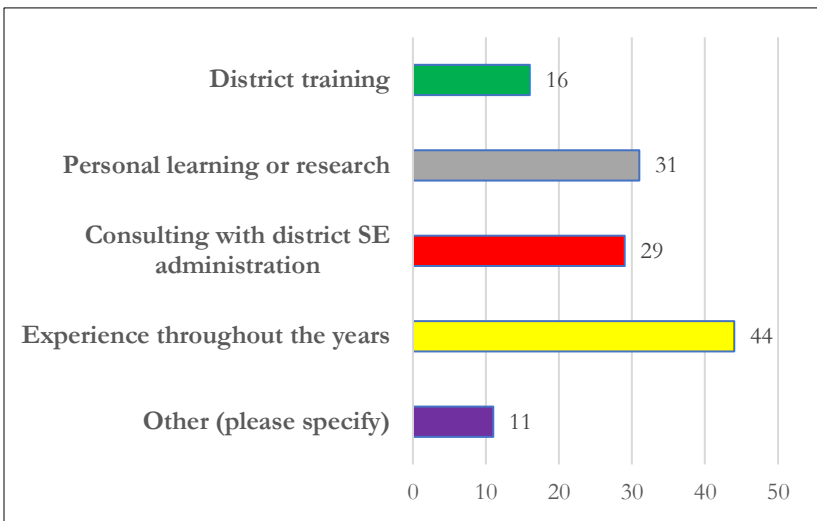
*Special Education Preparedness Currently Versus Beginning of Administrative Career*



Responses to the question, *What factors do you think facilitated the increase of your level of preparedness?* are presented in Figure 7. Most indicated that the experience they have gained throughout the years has been most helpful ( $n = 44$ ), followed by personal learning or research ( $n = 31$ ), and consulting with district special education administrators ( $n = 29$ ).

**Figure 7**

*Factors That Increased Levels of Preparedness*



The responses marked as “other” factors that have increased their levels of preparedness in relation to their ability to lead special education programs and pedagogy within their building are summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Other Sources of Special Education Information*

Other Information Source
1. Being able to be creative especially in the pre-referral process.
2. Special education staff and school psychologists.
3. My previous position as an assistant director of PPS.
4. Working closely with special education teachers, psychologists, and related service providers in my previous role as AP (director of guidance & special ed)
5. Consulting with my principal.
6. Collaborating with colleagues who had the knowledge and experience to help me grow professionally in this area.
7. Working with consultants.
8. Consulting with the special education team in my building, sitting in on CSE meetings.
9. I have a strong team consisting of a full-time behavior specialist, two guidance counselors, and a psychologist. We meet regularly, and I have learned a lot from working with them.
10. PPS staff in the building.
11. Fear of lawsuits.

*School Building Characteristics*

School building leaders were further asked to report all grade levels currently in their school building and the number of elementary students. Most ( $n = 30$ , 58.85%) reported that the total number of students ranges from 251-500 students and most ( $n = 24$ , 47.06%) include grades PK/K-8. All responses are summarized in Table 9.

**Table 9***Grade Levels in School Building by Number of Elementary Students*

Number of elementary students in the building	Grade Level				Total
	PK/K-2	3-5	PK/K-5	PK/K-8	
0-250	0	3	0	0	3
251-500	10	5	2	13	30
501-750	4	1	0	8	13
751-1000	2	0	0	3	5
Total	16	9	2	24	51

The average class size for respondents' elementary-level classrooms (including Pre-K, if applicable) is reported in Table 10. The majority ( $n = 37, 72.55\%$ ) include 20-29 students.

**Table 10***Average Class Size for Elementary Level Classrooms*

Number of Students	<i>N</i>	%
0-9	0	0.00
10-19	14	27.45
20-29	37	72.55
30-39	0	0.00

Table 11 summarizes the approximate percentage of students with IEPs in their general education classrooms in relation to how many are included in general education classrooms for at least 40% of their school day. Twenty respondents (39.21%) indicated that approximately 11-15% of students with IEPs are in general education classrooms. Of these, most ( $n = 18, 35.29\%$ ) are included in general education classrooms for at least 40% of their school day.

**Table 11**

*Percentage of Students with an IEP in General Education Classrooms*

		Percent of Students with an IEP in General Education Classrooms					Total
		0-5%	6-10%	11-15%	16-20%	≥ 21%	
Students with IEPs in GE classrooms ≥ 40% of day	0-20%	1	3	2	3	2	11
	21-40%	1	2	2	0	0	5
	41-60%	0	2	1	1	0	4
	61-80%	0	3	7	3	0	13
	81-100%	4	2	8	4	0	18
Total		6	12	20	11	2	51

**Research Question One**

The first research question was, *Do school building leadership preparation programs contain coursework and/or practicum specific to special education program administration?* It was hypothesized that most school building leadership advanced certificate programs contain little to no special education-specific coursework outside of school law class offerings. According to Feeley (2023) a total of  $n = 36$  school leadership preparation programs were found in New York State (NYS) through online searches of course catalogs. Most of these programs (52.78%) had no class descriptions mentioning special education related terms and 22.22% contained programs with one class description mentioning special education related terms. The total number of classes offered across these 36 programs was  $n = 640$ . The total number of classes found that mentioned special education was  $n=36$ . 5 of those 36 were solely dedicated to special education law (versus special education programming, practices, procedures), 13.8%. The amounts and proportions of class descriptions that mention special education related terms are summarized in Table 12.

**Table 12***Class Descriptions That Mention Special Education Related Terms*

Amount of Class Descriptions with Special Education Related Terms per Program	<i>N</i>	%
0	19	52.78
1	8	22.22
2	5	13.89
3	1	2.78
≥ 4	3	8.33

**Research Question Two**

The second research question was, *How do elementary school building leaders perceive their preparedness to assume leadership for special education students, mandates, programs, and staff, in their public elementary school building?* It was hypothesized that the survey would show that while many school building leaders perceive that they have experience in leading inclusive schools, they do not necessarily perceive that they have been adequately prepared for special education leadership from their administrative preparation program. It was also hypothesized that they may feel that more on-going professional development is needed in special education. This addressed the main focus of this study, which was to determine how principals and assistant principals (who are current elementary school building leaders) perceive their preparedness about different aspects of leadership in special education.

To obtain data for this research question, school building leaders were asked (a) how many special education-related courses were required in their administration preparation program and (b) how they currently perceive their preparedness in relation to eight types of special education-related activities. Preparedness was reported on a scale of 1 (*not prepared at all*) to 4 (*very*

*prepared*). A series of linear regressions was then conducted in SPSS to determine if the number of courses was a significant predictor of how prepared respondents currently feel in the eight different types of activities. The number of required courses in an administration preparation program significantly predicted levels of preparedness in three of the eight special education-related activities ( $p < .05$ ): completing special education paperwork and reports ( $p = .024$ ), attending CSE meetings ( $p = .014$ ), and facilitating collaboration between regular and special education ( $p = .048$ ). The model for predicting preparedness for developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices based on the number of required courses was close to statistical significance ( $p = .052$ ). All regression results are summarized in Table 13.

