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AN EXAMINATION OF INCLUSION OF SECONDARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
IN ONE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

Brandon Brown

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of

Master of Science

in

Special Education

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2024

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ABSTRACT

An Examination of Inclusion of Secondary Students with Disabilities in one Local School
District

by

Brandon Brown, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2024

Major Professor: Kaitlin Bundock

Department: Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and research the topic of inclusion in one local school community. The study examined the perceptions of special educators, general educators and administrators towards inclusion in the school community. Perspectives of inclusive practices are often only considered in the context of special education; surveying general educators will help provide insight related to the extent to which inclusion is considered outside of the special education classroom. The study also examined the opinions of parents who have a student who receives special education services in one school district in the Intermountain West of the United States of America. Through surveying parents of students with disabilities in this district, we can better identify and evaluate what schools are doing right and hopefully shed light on areas that can be improved upon. Results from the study showed that most school district

employees, (general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators) and parents of students with disabilities believe that inclusion is beneficial to classrooms. Even though this is the opinion of the majority the definition of, and the practice of inclusion looks different in classrooms and schools.

(72 pages)

Keywords: disability, inclusion, FAPE, accommodation, modifications

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

An Examination of Inclusion of Secondary Students with Disabilities in one Local School

District

Brandon Brown

This survey was designed to examine the role of inclusion in a secondary school setting in one school district. The survey attempted to measure the attitudes, and opinions of general education school teachers, special education school teachers, administrators, and the parents of a student with a disability. The survey determined that most opinions agreed that students with disabilities deserved to be included in classes and extracurricular activities but what that would look like was different in all groups. Opinions even varied when looking at what the exact definition of inclusion was. Results from the survey showed opinions that teachers and administrators have towards the school district and how inclusive it is overall. Inclusion is an important aspect of education as everyone deserves the right to a quality education. How to accomplish this goal for all students remains a lingering question that as of today has no definitive answer.

CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	iii
Public Abstract.....	v
List of Figures.....	vii
List of Tables.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	6
Purpose Statement and Research Questions.....	23
Methods.....	24
Participants and Setting.....	24
Materials.....	25
Procedures.....	26
Data Analysis.....	27
Results.....	28
Participant Demographics.....	28
Definition of Inclusion.....	34
Perspectives Regarding Inclusion.....	39
Discussion.....	46
Main Findings.....	46
Limitations.....	50
Future Directions.....	51
Conclusion.....	52
References.....	53
Appendix A.....	58

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Percentage of Respondents by category.....	29
Figure 2 Respondents Length of Employment in the district	30
Figure 3 Percentage of School Types Respondents Employed at or Student Attended.....	31
Figure 4 Respondents Interaction with Students with Disabilities by Disability Classification...	32
Figure 5 Classes that Students with Disabilities Participate in.....	33
Figure 6 Types of Inclusive Activities Occurring in Schools.....	34

LIST OF TABLES

	page
Table 1 Topics of Definitions by Parents/Guardians of Students with Disabilities.....	35
Table 2 Topics of Definitions by Special Education Teachers.....	36
Table 3 Topics of Definitions by Administrators.....	37
Table 4 Topics of Definitions by General Education Teachers.....	38

Introduction

Inclusive education is essential for the well-being of students receiving special education services. Belonging to a group and feeling accepted in that group improves a person's mental health. It has been suggested that “social acceptance has been linked with greater psychological health” (Ford. B, 2018, p. 1075). Human beings are social animals who strive to build relationships with those around them. To be excluded from an education, an occupation, or even the community at large because of a disability takes away from a person’s quality of life. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 2004) states that, “Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.”

Communities worldwide have often excluded those individuals with disabilities from participating fully in society. This can be seen in our public schools throughout the country. Many students with disabilities are placed in more restrictive classes which impacts their relationships and opportunities to be with their general education peers. In their article, Agran and colleagues (2020) state, “the extent to which students with severe disabilities are provided access to the general education classroom has remained largely stagnant for at least the last decade. Nationwide, placement practices for these students continue to remain “distinctly separatist,” and discussions about their inclusion in general education classes often become “highly contentious” (Connor & Ferri, 2007, p. 64; Agran et al., 2020, pgs. 4-5). To help with this issue and reduce the stigma and stereotypes associated with students with disabilities, general education peers need to interact with and get exposure to students with disabilities. Dr.

William Anthony (1972) has stated, “individuals who report contact tend to have slightly more favorable attitudes than those who report no contact”.

The World Health Organization’s Community Based Rehabilitation Guidelines recommend inclusive activities and actions within health, education, livelihood, social, and empowerment domains (World Health Organization, 2010). Inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities in schools may help improve the overall life outcomes of students with disabilities. Additionally, unified sports (sports in which people with and without disabilities participate) could provide another opportunity for increased contact between individuals with and without disabilities to develop relationships that are beneficial for individuals’ social well-being.

Inclusion in schools for all students regardless of any status is imperative to ensure a quality education. For many years in secondary school students with disabilities were not given the rights and respect to be included in the school culture. McDougall (2004) states, “negative peer attitudes are generally recognized as being a major barrier to full social inclusion at school for children and youth with disabilities”. Views of students with disabilities have begun to change over the last few decades (Novak, & Bartelheim 2012). Instead of moving students with disabilities into separate classrooms, students with disabilities are being included in general education classes and being included in the school community reflecting a belief that, “inclusive education is about fitting schools to meet the needs of all students” (Sandhu 2017, p. 422). An inclusive education should be the desire and goal of all teachers. In providing students with inclusive education educators are ensuring that students with disabilities are receiving a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). In some cases, general education teachers are reluctant or struggle to include students with disabilities because of accommodations or modifications that

will need to be made to curriculum or their class structure. Research shows that general education, “teachers have reported a lack of confidence in their ability to provide instruction to students with disabilities, which led to negative attitudes toward inclusion” (Jung 2007). Furthermore, Helwig and Tindal (2003) and Walton et al. (2014) found that general education teachers had difficulties in understanding how students benefit from accommodations (as cited in Joyce, 2018).

Parents play an important role in ensuring that inclusion is provided in a school setting. Parents are “integral partners in developing a more inclusive system” (Sharma & Trory, 2019, p. 879). Authors have suggested that parent’s attitudes can change how others view inclusion (de Boer, et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2001). This includes the student’s own attitudes and behaviors. Both positive and negative parental views of inclusion can impact the way that students feel about students with disabilities participating in mainstream inclusion (de Boer et al., 2010).

To begin examining the issue of inclusion in local schools one must first understand the definitions of certain key words. Disability is defined in many ways, but according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the ADA defines a person with a disability as,

a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability. The ADA also makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on that person’s association with a person with a disability (ADA, 1990).

The IDEA defines disability as

a child evaluated in accordance and being determined as having an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as “emotional disturbance”), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA, 2004).