**Table 13**

*Regression Results for Required Courses as Predictor of Special Education Preparedness*

Dependent Variable	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
Completing special education paperwork and reports						
Regression	6.622	1	6.622	5.424	$p = .024$	.103
Residual	57.378	47	1.221			
Attending CSE meetings						
Regression	5.345	1	5.345	6.506	$p = .014$	.122
Residual	38.614	47	.822			
Disciplining students with disabilities						
Regression	2.679	1	2.679	3.513	$p = .067$	.070
Residual	35.851	47	.763			
Evaluating, supervising, or observing special education staff						
Regression	2.095	1	2.095	2.935	$p = .093$	.059
Residual	33.538	47	.714			
Communicating with families of students with disabilities						
Regression	1.513	1	1.513	2.332	$p = .133$	.047
Residual	30.487	47	.649			
Facilitating collaboration between regular and special education						
Regression	3.908	1	3.908	4.116	$p = .048$	.081
Residual	44.623	47	.949			
Developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices						

Dependent Variable	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	R <sup>2</sup>
Regression	4.253	1	4.253	3.979	<i>p</i> = .052	.078
Residual	50.237	47	1.069			
Attending MTSS/RtI/IST/CST meetings						
Regression	2.305	1	2.305	2.888	<i>p</i> = .096	.060
Residual	35.908	45	.798			
Predictor: How many required courses are in administration preparation programs?						

Regression equations for the three statistically significant (*p* < .05) findings (i.e., to predict preparedness for *Completing special education paperwork and reports*, *Attending CSE meetings*, and *Facilitating collaboration between regular and special education*) and the equation for prediction preparedness for Developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices (*p* = .052) are presented in Table 14. The values of the unstandardized coefficients for these models ranged from .224 to .292, which apply to changes in preparedness on scale from 1 (*not at all prepared*) to 4 (*very prepared*). See Table 15 for all regression coefficients and levels of significance.

**Table 14**

*Regression Equations for Required Courses as Predictor of Special Education Preparedness*

Dependent Variable and Regression Equation
Completing special education paperwork and reports $Y' = 2.286 + .292(\text{required courses in administration preparation program})$ For every additional required course, the expected increase in preparedness for completing special education paperwork and reports is .292.
Attending CSE meetings $Y' = 2.691 + .262(\text{required courses in administration preparation program})$ For every additional required course, the expected increase in preparedness for attending CSE meetings is .262.
Facilitating collaboration between regular and special education $Y' = 2.786 + .224(\text{required courses in administration preparation program})$ For every additional required course, the expected increase in preparedness for facilitating collaboration between regular and special education is .224.
Developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices



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Dependent Variable and Regression Equation

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$$Y' = 2.644 + .234(\text{required courses in administration preparation program})$$

For every additional required course, the expected increase in preparedness for developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices is .234.

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Predictor: How many required courses in administration preparation program

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**Table 15***Coefficients for Required Courses as Predictor of Special Education Preparedness*

Dependent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	
Completing special education paperwork and reports	2.286	.292		7.838	<i>p</i> < .001
	.292	.125	.322	2.329	<i>p</i> = .024
Attending CSE meetings	2.691	.239		11.248	<i>p</i> < .001
	.262	.103	.349	2.551	<i>p</i> = .014
Disciplining students with disabilities	2.861	.231		12.411	<i>p</i> < .001
	.185	.099	.264	1.874	<i>p</i> = .067
Evaluating, supervising, or observing special education staff	3.067	.223		13.753	<i>p</i> < .001
	.164	.096	.242	1.713	<i>p</i> = .093
Communicating with families of students with disabilities	3.156	.213		14.844	<i>p</i> < .001
	.139	.091	.217	1.527	<i>p</i> = .133
Facilitating collaboration between regular and special education	2.786	.257		10.831	<i>p</i> < .001
	.224	.110	.284	2.029	<i>p</i> = .048
Developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices	2.644	.273		9.690	<i>p</i> < .001
	.234	.117	.279	1.995	<i>p</i> = .052
Attending MTSS/RtI/IST/CST meetings	2.977	.240		12.407	<i>p</i> < .001
	.173	.102	.246	1.699	<i>p</i> = .096

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Predictor: How many required courses in administration preparation program

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To further explore research question two, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there are significant differences in preparedness across the eight special education-

related areas for school building leaders (e.g., principals and assistant principals) based on whether or not they hold a degree or certification in special education. Overall,  $n = 14$  (27.45%) respondents have a degree or certification in special education while  $n = 37$  (72.55%) do not. More principals hold a degree/certification ( $n = 35$ , 68.63%) than assistant principals ( $n = 16$ , 31.37%), as seen in Table 16). It was hypothesized that school building leaders who hold a degree or certification feel more prepared for all special education-related areas, as compared to those who do not.

**Table 16** Degree or Certification in Special Education for Principals and Asst. Principals

*Degree or Certification in Special Education for Principals and Asst. Principals*

Degree or certification in SE	Current position		Total
	Principal	Asst. Principal	
Yes	10	4	14
No	25	12	37
Total	35	16	51

Significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) in mean levels of preparedness were found for seven of the eight special education-related areas. In each of these instances, elementary school building leaders who hold a special education degree or certification feel more prepared as compared to those who do not (see Table 17). The only area where no significant difference was observed was for the category of MTSS/RtI/IST/CST ( $p = .156$ ). Moreover, all effect sizes were large ( $d > .50$ ), based on Cohen's (1988) guidelines, which suggests that the difference in preparedness between these two groups is meaningful.