Inclusion in education is defined as, “an education system that includes all students, and welcomes and supports them to learn, whoever they are and whatever their abilities or requirements. This means making sure that teaching the curriculum, school buildings, classrooms, play areas, transport and toilets are appropriate for all children at all levels. Inclusive education means all children learn together in the same schools. No-one should be excluded. Every child has a right to inclusive education, including children with disabilities” (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund [UNICEF] 2017).

FAPE is also an important aspect of inclusive education. A free appropriate public education helps ensure that students with disabilities are receiving access to education. FAPE is defined as,

An appropriate education may comprise education in regular classes, education in regular classes with the use of related aids and services, or special education and related services in separate classrooms for all or portions of the school day. Special education may include specially designed instruction in classrooms, at home, or in private or public institutions, and may be accompanied by related services such as speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, psychological counseling, and medical diagnostic

services necessary to the child's education. An appropriate education will include: education services designed to meet the individual education needs of students with disabilities as adequately as the needs of nondisabled students; the education of each student with a disability with nondisabled students, to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the student with a disability; evaluation and placement procedures established to guard against misclassification or inappropriate placement of students, and a periodic reevaluation of students who have been provided special education or related services; and establishment of due process procedures that enable parents and guardians to: receive required notices; review their child's records; and challenge identification, evaluation and placement decisions (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2010).

Lastly, accommodation is defined as a modification or adjustment to a job, the school environment, or the way things are usually done during the hiring or schooling process. A modification is a change in the class curriculum (ADA). These definitions are important to help examine the issue of inclusion in local secondary schools.

Again, inclusion in the classroom is essential and important to the well-being of the students. Additional research should be conducted to determine if students, their parents, general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators in the local school communities feel that inclusive education experiences are being provided. It should also be examined to what extent changes could be made (if any are needed). Inclusion extends beyond the classroom to school affiliated/organized activities such as sport competitions, plays, choir concerts, and assemblies. Data on inclusion in these areas of school life should also be collected and examined.

Literature Review

Method

I conducted a literature review to find peer-reviewed journal articles that provide additional information on inclusion and its effects on students receiving special education services. To locate these peer-reviewed research backed journal articles I searched a total of seven different databases: Ebscohost, Jstor, PsychINFO, Scopus, Social Services Abstracts, Sage Journals, and Taylor Francis Online. To gather the articles, I used different search parameters to locate the articles that were most suitable for the research that I'm proposing to complete. Across all databases I searched the terms "inclusion", "disab*", and "secondary". In most cases thousands of articles were found. To help limit the search and find articles that were better suited to my research, I added the search words "positive results". The last search parameter that I used was the term "unified sports" because I am interested in how involvement in unified sports may impact perceptions of inclusion.

In beginning my search and using the terms "inclusion", "disab*", and "secondary" the search results returned over 3,000 articles that met criteria. To reduce the number of articles I added the term "United States" as I am most interested in inclusion in my own country and recognize that laws governing inclusion and disability access vary between countries. By adding this term, the number of articles dropped to around 200. In adding the term "positive results", the search results decreased to around 70 articles. Next, I reviewed the abstracts of these 70 articles to identify articles most closely related to my topic of interest. In examining the 70 articles I was able to reduce the number to 20 by eliminating articles that did not talk about inclusion in the abstract of the paper. To further limit the search, I eliminated any article that was written prior to the year 2000. There were still articles from foreign countries included in the pool of 20 articles,

despite “United States” being included in the search terms. I ultimately chose to keep articles from foreign countries if the article was specifically about parent and/or student perspectives of inclusion, the research topic I am particularly interested in conducting. Doing so also gives me an opportunity to consider how inclusion varies throughout the world. To again reduce the number of articles I focused on articles that talked about attitudes and perceptions about inclusion. After completing these procedures for the literature review, I was able to find 5 articles that examined attitudes that are relevant to my proposed research related to parent and student perspectives of inclusion in schools.

Parents View of Inclusion

Sharma and Trory (2019) examined attitudes of parents of students with and without special needs in mainstreamed (i.e., inclusive) classrooms. To collect data for their topic the authors decided to use a mixed methods approach. Through the data the authors found many opinions on the issue of inclusion for students with disabilities.

The authors examined inclusion within the nation of Thailand. The authors mention that many countries, especially those in Southeastern Asia, are behind western nations in terms of education and inclusion for youth with disabilities, as there is no legislation providing equality for those with disabilities. The authors define inclusion as, “the practice of educating children with special education needs (SEN) in the regular classrooms along with offering them the required services and support.” The authors also use the term TDC which stands for typically developing children. These are the students who are the classmates of the SEN students in the study (Sharma & Trory, 2019 p. 878). One issue that is important to keep in mind is that countries in Southeast Asia have cultural differences that impact their perception of disability. This impact can be examined through the differences of a collectivist society and an

individualistic society. For example, those who may be practicing Buddhists feel that the life that one lives today is based on decisions and actions made in the past (Carter 2006).

To determine parent's perceptions and opinions on inclusion the authors focused on two research questions: (1) What are the attitudes of parents of TDC towards inclusive education in Early Years Settings of inclusive mainstream schools in Bangkok? (2) What are the attitudes of parents of children with SEN towards inclusive education in Early Years settings in inclusive mainstream schools in Bangkok? The authors examined these questions using a mixed methods approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. They used a web-based survey that included open and closed ended questions, which allowed them to gather the opinions of parents in an anonymous manner.

The authors initially reached out to six schools to see if they would be willing to participate in the research. These six schools had a mixture of typically developing children (TDC) and special education needs students (SEN). Of the six schools two decided to participate in the study. There was also a "snowball" sampling as parents began to spread the word and more parents participated in the study (Cohen et al., 2007; Visser et al., 2000). In total 71 surveys were completed for the study. Fifty of the survey were completed by parents of TDC students, and 21 were completed by the parents of SEN students.

The survey consisted of 3 categories of questions that asked participants to rate their opinions using a 5-point Likert scale. There were 3 categories of questions that were asked to participants: (1) Questions meant to assess attitudes towards inclusion that would apply to both group of parents – parents of TDC and parents of children with SEN. (2) Questions presented only to the parents of TDC because these covered potential benefits and concerns applicable for parents of TDC, and (3) Questions presented only to the parents of children with SEN because

these covered potential benefits and concerns applicable for parents of children with SEN. In addition to these rating questions, the survey included multiple open-ended questions that focused on advantages and disadvantages of an inclusion-based classroom.

The results of the survey from parents of typically developing children show that 80% of the parents agree that inclusion will make their children more sensitive to other differences. Fifty percent of parents felt that inclusion helped their student to be more mindful and supportive of those with special needs. Lastly, 90% of parents felt that inclusion was beneficial for those students with disabilities. When looking at the open-ended questions most parents expressed how inclusion provides an opportunity for their students to learn about a person's individual differences. Parents from both groups felt that training for educators was an important factor in inclusion-based classrooms. Some disadvantages that were discussed were that the class pace would be slow, and that a student with special needs would need more attention from the teacher. With that being said, 60% of the participants felt that advantages outweighed the disadvantages.

Parents of SEN students felt that inclusion was beneficial. The parents expressed feeling that inclusion provides social interactions for their students, helps their students prepare for the real world, and helps teach them life skills. Seventy percent of parents reported feeling that SEN students will learn faster in an inclusive classroom. Ninety percent of parents reported feeling that being in an inclusive classroom will give their student self-esteem and that they will have good role models in the other students. Parents of SEN students expressed concern that their student may be left out or that the students IEP will not be followed in a mainstream classroom. Seventy five percent of SEN parents felt that the benefits of inclusive education outweighed the negatives.

The research conducted in this study shows the perception of parents towards inclusion in a school setting. It shows the perceptions parents have from both special education and general education perspectives. In both cases the parents felt that inclusion is a good thing where the positives outweigh the negatives. This directly ties into the correlation that I am examining in my local community. One potential limitation of the study is that the research was completed in a country where inclusion education is just starting. Teachers in Thailand need to acquire the skills necessary to create inclusive classrooms.

Paseka and Schwab (2019) also looked at the relationship between parent's attitudes and inclusion in the classroom. The factors the authors examined in this study includes how teaching practices and resources are evaluated to determine how parents feel about classrooms that promote inclusion. The thought of inclusion has become a dominant viewpoint not only in the United States but around the world. Inclusive schooling is very important, but it is not systematically provided which leads to a great degree of variability across states and countries worldwide.

Paseka and Schwab (2019) focused on students in Germany and how inclusion is interpreted by parents throughout Germany, where there are about 524,000 students with disabilities. Since 2008 the number of students who are enrolled in inclusive classes has increased over 20%. Even with this increase about 60% of students with disabilities still attend special schools. Prior research has shown that positive attitudes are key to successfully implementing an inclusive classroom (Florian & Spratt 2013). In Germany parents have the right to decide which school their student attends so the attitudes of parents towards students with disabilities are important in examining the perception of inclusion in the country.

Research shows that parental differences in concern can be found in three distinct dimensions: Parents' attitudes tend to be more positive when they are more educated and have had some experience with inclusion-based education (de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert 2010), attitudes of parents change based on the type of disability that a student has and students who have a physical disability are supported more than a student who has a behavioral issue or a cognitive issue (Avramidis and Norwich 2002). Teaching practices and resources are also keys to successful inclusion in classrooms.

The main purpose of their study was to examine the attitudes of parents towards inclusion, teaching practices, and resources in both inclusive and regular classes (Paseka & Schwab 2020, p. 258). The authors examined four research questions:

- (1) To which extent do parents favor inclusion of students with different types of disabilities?,
- (2) Do parents' perceptions of teaching practices in inclusive and regular classes differ?,
- (3) Do parents whose children attend inclusive classes perceive higher resources compared to parents whose children attend regular classes? and,
- (4) Which variable predicts a positive or negative attitude towards inclusive education?

The authors selected the following variables which are correlated with the attitudes of parents:

- (a) school setting of the child (regular vs. inclusive class), (b) gender of parents, (c) age of parents, (d) parent's level of education, (e) parent's monthly income, (f) age of parents' oldest child, (g) parent's perception of teaching practices and (h) parents' perception of resources.

The survey that was used was a JAKO-O survey, a survey that is funded by the company JAKO-O. These surveys have been used in the past to get parental opinions on the education

system in Germany. Data for the study was also collected through semi-structured phone interviews. Participants in the study were all parents of students who were currently in the school system. It was also decided that if the parents had multiple children in the school system that they would focus only on the oldest child. There were 2000 total participants in the study. Of the 2000 participants 70% of them were female and 30% were male. Of the 2000 participants 1490 parents were parents of students educated in a regular class and 418 were parents of a student with disabilities.

The results of the study indicate that parents of students who participate in inclusive classrooms are more likely to have a positive attitude towards inclusion. Positive relationships with students or people with disabilities were associated with a more positive attitude towards an inclusive classroom. Parents reported feeling that the number of resources that were provided in both types of classrooms were acceptable for the classes. People with higher levels of education and larger monthly incomes reported more positive attitudes towards inclusion (Paseka & Schwab 2020, p. 263). The results also indicated that the attitude of parent's varied based on the type of disability a person has. A student who had a physical disability or a less severe mental disability was more accepted and included without a negative attitude. Those students who had behavioral issues or had severe intellectual disabilities were less likely to be supported in an inclusive classroom by other parents.

There are a few limitations to the study. The first being the type of data that the authors chose to use. It is hard to gather useful data from telephone interviews thereby limiting the types of statistical analyses that might be used. Some of the questions may have been confusing and needed to be reformatted and updated for any future study. The authors also note that inclusion

can become a political issue more so than focusing on the importance, the advantages, or the disadvantages of providing inclusive education to students (Paseka & Schwab 2020, p. 268).

Results of this survey show that when it comes to class inclusion in Germany there is still much to be done. Inclusive teachers need to make good relationships with parents and focus on the tools and resources needed to provide an inclusive education that doesn't negatively impact the education of their students.

Youth Attitudes Towards Inclusion

Siperstein and colleagues (2007) examined the issue of students' perception and attitudes towards inclusion for students with an intellectual disability. The authors note that prior research indicates that students hold negative opinions about their peers with an intellectual disability. Specifically, students without a disability tend to reject or neglect students with an intellectual disability (Nowicki & Sanderson, 2002; Siperstein & Bak, 1980; Siperstein et al., 1988; Stainback & Stainback, 1982). Further studies show that there is a connection between the attitudes of students without disabilities and how they perceive students with disabilities in the classroom. These negative perceptions have led to studies that look at the impact of exposure on general education students towards their disabled counterparts. The research has shown that in many cases exposure does lead to more inclusion and does help to change negative perceptions of students with disabilities in the classroom (Fisher, 1999). More current research has shown that there are small positive steps toward changing attitudes but that in many cases student's attitudes have remained the same (Krajewski, et al., 2002).

In this study the authors completed a national survey to expand the sample size of a survey conducted in a previous study. In many cases the survey size is very small which leads to

data that doesn't show the complete picture. The survey focuses on multiple aspects of attitudes. The study looks at the perception of junior high (7th-9th grade) general education student towards students who have intellectual disabilities. It also evaluates general education student's attitudes towards students being included in academic and non-academic classes.

The authors surveyed students in forty-seven different school districts from 26 states in the United States of America, across different geographical areas. Sixty-eight total schools participated in the study including, 27 urban area schools 24 schools from suburban areas, and 17 schools from rural communities. Each participating school had between 100 and 1000 students enrolled. Between all the participating schools 5,837 students had parental permission to participate in the study. The surveys were given during English or Math since all students had these classes. The survey took about 20 minutes to complete. Five inclusion related scales were used that were answered with a yes or no. These scales are: (1) Perceived Capabilities Scale, (2) Impact of Inclusion Scale, (3) Behavioral Intentions Scale, (4) Academic Inclusion Scale and, (5) Nonacademic Inclusion Scale.