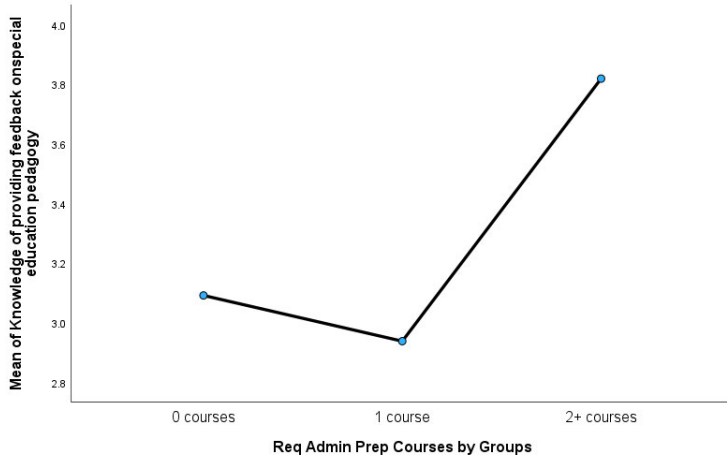
**Table 17***Mean Differences in Levels of Preparedness by Special Education Degree/Certification*

Special Education area	$\mu$ (Has SE degree or cert)	$\mu$ diff	Result	Cohen's $d$
SE paperwork and reports	Yes 3.46 No 2.64	.823	$t(47) = 3.003, p = .002$	.744
CSE meetings	Yes 3.69 No 3.03	.665	$t(47) = 2.233, p = .015$	.723
Discipline	Yes 3.77 No 3.03	.741	$t(47) = 3.737, p < .001$	.881
Evaluations	Yes 3.92 No 3.19	.729	$t(47) = 4.247, p < .001$	.904
Communicating	Yes 3.77 No 3.31	.464	$t(47) = 2.117, p = .021$	.581
Collaboration	Yes 3.85 No 3.00	.846	$t(47) = 3.647, p < .001$	.898
Vision	Yes 3.62 No 2.92	.699	$t(47) = 2.678, p = .005$	.679
MTSS/RtI/IST/CST	Yes 3.54 No 3.24	.303	$t(47) = 1.021, p = .156$	N/A

The final analysis for research question two was a one-way ANOVA, to determine if mean levels of knowledge in the four areas (e.g., LRE, District's continuum of special education services, inclusion and inclusive practices, and pedagogy) differ based on the number of required courses for school building leaders' administrative preparation programs. Three groups were created for school building leaders with either 0, 1, or  $\geq 2$  required courses. The mean level of knowledge about providing feedback on special education pedagogy was significantly higher for school building leaders with  $\geq 2$  courses, as compared to either those who took 0 or 1 course and the effect size ( $\eta^2 = .089$ ) was large (Field, 2018).

**Figure 8**

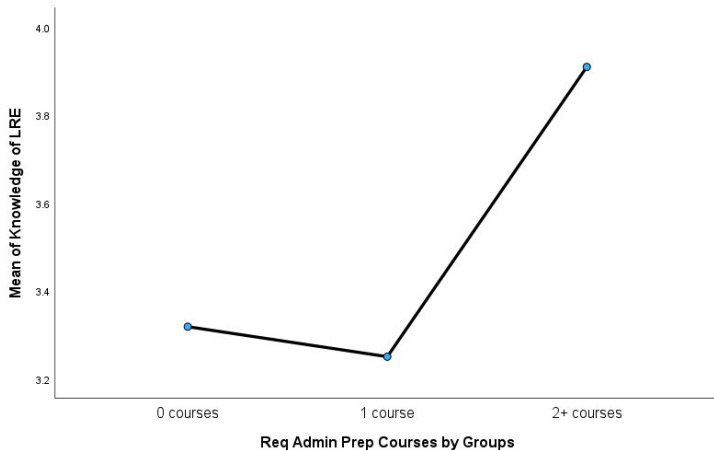
*Differences in Knowledge on Pedagogy Based Number of Required Courses*



Conversely, no significant differences were found for mean levels of knowledge levels about district’s continuum of special education services, or inclusion and inclusive practices ( $p > .05$ ) as seen in Table 18. However, for Least Restrictive Environment the p-value was .055, which is near the level of statistical significance and further confirms the research hypothesis that there is a difference in knowledge based on the number of courses.

**Figure 9**

*Differences in Knowledge on LRE Based Number of Required Courses*



**Table 18***Mean Differences in Levels of Knowledge by Number of Required Courses*

Special Education Knowledge Area	$\mu$ Knowledge	Sig.	Result	$\eta^2$
Least Restrictive Environment		$p = .055$	$F(2,46) = 3.092$	.119
0 courses	3.32			
1 course	3.25			
$\geq 2$ courses	3.91			
District's continuum of SE services		$p = .091$	$F(2,46) = 1.919$	N/A
0 courses	3.27			
1 course	3.06			
$\geq 2$ courses	3.82			
Inclusion and inclusive practices		$p = .119$	$F(2,46) = 1.578$	N/A
0 courses	3.36			
1 course	3.13			
$\geq 2$ courses	3.82			
Providing feedback on pedagogy		$p = .021$	$F(2,46) = 4.213$	.089
0 courses	3.09			
1 course	2.94			
$\geq 2$ courses	3.82			

**Conclusion**

Data for this study were collected through an online survey from 51 principals and assistant principals who are currently serving as school building leaders in elementary schools in Long Island, New York. The findings confirm both research hypotheses. For research question one, it was hypothesized that most SBL advanced certificate programs contain little to no special education-specific coursework outside of School Law class offerings. An online search for school leadership preparation programs in New York State found that 36 are offered. 52.7% have zero programs mentioning special education related terms and only 47.3% include special education related terms in one or more of the course descriptions. Moreover, only 13.8% of the total number of classes appear to be specifically dedicated to special education law.

For research question two, it was hypothesized that current elementary school building leaders likely have substantial amounts of academic and/or professional experience in leading inclusive schools. Despite their experience they do not always feel well prepared for special education leadership resulting from deficiencies in administrative preparation programs. To test this hypothesis, a series of statistical tests were conducted in SPSS. Simple linear regressions confirmed that school building leaders' perceived preparedness can be predicted by the number of required courses during administrative preparation programs. In addition, independent sample *t*-tests provided evidence that means levels of preparedness are significantly different based on whether school building leaders hold a degree or certification in special education or not. Finally, evidence was found to support the finding that there is a significant difference in mean levels of knowledge of providing feedback on special education pedagogy and Least Restrictive Environment based on the number of required courses taken in administrative preparation programs. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion

The problem addressed by this research was that current administrative preparation programs in New York State (NYS) do not adequately prepare school building leaders (principals and assistant principals) for special education leadership. According to Bateman & Cline (2020), “Administrators in PK-12 education settings recognize that, to supervise special education programs, an administrator must have more than a casual understanding of the IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA” (p. 7). School building leaders must be prepared for a wide variety of responsibilities associated with numerous areas of special education. This includes activities identified in the study such as:

- (a) participating in Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings,
- (b) disciplining students with disabilities,
- (c) evaluating, supervising, or observing special education staff,
- (d) communicating with families of students with disabilities,
- (e) facilitating collaboration between regular and special education programs,
- (f) developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices,
- (g) attending and/or leading Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)/ Response to Intervention (RtI)/Instructional Support Team (IST)/Child Study Team (CST) meetings.

School building leaders must not only successfully perform these duties but should also feel prepared to lead school change in special education program and service delivery. Additionally,

they must be well-prepared to effectively develop and articulate a shared vision of inclusion for special education teachers and students.