The first scale, the Perceived Capabilities Scale, consisted of 16 questions that looked at the perceptions of capabilities for a student with an intellectual disability. The second scale the Impact of Inclusion Scale looked at student's beliefs on how a student with an intellectual disability would impact the class. This scale had 5 questions. The third scale the Behavioral Intentions Scale looked at student's desire or intent to interact with a student with an intellectual disability. This scale had 12 questions for students to answer. The Academic Inclusion Scale had two questions that focused on academic inclusion in both English and Math classes. The last scale the Nonacademic Inclusion Scale, included 2 questions that focused on if students with an intellectual disability should be allowed to participate in classes like art or physical education.

The overall results found that on the first scale general education students had an overall (64%) positive attitude towards the perceived capabilities of a student with an intellectual disability. The Impact of Inclusion Scale shows that many general education students (74%) felt that inclusion for all students was a positive effect that would provide benefits to all students. Students surveyed also expressed some negative attitudes. Some students felt that a student with a disability would take the focus of the teacher away and make it harder to concentrate on lessons. The results of the Behavioral Intentions scale showed that students were more likely to interact with a disabled peer in school and not outside of school. Students without disabilities were more likely to do the small things like share a pencil or say hi to a student with a disability than they were to spend time outside of school participating in activities. When looking at the last two scales the level of support for students participating in nonacademic classes was much higher than the level of support for students to participate in academic classes. Eighty percent of those who completed the survey felt that students with disabilities should be able to participate in nonacademic classes, where 40% of students felt that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in academic classes (Siperstein et al., 2007 p. 443-446). These results indicate that students who agree that students with disabilities should be able to participate in nonacademic classes do not necessarily agree that students with disabilities should be included in general education academic classes.

The survey examined different groups and their perceptions of inclusion. The results indicated that female students were more likely to support inclusion but not by a large margin. The authors examined other variables such as age, hours of television watched, and school demographics. Out of these demographics the authors found only a slight correlation indicating that students from rural areas had more positive perceptions on the scales that were examined.

The inability of the authors to know the practices or levels of inclusion of a school is a limitation to the study. The authors were also unsure of how many students with disabilities attended or were enrolled at the participating schools. In some cases, the general education students who completed the survey were unable to identify or realize that another student had an intellectual disability. The results of this study could be as the authors state, “the glass is either half empty or half full” (Siperstein et al., 2007 p. 453). It brings up the questions is inclusion working? Is enough being done to promote inclusion?

McDougall and colleagues (2004) looked at student’s attitudes and perceptions of students with disabilities to examine social inclusion in a school setting. Many new laws, regulations, and policies have been passed by many nations throughout the world to try and provide a mainstreamed education for children with disabilities. The process of creating these new guidelines is a positive step in the right direction but they don’t ensure that inclusion and social acceptance is an outcome (Rizvi & Lingard, 1996). Research shows that even with inclusion laws in place students with disabilities still report feeling alone, not accepted, loneliness, and isolation. Many of these feelings are created or built upon by general education peers. Negative attitudes, prejudice, and stereotypes towards students with disabilities can lead to bullying. Successful inclusion is important for integration and transition into the high school setting. In their study McDougall and colleagues (2004) examined attitudes through a bioecological model. Personal, interpersonal, environmental, and methodological issues were all considered in examining attitudes of general education peers towards students with disabilities (McDougall et al., 2004 p. 290).

The authors of this study used a second wave of data of the School Culture Project (SCP). This is a longitudinal method to investigate the effects of the school environment on problem

behavior. The authors analyzed data from a sample of 2,311 ninth grade students. The students attended 23 Ontario high schools. Of the 2,311 students 12% of them reported having a disability, either physical or mental. Since this study was looking at general education peers the 12% of respondents with disabilities were removed from the sample. The new sample size became 1,872 students. Authors then completed a listwise deletion which dropped the sample size by 29% and left the number of participants at 1,328. Other demographics of the study were as follows: 60% of the students were 14 years old, 32% were 15 years old, 8% were 13 years old, and less than 1% were 16 years old. Fifty eight percent of the sample were female students. Seventy seven percent of the participants had a B average or higher. The study had two objectives: (1) provide descriptive information about the students' attitudes toward their peers with disabilities, and (2) estimate direct and indirect pathways to linking dimensions of school culture with students' attitudes toward peers with disabilities. The technique that was used to analyze the data gathered was the Structural Equation Model (SEM). This technique was chosen because it accounts for measurement errors and allows for the testing of different variables (McDougall, et al., 2004 p. 293). The students participating in the study were given questionnaires that consisted of two sections. Each section contained 8 pages and it took on average 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The SCP questionnaire contained questions about the perceptions students have of family, community, school (McDougall et al., 2004, p. 295).

The authors state a hypothesis that there are 3 factors that represent school culture: positive teacher relationships, school level relationships, and a school goal task structure. These 3 factors could have a direct positive influence on the attitudes of general education students. Two other aspects that can increase positive attitudes are decreased interpersonal alienation and

decreased social anxiety. When looking at results for objective one, the authors found that 61% of general education students expressed positive attitudes towards peers with disabilities, and 21% of general education students expressed negative attitudes to peers with disabilities. Results for objective two found that a school goal task structure and positive student relationships directly impacted positive attitudes in a school setting. The relationship between positive teacher interaction and positive attitudes were not statistically significant. The most significant implication that this study shows is that a school environment that focuses on a social school structure that is welcoming and inclusive to all enhances the attitudes of peers towards students with disabilities. This is in comparison to a school setting that focuses on competition and standing. It was found that female students typically had a higher positive attitude than males and that students who had direct contact with peers with disabilities had a higher positive attitude than those without direct contact. This is supported by past research (e.g., Kishi & Meyer, 1994; Rosenbaum et al., 1988).

Some limitations of this study include that this study is based on a convenience sample of high school and the SCP questionnaire was not created or designed to assess the attitudes of students. Additionally, other factors that may play a part in influencing attitudes of students were not measured or evaluated. Many of the measures in the study may not be enough to measure the factors of interest. Any causal inference that is made is unreliable because of the cross-sectional, non-experimental design (Robins 1988). Examining aspects that impact the attitudes of the students without disabilities towards students with disabilities is important to create an inclusive school environment. To have inclusion acceptance must be at the forefront of student relationships.

Inclusion Impact of Unified Sports

In our local school community Unified Sports is a great way to encourage students with disabilities to participate in an activity that is supported by the rest of the school community. Since Unified Sports is a program that is supported by the Special Olympics, it can have an impact on both the school and community. The authors in this study (McConkey et al., 2019) focus on the positive benefits that participation in Unified Sports can provide to not only students with disabilities but also to students without disabilities who participate to give support.

Social isolation is an issue that some people with intellectual disability experience. Social stigma, prejudice, and stereotypes plays a part in forcing people with this disability into social isolation (Bogenschutz et al., 2015). Social inclusion is a great way to impact a person's quality of life. Inclusive sports are one way to include people with disabilities and the Special Olympics is an organization that works hard to provide opportunities to those with disabilities who might not get the chance to participate. Unified Sports is a branch of the Special Olympics that provides students with disabilities the chance to be included in school sports that otherwise might not allow people with disabilities to participate.

McConkey and colleagues (2019) had three main aims in their study: (1) to understand the meaning of social inclusion to players who had participated in Special Olympics Unified Sports. (2) to elicit the feelings that players associate with being included and excluded, and. (3) to identify the benefits that players experience from participating in Unified Sports ((McConkey et al., 2019, p. 235). The authors chose to interview six unified teams from two different states. Two other teams were chosen from different countries and were interviewed to compare Unified Sports on a global level. Forty-nine students with intellectual disabilities were interviewed for the study. Thirty-nine students without disabilities were also interviewed for the study. All

participants ranged in age from 16-25 years old. Interviews took place after a practice and lasted for about 30 minutes.

Structured interviews were completed with the athletes where three distinct pictures were shown to the participants. In each picture one person was picked out and the participant was asked if the person was included or left out. Further questions were asked of the participant that allowed the participant to share personal information on inclusion or isolation. Next, three more pictures were shown where a person was being left out of an activity. The participant was again asked questions about being left out and what it feels like. For the third part of the interview two pictures were shown of Unified Sports teams participating in an athletic contest. The participants were then asked if those who participate in Unified Sports are included or left out. Participants were also asked what they could do to make newcomers feel included (McConkey et al., 2019, p. 236)

Based on interview data, the authors identified one main theme, togetherness. This theme was expressed by both partners (support students) and athletes (students with disabilities). The authors also identified five sub-themes based on the data they collected: (a) equality, (b) friendship, (c) participation, (d) connections, and (e) assistance. The authors also recorded four feelings that participants reported: (a) happy, (b) relaxed, (c) confident, and (d) cared for. These themes and feelings show the impact that Unified Sports has on not only students with disabilities but all students who participate (McConkey et al., 2019, p. 238-239).

The answers given during the interview sessions provided insight into the benefits of inclusion for those who participate in Unified Sports. The authors found that students who participate have higher personal development. Students are more confident, communicate better, are more willing to communicate in front of others, and want to show that they can do things that

others can. Another benefit found from the interviews was that new opportunities were provided. New friendships and experiences were made. Lastly, the interviews showed that the students without disabilities experienced a change in perceptions or attitudes. Participating in Unified Sports helped to positively change their perceptions of their peers (McConkey et al., 2019, p. 240).

There were a few limitations to the study. Not everyone can participate in Unified Sports. There are many students who do not enjoy playing sports and these students wouldn't have the chance to benefit from the advantages of Unified Sports. This study did not look at the impact of Unified Sports on other aspects of the students' lives. The study does not look at the impact that coaches have on inclusion. The last limitation reported by the authors is that it is difficult to measure views and experiences of those with intellectual disabilities. It can be difficult to communicate or express an opinion for a student with an intellectual disability.

Based on the results of this study, Unified Sports is a great way for students with disabilities to participate in activities that can be recognized in a school setting. It gives students the opportunity to participate in activities with their general education peers. It can have a large impact on the lives of students with disabilities but also create advocates through the participation of the general education peers as they learn to look past prejudice and stereotypes of a student with disabilities.

Summary of Literature Review

Based on empirical studies I examined in my review of the literature, people with and without disabilities express positive attitudes towards inclusion and inclusive practices. Parents of general education students report feeling that classes that include students with disabilities

teach their children kindness, patience, and acceptance. Literature also shows that students attitudes and perceptions towards students with disabilities tends to be positive when general education students have high exposure and interactions with students with disabilities. Stereotypes, prejudice, and ignorance tends to be less of an issue when general education students have personal relationships with students with disabilities.

The literature review also indicates that Unified Sports may be one positive way to further inclusion and establish relationships between students from both groups. Students with disabilities get to experience sporting events through Unified Sports where they are a representative of their school. The general education students get to participate in a sport that they enjoy and while doing so get to share in an activity that is enjoyed by both groups. Unified Sports creates bonds between student groups and gives students with disabilities many positive benefits like better self-esteem, an identity, and belonging to a group.

While research thus far indicates positive perspectives towards inclusion held by parents and students, some studies reported negative perspectives as well. One concern reported by parents and students without disabilities is that the teacher will need to provide more attention to students with disabilities and that general education students could be ignored or receive less instruction and attention from the teacher. There is also concern that the class might move at a slow pace which could cause general education students to miss out on certain parts of curriculum. Even with certain negative attitudes or concerns of an inclusive classroom, the literature I reviewed shows that parents and students have a positive opinion towards inclusive practices in a classroom or school setting.

While research has been conducted on parent and student perspectives of inclusion in several different countries and related primarily to classroom experiences, there are still several

gaps in the literature on this topic. First, little research conducted so far has examined inclusive experiences of students with and without disabilities in secondary contexts specifically. Additionally, no survey studies so far that I am aware of have compared perspectives on inclusive experiences between junior high and high school settings. There is also little research examining the perspectives of administrators and educators related to inclusion in secondary settings.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to evaluate and research the topic of inclusion for adolescent students with disability in a secondary setting, in one local community. The study examined the perceptions of special educators, general educators, and administrators towards inclusion in one school district in the Intermountain West of the United States of America. Perspectives of inclusive practices are often only considered in the context of special education; surveying general educators may help provide insight related to the extent to which inclusion is considered outside of the special education classroom. The study also examined the opinions of parents who have a student who receives special education services in the school district. Through surveying parents of students with disabilities in this district, we can better identify and evaluate what schools are doing right and hopefully shed light on areas that can be improved upon. The research questions guiding this study include:

1. What are the perspectives of parents of students who receive special education services regarding inclusion in their local school district and community?
2. What are the perceptions of general education educators regarding inclusion in the local school community?

3. What are the perceptions of special education educators regarding inclusion in the local school community?
4. What are the perceptions of administrators regarding inclusion in the local school community?

Methods

Participants

This survey (Appendix A) included four different groups of participants. A request to distribute the survey was sent to one post high school secondary location, nine high school locations, and seventeen junior high school locations throughout the school district.

The overall potential sample size of the survey was approximately 2,430 people. The first group of participants was the parents of students with disabilities who are enrolled in secondary schools (junior high school, high school, and post high school) in one school district in the Intermountain West. In this first group of participants, the survey was sent out to approximately 610 parents. With a response rate of 10% the expectation was to have around 60 participants.