As referenced in chapter two, only classroom instruction has a greater impact on student learning other than leadership. Research has shown that school leadership has the second greatest impact on student learning of all school-based factors only behind classroom instruction (Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2014). Because of this impact, it is imperative that elementary school building leaders be well-versed in all aspects of learning that takes place each day. Given the important need for leadership to understand and value those with learning differences, to demonstrate responsive pedagogy, and to create educational environments that promote inclusivity, programs that prepare school building leaders to lead must be responsive in providing coursework that reflects the diversity of learners in their schools.

This study aimed to address this problem by examining two research questions. The first was to investigate course offerings in administrative preparation programs in NYS to better understand how many special education-specific classes are included in such programs. The second research question was to explore the extent to which public elementary school building leaders, inclusive of principals and assistant principals on Long Island in NYS, perceive their preparedness for managing special education issues related to their professional duties, staff, and students.

### **Major Themes**

*Lack of Special Education Courses in Administrative Preparation Programs in New York State*



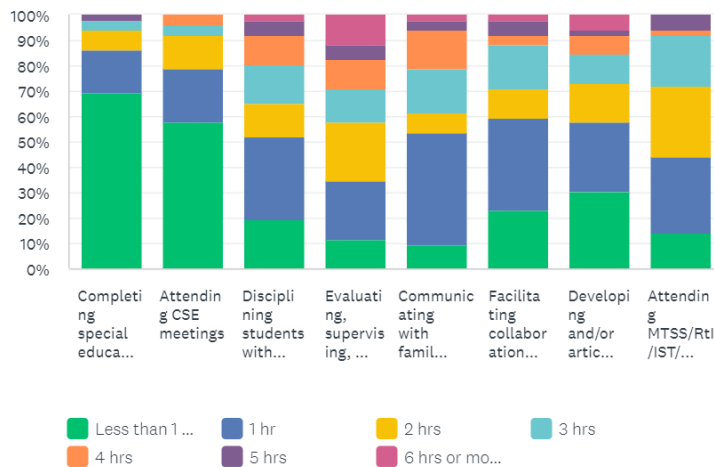
As established by Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), leaders play a significant role in creating, maintaining, and developing schools that are inclusive. Therefore, building school leaders' capacity to understand special education mandates, pedagogy, and pertinent practices will establish equitable learning environments for all students. Based on the data collected by Feeley (2023), out of 36 school leadership programs in NYS, 52.7% had no class descriptions with special education related terms. 22.22% contained programs with one class description mentioning special education related terms. These findings confirmed this researcher's first hypothesis that there is little to no coursework related to special education policies and practices in administrative preparation programs in NYS. Not having special education related coursework during an administrative preparation program can be detrimental to students, families, and to the education system. According to Bateman & Cline (2020), "Without a full knowledge of special education, an administrator will be prone to error on either denying services which are necessary for the student to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), or the administrator will spend precious district resources on services which are not required." (p. 18) Additionally, school building leaders play critical roles in developing and supporting inclusive schools that improve student outcomes for those with disabilities. Inadequate preparation can significantly impact students' overall educational access and experience. Preparing school building leaders to lead inclusive schools that improve outcomes for students with disabilities is complex work that requires a substantial knowledge base. Preparation for this complex work should include an understanding of diverse learners and the systems that support their learning and long-term success (Billingsley, et al., 2017).

*The Relationship Between Perceived Preparedness and Exposure to Special Education Coursework*

It was established by this research that most respondents (96.1%) spend at least 40 hours per week working as a school building leader with 58.8% of respondents indicating they spend more than 50 hours per week leading their schools. When looking at time spent on special education related work (Figure 10), school building leaders report spending two hours or more each week evaluating and supervising special education staff (65.4%), communicating with families of special education students (46.2%), developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices (42.3%), and facilitating collaboration between general education and special education programs (40.4%). Despite the number of hours spent in these areas, the research indicated that 60.78% of elementary school building leaders surveyed did not perceive themselves as adequately prepared to lead special education pedagogy and programs when starting their career as a building leader.

**Figure 10**

*Hours Per Week on Special Education Related Activities*



Based on the time elementary school building leaders spend on special education related work, being prepared is of utmost importance.

The impact of levels of preparedness can be seen when looking at the results of the linear regressions. The results revealed that perceived preparedness in four aspects of school building leadership in special education is significantly influenced by the number of required courses in administrative preparation programs. As the number of required courses increased, levels of preparedness also increased in the four areas of (a) completing special education paperwork and reports, (b) attending CSE meetings, (c) facilitating collaboration between regular and special education, and (d) developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices. This confirmed the hypothesis that elementary school building leaders perceive that while they currently have experience in leading inclusive schools, they have not been adequately prepared for special education leadership from their administrative preparation program when they began their career as principal or assistant principal. As previous research has shown, to be most effective, principals need to be knowledgeable about the various laws, policies, and procedures of special education to lead their instructional teams in meeting the academic and behavioral needs of all students (Billingsley, et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022; Lynn, 2015).

The hypothesis for research question two was further confirmed by the results of the independent samples *t*-tests. Significant differences in levels of preparedness were found across seven out of the eight special education-related areas for school building leaders based on if they hold a degree or certification in special education and all effect sizes were large. Those who hold such a degree felt significantly more prepared for all categories except leading

MTSS/RtI/IST/CST meetings. The third analysis conducted for research question two again confirmed the research hypothesis. According to the results of a one-way ANOVA, the mean level of knowledge about providing feedback on special education pedagogy was significantly higher for elementary school building leaders with  $\geq 2$  courses, as compared to those who had either no or one course. Again, the effect size was large which suggests that this difference is meaningful (Field, 2018).

### **Implications for Practice**

The following are some key implications based on the findings from this study and why this research is significant. The target audience for this study was designers of administrative preparation programs for elementary school building leadership on Long Island in NYS. The evidence obtained from the data demonstrates that, to promote knowledge about pedagogy and preparedness for elementary school building leadership in special education, administrative preparation programs should have *at least* two required courses related to special education. This is because of the finding that indicates the number of required courses in an administration preparation program significantly predicted levels of preparedness in three of the eight special education-related activities. Additionally, the findings indicate that the average level of knowledge about providing feedback on special education pedagogy and on Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) was significantly higher for school building leaders with  $\geq 2$  courses.

The findings from this study are integrated with a theoretical perspective based on policy and governance, as related to the administrative preparation of elementary school building leaders in special education (Grindal & Jordan, 2017). This comprehensive framework helps provide

context for the results and their potential impact on the intersection between policy, practice, and one's preparedness to lead special education pedagogy and practices. Policies and regulations at the federal, state, and local levels shape the design and content of administrative preparation programs in special education. This includes faculty qualifications, accreditation standards, and licensure requirements. When elementary school building leaders believe they are prepared, they will be better equipped to serve in their leadership roles and be stronger advocates for policy changes or systemic improvements that support students with disabilities.