Special education teachers employed by the school district were also included in the study. In this group of participants, the survey was sent out to approximately 75 special education teachers. Again, with a 10% response rate it is expected that at least 7 participants would complete the survey.

To determine the perception of inclusion in as many classrooms and different settings as possible, general education teachers and administrators of secondary schools were also included as participants in the study. Participants were not eligible to participate if they did not have any prior experience with students with disabilities being enrolled in any of their classes. This

exclusion criterion ensured that only respondents who had experienced inclusive practices in the classroom would be measured through the survey results. This section of potential participants is the largest as the survey was sent out to approximately 1750 participants. Surveys were sent to approximately 1660 general education educators. It was also sent out to an estimate of 85 administrators. Between the two groups with a 10% response rate the anticipation is that at least 175 participants would complete the survey. Including all participants that fall into the 10% response rate the total number of survey's expected to be completed was around 250 surveys.

Materials

A request to distribute an electronic survey was sent out to the administrators of each secondary school in the district, after receiving university Institutional Review Board (IRB) and district approval. An electronic survey was sent to the teachers at the secondary schools whose administrators provided permission, using school district list serves. The survey was conducted anonymously where the only defining information was if the respondent is a parent of a student with a disability, an administrator, or a teacher, either general education or special education. The survey also asked respondents to identify the setting that they are employed in; parents were asked to identify the setting (i.e. school level) that their student was enrolled in.

The survey was broken into four different sections. The survey contained 58 total questions. There were multiple types of questions on the survey including, open ended questions, Likert scale questions, and multiple-choice questions. The first section of the survey contained questions that were directed to all participants of the study. These first questions defined the role of the person who was participating in the survey. The second section of the survey contained 21 questions specifically for general education teachers and administrators. The third and longest part of the survey was directed to the parents of students with disabilities. This section had 27

questions which examined parents' perceptions of the inclusive practices that take place in the student's own school and within the school district. The last section of the survey contained 10 questions that focused on special education teachers' views about inclusion in their classrooms and schools.

Procedures

Upon receiving university IRB approval and district approval, a request to distribute the electronic survey was emailed to the administrators of all secondary schools in the district. A link to an electronic version of the survey was emailed to the teachers in each school whose administrator provided permission, using the school districts list-serves. Once interested participants clicked on the survey link, they were first directed to a page with information about the survey and an informed consent form. Participants who consented to participate in the survey study were then directed to the rest of the survey; participants who declined to participate in the survey were directed to a thank-you page and did not complete the survey. The goal was to include all secondary school settings in the school district. This was important to help determine the perception and attitude of inclusion throughout the secondary setting in the entire school district. All answers that were provided by willing participants were kept anonymous and confidential. To gain as many responses as possible the survey was sent electronically multiple times. The survey was sent out 3 times in total in two-week time increments. Data analysis began approximately one week after the survey was sent out the third time. Data analysis took about three weeks from start to finish.

Data Analysis

Most of the questions included in the survey were Likert scale questions for which participants indicated their views on the importance or perception of inclusion and its impact in the classroom. Different rating scales were used across questions. For example, some questions asked participants to rate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements, while other questions asked participants to rate the extent to which inclusive activities were occurring in their schools. Due to different rating scales being used across questions, the main way the data was analyzed was by calculating percentages of respondents who indicated each level of rating per question. Results were evaluated across different contexts (administrative, parent, special education, general education). Results received and based on the scale indicate the overall opinions, perspectives, and attitudes of respondents.

The open-ended questions focused on qualitative data. Respondents' answers to open ended questions were compared and interpreted to identify if there was any connection between respondents' responses. Responses to open-ended questions from respondents were read multiple times to gain as much information as possible. Data gathered focused on the impressions of respondents towards the importance of inclusion in a school setting. The data gathered from the open-ended questions on the survey were placed in categories of similar answers to help identify themes or patterns. Once patterns were established data gathered from open-ended questions were then analyzed and evaluated towards the purpose of this study.

Results

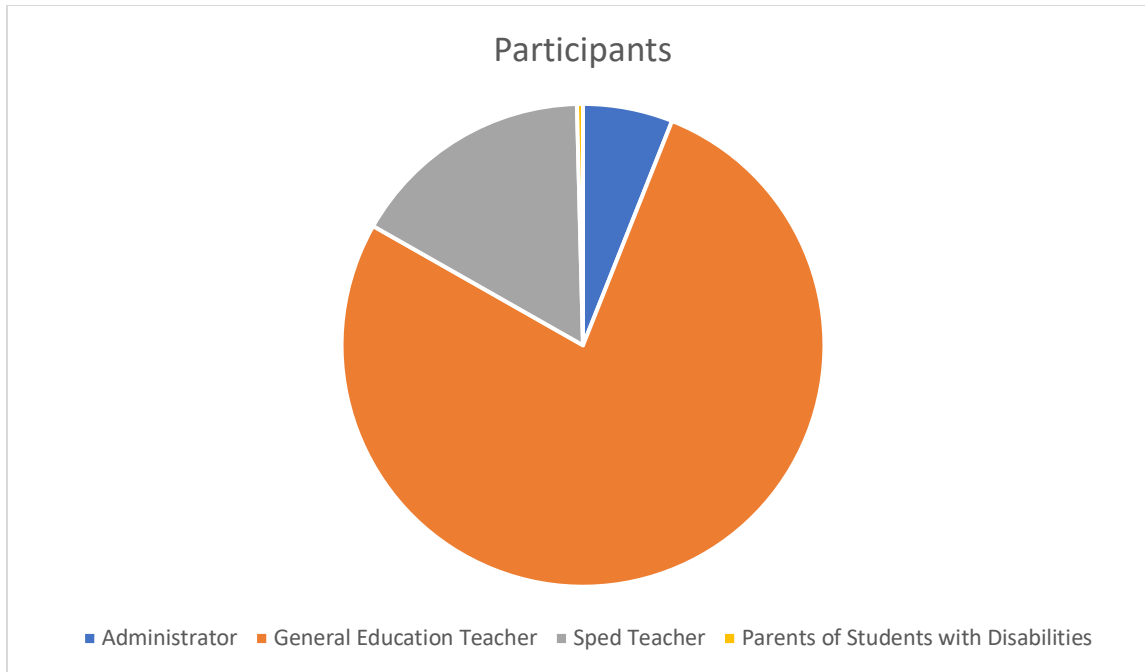
Demographic Questions

All high schools, junior high schools, and post high school programs in the district were invited to participate in the survey. The district required permission to be granted for survey distribution by each school administrator. A total of 6 high schools, 2 junior high schools, and 1

post high school accepted the request. A total of 313 participants met the requirements dictated in the survey and completed the entire survey. An anticipated response rate of 10% was desired for the survey. Based on the number of potentially eligible participants within the schools that accepted the participation request, the survey had an estimated response rate of 24%. Participants were grouped into one of four different categories, based on how they answered demographic questions related to their role. (administrator, general education teacher, special education teacher, or the parent/guardian of a student with disabilities). Most of the survey respondents were general education teachers (74%, n= 231), followed by special education teachers (16%, n= 49), administrators (6%, n= 18), and parents/guardians of students with disabilities (4%, n= 15 see Figure_1). These numbers were somewhat expected as the sample size of general education teachers was much larger than any other group.