Other areas related to policy and governance that are potentially related to the findings from this study are in alignment with Grindal & Jordan (2017). For example, the designers of administrative preparation programs must make choices about how to allocate resources and the content of the courses that are offered. Evidence from this study suggests that the number of required courses is related to levels of preparedness for elementary school building leaders in special education. Institutions that help prepare future leaders should consider how resource allocation affects the behavior and performance of school building leaders.

Other relevant aspects of the theory of policy and governance in special education are innovation and inequality/social justice. Working as a school building leader often demands innovative responses to challenges, such as instructional leadership, school management, and student/family support services and the skills associated with these factors that may be learned about through required coursework (Capper et al., 2006). For example, failing to adequately prepare school building leaders for meeting the unique challenges associated with special education could inadvertently lead to inequalities for students with disabilities (Billingsley, et al.,

2017; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2022; Lynn, 2015). Even if it is unintended, school leadership practices and policies may contribute to inequities and educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Elementary school building leaders must be prepared in the area of special education, which may be addressed through increased training by providing more targeted required coursework in administrative preparation programs that supports the professional development of school leaders.

The findings from this study confirm that within administrative preparation programs some changes in implementation, especially as related to coursework, are warranted. Because there are challenges and complexities associated with implementing new laws/mandates for special education within elementary school settings (e.g., funding, compliance with legal mandates, coordination of services, and ensuring equity and inclusion for students with disabilities) preparing principals for special education leadership should be paramount for administrative preparation programs.

When looking at the implications for practice, recommendations for central office administration should also be included. It is equally important for central office administrators to recognize their role in supporting school building leaders. One such recommendation would be to require mandatory special education professional development for all school building leaders. Through data analysis of the survey, it was indicated that 53% of respondents were not mandated to attend in-service coursework or professional development for special education leadership. As a result of this lack of support, over 82% of respondents engaged in optional professional development to increase their knowledge about special education leadership. Central office

administrators could potentially leverage the expertise of their legal firms or special education directors/administration or bring in experts in special education pedagogy to provide specific and targeted special education professional development for their school building leadership teams.

### **Future Directions**

Several recommendations for the direction of future research resulted from this study. For research question one, the online search could be replicated and/or expanded to determine if the same or different conclusions are reached. For research question two, this study could be replicated using the same methodology (i.e., an anonymous online survey) but to reach a larger and possibly a broader sample of school building leaders, both secondary and elementary, beyond Long Island. This could be other areas of NYS, or throughout the United States. Larger sample sizes can increase statistical power so that true effects are detected and to increase internal validity, so that more confidence about the obtained results is achieved (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

No significant differences were found for levels of preparedness for attending MTSS/RtI/IST/CST meetings based on holding a degree or certification in special education or about knowledge levels on a district's continuum of special education services, or inclusion and inclusive practices based on the number of required courses. Since the framework for multi-tiered systems of support are relatively new, future research should be conducted to ascertain if similar results are obtained.

Of the administrative preparation programs in New York State, three out of 36 programs studied by Feeley (2023) had four or more class descriptions mentioning special education-related terms that should be further examined. The types of special education courses should be clearly

defined and understood in the context of educating school building leaders. This can be accomplished by sending surveys to higher educational institutions to better understand where within existing courses special education-related topics are discussed and taught. It is also recommended that further research conducted include a survey sent to those programs' alumni to ascertain their perceived preparedness based on the incorporation of special education coursework with a comparative analysis to this research to see if levels of perceived preparedness increase or decrease.

Finally, the last area recommended to be explored is a cost-benefit analysis of which courses in an administrative preparation program would need to be either removed or restructured to incorporate special education leadership courses. This analysis is crucial for ensuring that future leaders are adequately prepared to address the unique challenges of special education. Additionally, this analysis can help identify areas where resources can be reallocated or streamlined to enhance the quality and effectiveness of leadership training in special education. By conducting a cost-benefit analysis of administrative preparation programs, educational institutions can make informed decisions about resource allocation, curriculum design, and program improvements to better meet the needs of future school leaders in special education. This analysis can inform strategic planning efforts and help ensure that administrative preparation programs are effective, efficient, and aligned with the evolving special education policies and practices.

### **Limitations**

This study included several limitations. First, the researcher attempted to recruit a broad sample of elementary school building leaders from Long Island in NYS. However, studies that



utilize online surveys as the methodology for data collection carry the risk of response bias since inclusion in the study is based on self-selection. Therefore, it is possible that there is some difference that is unknown to the researcher between those who chose to complete the survey and those who did not (Bethlehem, 2010). For example, most principals and assistant principals in this study had only one to five years of experience in this role. Few school building leaders with more than 11 years of experience answered the survey. Therefore, potentially different results could be obtained using data that included respondents with more professional experience in these roles. For example, school building leaders with intense workloads or those feeling especially unprepared and/or overwhelmed by their administrative duties in relation to special education may not have felt that they had time to spare to complete the survey.

The research design was naturalistic and nonexperimental. There was no random assignment of respondents to any experimental conditions or control group. The findings confirm that there is a strong relationship between some aspects of administrative preparation program coursework and perceived preparedness for special education leadership activities, but it is not possible to draw any causal inferences. Thus, the internal validity of this study may have been affected by some unknown missing or confounding variable that was not included in the research (Rohrer, 2018). This can also result in biased estimates of the effect sizes of the statistical tests (Henley et al., 2020). For these reasons, it should be acknowledged that alternative explanations for the findings or the strength of the effects may exist (Trochim et al., 2016).

A specific limitation associated with research question one is the possibility that the online search for administrative preparation programs for SBL certification in NYS may not have

captured all data. For example, some programs may have been missing from the online catalogs. Additionally, the online course catalogs may have contained out of date course descriptions published online.

For research question two, another potential limitation was the reliance on self-reported data. Respondents are more likely to complete online surveys that, like the one utilized for this study, are anonymous. Yet the validity of the findings depends greatly on the accuracy of self-reported data which may be affected by memory or other factors such as a respondent's physical or emotional state at the time the data was provided (Bethlehem, 2010).

The validity of the findings is also related to the quality and reliability of the instrument used for data collection. For this study, the researcher created an online survey based on a prior survey developed by Auletta (2018) and on the researcher's professional knowledge and experience. It is possible that essential data related to the research question was missed or the survey items did not fully capture the data needed to accurately address the problem (Bandalos, 2018). It is also possible that limiting the survey to school building leaders on Long Island in NYS poses a threat to external validity by limiting the generalizability of the results beyond the sample.