Figure 1

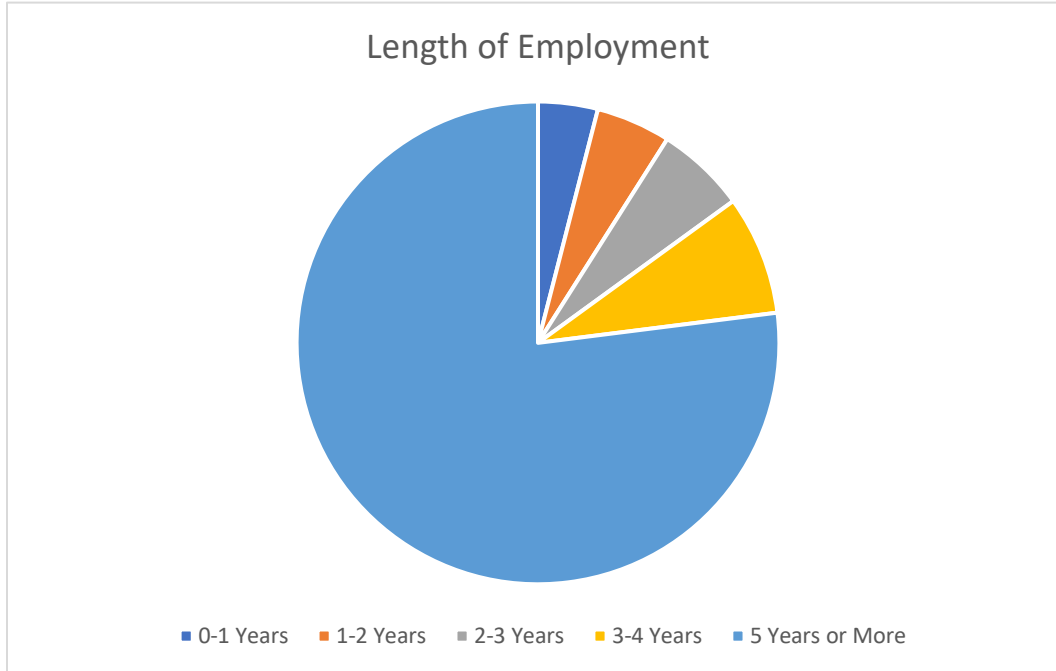
Percentage of Respondents by Category



Another demographic question included in the survey related to how long an employee of the school district had been employed as a teacher or administrator. Data found that 4% of employees had been teaching or working as an administrator for 0-1 years. Five percent had been employed by the school district for 1-2 years. Another 6% had been working for the school district for 2-3 years. Eight percent of respondents had been an administrator or teacher for 3-4 years and lastly, 77% of respondents had been employed by the school district for more than 5 years (see Figure 2.)

Figure 2

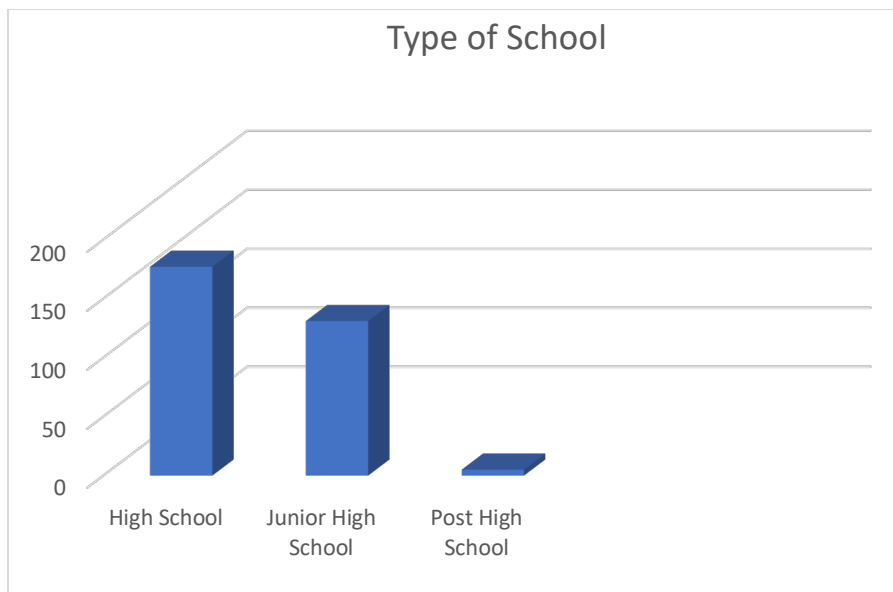
Respondents' Length of Employment in the district



An additional demographic question that was examined was employment in different secondary school levels. In the school district in which this study was conducted, there were respondents from high schools, junior high schools, and one post high school location were included in the data that was collected. Most of the participants were employed by a high school or had students that attended a high school (see Figure 3.)

Figure 3

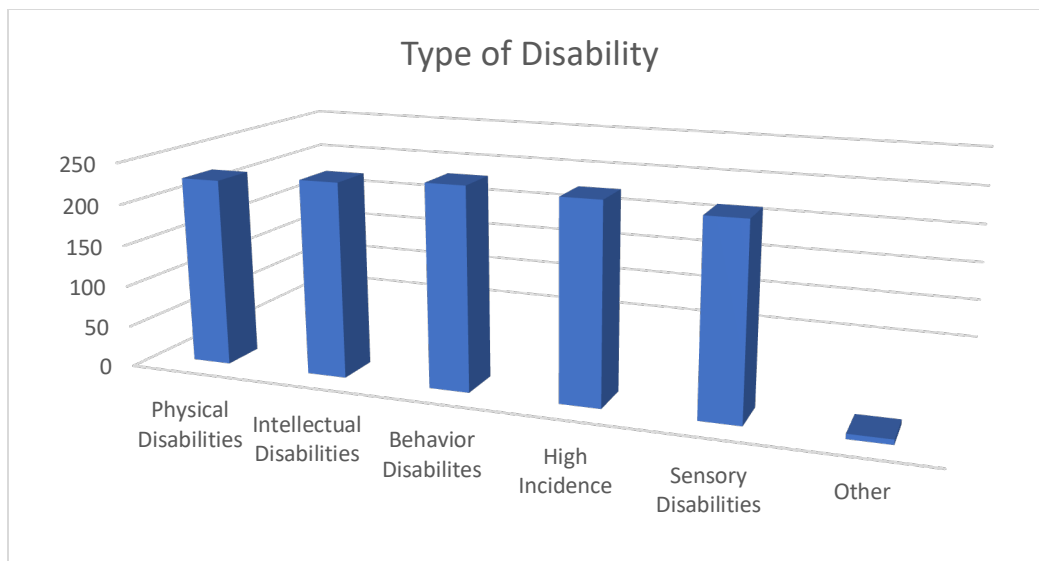
Percentage of School Types Respondents Employed at or Student Attended