Although the effect sizes for all statistically significant findings were strong, the quality or the study and its internal validity may have been negatively affected by aspects of the non-experimental research design, non-random sampling procedure, and response bias. The results of this study may be considered valid for principals and assistant principals who are currently working as school building leaders, yet it is possible that the results are not generalizable beyond Long Island. More research is needed to confirm the findings from this study and to determine if

the evidence obtained through this research may be generalized to other regions of the United States.

### **Conclusions**

In summary, this study provided evidence that supports the conclusion that many elementary school building leaders do not necessarily begin their careers believing they are adequately prepared for leadership in special education. This conclusion is based on two factors: the primary factor being the reported number of required courses in administrative preparation programs, which was a significant predictor of preparedness as seen in both the linear regression and the one-way ANOVA. A secondary factor emerged from the independent sample t-tests that compared mean levels of preparedness based on whether school building leaders hold a degree or certification in special education.

The abundant literature in chapter two, along with the study's research seen in chapter four, emphasizes the complexity and specialization required for effective special education leadership. Elementary school building leaders play a crucial role in promoting equity, inclusivity, and access for students with disabilities. They must have a deep understanding of legal requirements, evidence-based practices, and strategies for supporting those diverse needs. By advocating for inclusive practices, fostering a supportive school culture, and collaborating with stakeholders, school building leaders can create environments where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. School building leadership is vital in ensuring that students with disabilities receive the necessary support and resources to achieve their full potential and participate fully in the educational community. As we see from this study, administrative

preparation programs in NYS have failed to adequately prepare elementary school principals and assistant principals for special education leadership by excluding specific coursework related to special education policies and practices leading to building leaders perceived preparedness being interrelated to the amount of special education coursework to which they have been exposed.

Based on the findings of this study, we see that the level of exposure to special education coursework is directly related to building leaders' perceived preparedness in this area. School building leaders who have had more opportunities to learn about special education policies, practices, and effective strategies are likely to perceive greater preparedness and identify themselves as more confident and competent in addressing the needs of students with disabilities and promoting inclusive practices in their schools.

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## Appendix A

### IRB Approval



**NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:**

*Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation, suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.*

**TO:**

Kathy Weiss - Principal Investigator  
Jeanette Wojcik - Student Investigator

**FROM:** LIU Institutional Review Board

**DATE:** November 13, 2023

**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Elementary School Administrators' Preparedness In The Area Of Special Education Leadership: Implications For School Administrative Preparation Programs

**PROJECT ID NO:** 23/10-114

**REVIEW TYPE:** Exempt

**ACTION:** IRB Exempt Determination/**Approval**

Your application has been reviewed using the University's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) administrative review process and can be considered to be an EXEMPT methodology/approach as defined in 45 CFR 46.104.d.

Exempt Category 2: Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: i. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, ii. Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation, or iii. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note: Revisions and amendments to the research activity must be promptly reported to the IRB for review and approval prior to the commencement of the revised protocol. **If the project is amended so that it is no longer considered to be exempt research as per the federal definitions, it will be necessary for the investigators to submit an application for full committee review.**



## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

IRB Protocol #: 23/10-114  
Approval: November 13, 2023  
LIU Sponsored Projects

## LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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**Study Title:** Elementary School Administrators' Preparedness in the Area of Special Education Leadership: Implications For Administrative Preparation Programs

**Sponsor/Supporter/Funded By:** Long Island University

**Faculty Investigator:** Dr. Kathy Weiss, Dissertation Chair [Kathy.Weiss@liu.edu](mailto:Kathy.Weiss@liu.edu)

**Principal Investigator:** Jeanette Wojcik, Doctoral Candidate [jeanette.wojcik@my.liu.edu](mailto:jeanette.wojcik@my.liu.edu)

You are being asked to join a research study. Participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to join now, you can change your mind later.

**1. Why is this research being done?**

This research is being done to examine the extent to which Long Island public-school elementary principals and assistant principals perceive their preparedness for special education leadership.

Participants of this study are limited to elementary principals and assistant principals of public-schools on Long Island in New York State.

**2. What will happen if you join this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things: Take a survey which asks about your level of involvement in special education as a Long Island public-school elementary principal/assistant principal, your level of post-secondary preparation and your perception about your preparedness for special education leadership within your building. This survey should take approximately 10-12 minutes.

**3. What are the risks or discomforts of the study?**

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life [or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests].

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LIU Sponsored Projects

Although your IP Address will not be stored in the survey results, there is always the possibility of tampering from an outside source when using the Internet for collecting information. While the confidentiality of your responses will be protected once the data is downloaded from the Internet, there is always the possibility of hacking or other security breaches that could threaten the confidentiality of your responses.

**4. Are there benefits to being in the study?**

There is no direct benefit to you from being in this study.

This study may benefit future principals and assistant principals if the results lead to a better understanding of how administrative preparation programs educate their students to be prepared for special education leadership.

**5. What are your options if you do not want to be in the study?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You choose whether to participate. If you decide not to participate, there are no penalties.

**6. Will it cost you anything to be in this study?**

There is no cost to being in this study.

**7. Will you be paid if you join this study?**

No.

**8. Can you leave the study early?**

You can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later.

**9. What other things should you know about this research study?**

**What is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and how does it protect you?**

This study has been reviewed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB), a group of people that reviews human research studies. The IRB can help you if you have questions about your rights as a research participant or if you have other questions, concerns or complaints about this research study. You may contact the IRB at [osp@liu.edu](mailto:osp@liu.edu). If you wish, you may

contact the principal investigator by email at Dr. Kathy Weiss, Dissertation Chair, [kweiss@liu.edu](mailto:kweiss@liu.edu). You can also contact the department chair, Dr. Tonie McDonald at [Tonie.McDonald@liu.edu](mailto:Tonie.McDonald@liu.edu). If you cannot reach the investigators or wish to talk to someone else, contact the IRB office at [osp@liu.edu](mailto:osp@liu.edu).

**What should you do if you have questions about the study?**

Email the principal investigator, Jeanette Wojcik at [jeanette.wojcik@my.liu.edu](mailto:jeanette.wojcik@my.liu.edu). If you cannot reach the principal investigator or wish to talk to someone else, contact the IRB office at [osp@liu.edu](mailto:osp@liu.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, please call the Institutional Review Board at Long Island University at [osp@liu.edu](mailto:osp@liu.edu).

**10. What does your agreement on this consent form mean?**

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things: take a survey which asks about your level of involvement in special education as a Long Island public-school elementary principal/assistant principal, your level of post-secondary preparation and your perceptions about your preparedness for special education leadership within your building. This survey should take approximately 10-12 minutes.

In Survey Monkey, you will see the following statement to consent to the survey:

By clicking the "Agree to Participate" button below, you are indicating that you have fully read the above text and have had the opportunity to print the consent form and ask questions about the purposes and procedures of this study. If you choose not to participate, please click the "Decline to Participate" button below or simply close your browser.

- I agree to participate
- I decline to participate

## Appendix C

### Recruiting Materials

IRB Protocol #: 23/10-114  
Approval: November 13, 2023  
LIU Sponsored Projects

#### EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP SURVEY: LETTER TO RESPONDENTS

Dear Long Island Public-School Elementary Principals and Assistant Principals,

I am a doctoral candidate at Long Island University-C.W. Post and my dissertation is entitled *Elementary Principals Preparation for Special Education Leadership: Implications for Administrative Preparation Programs*. As a former Elementary Principal and current Director of Elementary PPS, I am interested in understanding the relationship between Long Island public-school elementary principals' and assistant principals' perceived preparedness for special education leadership and administrative preparation programs in New York State. Special education leadership includes understanding legal mandates, encouraging inclusive practices, and building educator's capacity to work with students of different abilities.

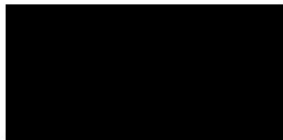
There is a link below that will take you to a [brief](#) survey using Survey Monkey where information will be collected about your level of involvement in special education as a Long Island public-school elementary principal or assistant principal, your level of post-secondary preparation, and your perceptions toward being prepared for special education leadership within your building. I respectfully request that you complete the survey, which should take approximately 10-12 minutes. All responses are anonymous to protect confidentiality. Please submit your responses no later than January 31, 2024.

Additionally, there is a link below that will take you to the Educational Leadership Informed Consent. This informed consent is an information document with details about the research study including its purpose and what your role will be.

I want to share my sincerest thank you in advance for your participation as I know that your time is precious. I am most honored by your willingness to contribute to literature in the field of principal leadership and special education. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jeanette.wojcik@my.liu.edu](mailto:jeanette.wojcik@my.liu.edu).

[Educational Leadership Informed Consent](#)

[Educational Leadership Survey](#)



Long Island University: C.W. Post

#### EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP SURVEY: LETTER TO ORGANIZATIONS

Dear [Name of Organization Leader],

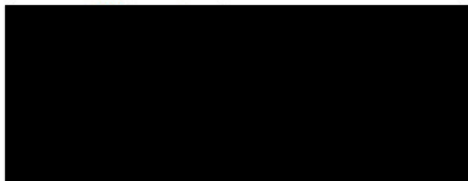
IRB Protocol #: 23/10-114  
Approval: November 13, 2023  
LIU Sponsored Projects

I am a doctoral candidate at Long Island University-C.W. Post and my dissertation is entitled *Elementary Principals Preparation for Special Education Leadership: Implications for Administrative Preparation Programs*. As a former Elementary Principal and current Director of Elementary PPS, I am interested in understanding the relationship between Long Island public-school elementary principals' and assistant principals' perceived preparedness for special education leadership and administrative preparation programs in New York State. Special education leadership includes understanding legal mandates, encouraging inclusive practices, and building educator's capacity to work with students of different abilities.

In your role as [insert role], I hope you will consider sharing the document in this link below with your members who are elementary principals and assistant principals of Long Island public-school districts. I am hoping to recruit a minimum of 500 respondents and your assistance in sharing this information would be greatly appreciated.

I want to share my sincerest thank you in advance for your participation as I know that your time is precious. I am most honored by your willingness to contribute to literature in the field of principal leadership and special education. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jeanette.wojcik@my.liu.edu](mailto:jeanette.wojcik@my.liu.edu).

[Letter to Long Island public-school Elementary Principals and Assistant Principals](#)



## Appendix D

### Survey

#### Education Leadership Survey

##### 1. Education Leadership Survey

**The purpose of this survey is to determine your perceived preparedness for special education programs, pedagogy and practices from the perspective of an elementary school principal or assistant principal. There are no right or wrong answers, so please address the questions to the best of your knowledge if you are unsure. If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: Take a survey which asks about your level of involvement in special education as a principal/assistant principal, your level of post-secondary preparation, and your feelings about your preparedness for special education leadership within your building. This survey should take approximately 10-12 minutes to complete.**

1. By clicking the "Agree to Participate" button below, you are indicating that you have fully read the above text and the consent form included in the original email and agree to participate in this study. If you choose not to participate, please click the "Decline to Participate" button below or simply close your browser.

I agree to

participate

I decline to

participate

#### Education Leadership Survey

##### 2. SECTION I- Background Information

\* 2. Your Current Position:

Principal

Assistant Principal

\* 3. Are you a principal or assistant principal in a public elementary school on Long Island?

YES

NO

\* 4. Previous Positions (check all that apply):

- District Level Administrator (Director, Assistant Supt., etc.)
- Principal
- Assistant Principal
  
- Teacher - General Education
- Teacher - Special Education
- Teacher - Special Area (reading, art, music, P.E., etc)
- Department Chairperson
- Related Service Provider (speech, OT/PT, social worker, psychologist)
- Other (please specify)

\* 5. How many total years have you worked in the field of education?

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 30+ years

\* 6. How many total years have you been a principal/assistant principal?

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 30+ years

7. How many years have you been in your current position?

- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 30+ years

\* 8. What is the highest degree you have obtained?

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Professional Diploma
- Doctorate

\* 9. Do you hold any degree or certification in special education?

- Yes
- No

\* 10. Years of full-time general education teaching experience (including special areas):

- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 30+ years
- I did not teach in general education



\* 11. Years of full-time special education teaching experience:

- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21-25 years
- 26-30 years
- 30+ years
- I did not teach in special education

Education Leadership Survey  
3. SECTION II-Education Leadership

\* 12. How do you receive most of your information concerning special education? (select all that apply)

- Information directly from the NY State Education Department
- Special Education Department Director/Chairperson
- Memos/Emails from Central Office
- Workshops/Seminars
- Federal and/or State funded Technical Assistance Centers
- In-service training
- Other (please specify)

\* 13. Grade levels contained in the school where you are currently principal/assistant principal:

- PK/K-2
- 3-5
- PK/K-5
- PK/K-8
- Other (please specify)

\* 14. Approximate number of elementary level students in your building (including pre-k if your building contains pre-k):

- 0-250
- 251-500
- 501-750
- 751-1000
- 1001 or more

\* 15. Average class size for elementary level classrooms in your building (including pre-k if your building contains pre-k):

- 0-9
- 10-19
- 20-29
- 30-39

\* 16. Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building:

- 0-5%
- 6-10%
- 11 -15%
- 16-20%
- 21 % or more

\* 17. Approximate percentage of students with IEPs in your building who are included in general education classrooms for at least 40% of their school day:

- 0-20%
- 21-40%
- 41-60 %
- 61-80 %
- 81-100%

\* 18. Considering each of the special education teachers in your school, how many spend the majority of their day in each of the following settings:

Number of Teachers

General Education Classroom (ICT, Consultant Teacher):	<input type="text"/>
Pull Out/Resource Room:	<input type="text"/>
Self-Contained Classroom:	<input type="text"/>

---

Education Leadership Survey

4. SECTION III: Formal Training from College or University

\* 19. Did you have any experience with individuals with disabilities BEFORE your formal training in education? (check all that apply)

- Yes: family member or close friend with a disability
  
- Yes: I have had non-educational, volunteer/work experience with individuals with disabilities
  
- Yes: during experiences in student teaching/substitute teaching/field work
- No
  
- Other (please specify)

\* 20. What is(are) the area(s) of your UNDERGRADUATE degree(s)? (Check all that apply)

- General Education: Elementary
  
- General Education: Secondary (any subject)
  
- Special Education: Elementary
- Special Education: Secondary
  
- Vocational/Career Technical Education (CTE)
  
- Other (please specify)

\* 21. To the best of your recollection, how many UNDERGRADUATE (bachelor's degree) courses were you required to take that dealt specifically with special education programs, laws, and/or students with disabilities?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

\* 22. What is(are) the area(s) of your GRADUATE (master's) degree(s)? (Check all that apply)

General Education: Elementary

General Education: Secondary (any subject)

Special Education: Elementary

Special Education: Secondary

Vocational/Career Technical Education (CTE)

Other (please specify)

\* 23. To the best of your recollection, how many GRADUATE (master's degree) courses were you required to take that dealt specifically with special education programs, laws, and/or students with disabilities?

0

1

2

3

4

5

6+

\* 24. Did you attend an administrative preparation program (School Building Leader/School District Leader) in New York State?

Yes

No If "No", please skip question 25

\* 25. To the best of your recollection, how many courses were you required to take in your ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATION PROGRAM (School Building Leader/School District Leader) that dealt specifically with special education programs, laws, or students with disabilities?

0

1

2

3

4

5

6+

\* 26. Have you had **MANDATORY** in-service/professional development to support you in meeting the specific needs of students with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

\* 27. Have you taken **OPTIONAL** in-service/professional development to support you in meeting the specific needs of students with disabilities?

- Yes
- No

\* 28. When you **BEGAN** your career as a principal/assistant principal, how prepared did you feel to lead special education programs and pedagogy within your building (between 1 and 4)?

1 = Not prepared at all 2 = Slightly prepared 3 = Moderately prepared 4 = Very prepared

Level of Preparedness

\* 29. **CURRENTLY** as a principal/assistant principal, how prepared do you feel to lead special education programs and pedagogy within your building (between 1 and 4)?

1 = Not prepared at all 2 = Slightly prepared 3 = Moderately prepared 4 = Very prepared

Level of Preparedness

\* 30. **CURRENTLY**, do you feel that your level of preparedness to support special education programs and pedagogy within your school has improved from the start of your principalship/assistant principalship?

- Yes
- No
- I am still in my first year of being a principal/assistant principal

\* 31. If yes, What factors do you think facilitated the increase of your level of preparedness? (check all that apply)

- District training/Professional Development
- Personal learning/research
- Consulting with district special education administration (i.e.: Director of Special Education)

Experiences throughout the years

Other (please specify)







\* 34. Regarding each of the same special education related activities, indicate if you feel you are spending the appropriate amount of time on each activity (between 1 and 4)

1 = Not enough time      2 = Less time than I would like      3 = The right amount of time      4 = Too much time

Completing special education paperwork and reports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending CSE meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disciplining students with disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evaluating, supervising, or observing special education staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicating with families of students with disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilitating collaboration between regular and special education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending MTSS/RtI/IST/CST meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 35. Regarding each of the same special education related activities, indicate your level of preparedness in your ability to carry out each role (between 1 and 4):

1 = not prepared                      2 = somewhat prepared                      3 = moderately prepared                      4 = very prepared

Completing special education paperwork and reports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending CSE meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disciplining students with disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evaluating, supervising, or observing special education staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicating with families of students with disabilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilitating collaboration between regular and special education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing and/or articulating a vision of inclusion and inclusive practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending MTSS/RtI/IST/CST meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 36. How would you describe your knowledge of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?

1 = not knowledgeable      2 = slightly knowledgeable      3 = moderately knowledgeable      4 = very knowledgeable

\* 37. How would you describe your knowledge of your District's continuum of special education services?

1 = not knowledgeable      2 = slightly knowledgeable      3 = moderately knowledgeable      4 = very knowledgeable

\* 38. How would you describe your knowledge of inclusion and inclusive practices?

3 = moderately

1 = not knowledgeable

2 = slightly knowledgeable

knowledgeable

4 = very knowledgeable

\* 39. How would you describe your knowledge of providing feedback on special education pedagogy?

1 = not knowledgeable

2 = slightly knowledgeable

3 = moderately knowledgeable

4 = very knowledgeable

*Note: Content based on survey completed by Auletta (2018) as seen in Appendix E.*

## Appendix E

### Data Use Permission Letter



Jeanette Wojcik [REDACTED] &gt;

#### Re: Dissertation Information

1 message

Trish Auletta [REDACTED]  
To: Jeanette Wojcik [REDACTED]

Sun, Aug 6, 2023 at 8:55 AM

Absolutely. Whatever you need. As referenced in my dissertation, my survey was adapted with permission from previous ones. It's nice to see a survey instrument reused and honed in to grow with need.

Trish Auletta

*My working day may not be your working day. Please do not feel obliged to reply to this email outside your normal working hours!*

On Aug 6, 2023, at 8:13 AM, Jeanette Wojcik [REDACTED] wrote:

Good Morning Trish,

Thank you so much for your willingness to share information with me! Our dissertations are similar except I am studying elementary principals and assistant principals. I have read and referenced your dissertation as I begin to draft my chapters and my survey. Would it be possible to have your permission to adapt your survey for my research?

Thank you so much for your support with this!

Warm regards,  
Jeanette Wojcik

On Tue, May 2, 2023 at 7:03 PM Trish Auletta [REDACTED] wrote:

Jeanette,  
Hi. I would be happy to help/share in any way that I can. Let me know how I can help.  
Trish

*My working day may not be your working day. Please do not feel obliged to reply to this email outside your normal working hours!*

On May 2, 2023, at 6:00 AM, Jeanette Wojcik [REDACTED] wrote:

Good Morning Dr. Auletta,

I hope that you are doing well! Our mutual friend, [REDACTED], shared your contact information with me as I am completing a similar dissertation research study. I was hoping that you would be interested in speaking with me regarding your dissertation.

Please let me know if you would be willing to speak with me and I would be happy to arrange a time at your convenience.

Thank you so much!

Warm regards,  
Jeanette Wojcik