Teachers and administrators were asked to identify the disability categories of students whom they have taught in their classes or interacted with as administrators. The categories that respondents were asked to identify were physical disabilities (227), intellectual disabilities (235), behavioral disabilities (242), high incidence disabilities (237), sensory disabilities (228), other (6), and not applicable or none. Each respondent was asked to identify all of the different types of disabilities they have encountered while working in a secondary school. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one category. In most cases most teachers and administrators interacted with at least one person from each group (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

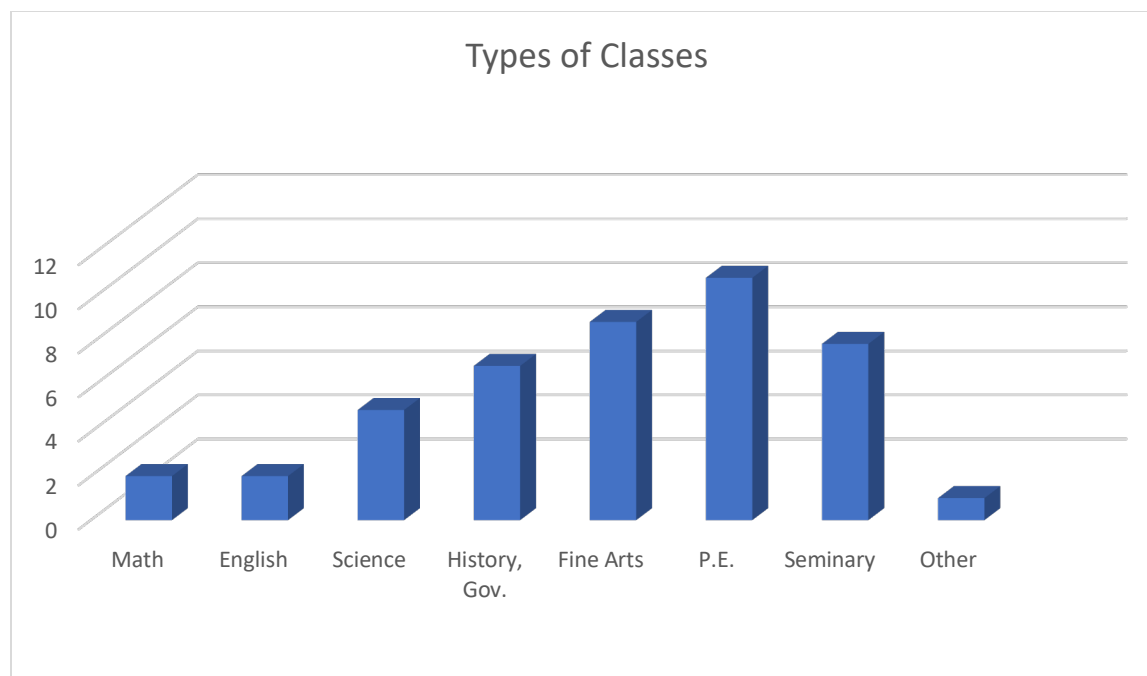
Respondents' Interaction with Students with Disabilities by Disability Classification



Participants were asked to identify the subjects that they teach to give an idea of what classes students with disabilities are participating in and what type of exposure, classrooms, subjects, and settings both special education and general education teachers are interacting with students with disabilities (respondents could select more than one subject). It was found that in most cases students with disabilities take elective classes. The data shows that the number of students with disabilities participating in elective classes (65%) is almost twice as many as any core class (35% see Figure 5).

Figure 5

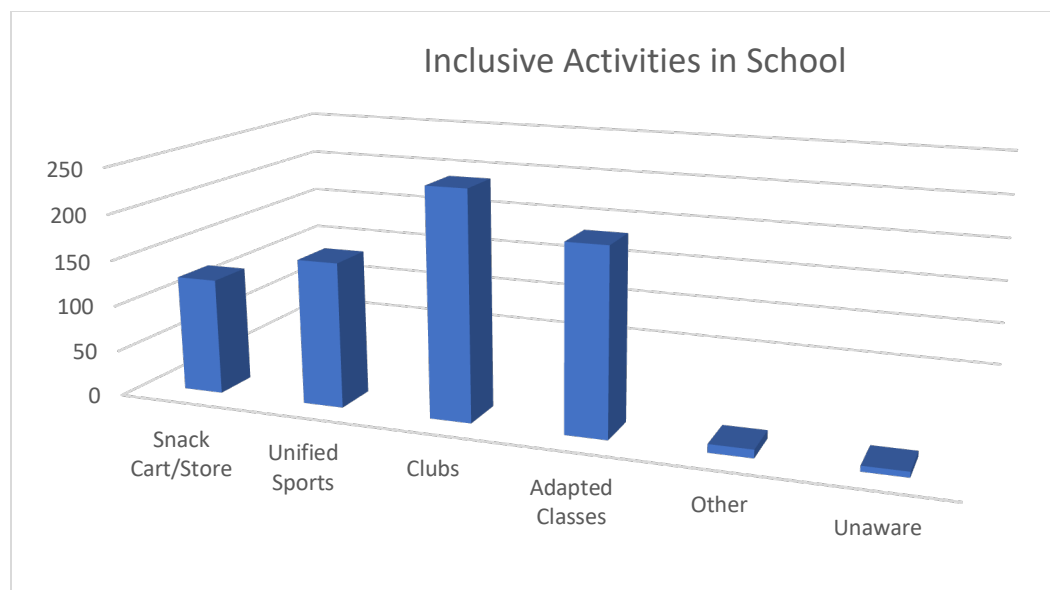
Types of Classes That Students with Disabilities Participate In



Respondents were asked to identify any inclusive activities that are taking place inside of their school currently. Some of the choices that were given were, snack cart/school store, unified sports, clubs, adapted classes, other, or I am unaware of any inclusive activities that occur at my school (respondents could select more than one activity). There were a few respondents who indicated that there were other choices besides the ones provided and some of these activities were delivering mail for the office, sports team managers, helping with recycling and performing in assemblies (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Number of Respondents Indicating Types of Inclusive Activities Occurring in Schools



Definitions of Inclusion

Respondents from all groups were asked to define inclusion in their own words. There were many different definitions given but in many cases the definitions that respondents provided were similar based on the demographic group that they belonged to.

Parents and Guardians' Definitions of Inclusion

Parents/guardians of students with disabilities in this survey generally defined inclusion as activities/settings where students of any ability are included in any activity that takes place in a school setting (40% of responses, n= 6). Activities mentioned by parent/guardian respondents included assemblies, pep rallies, plays, musicals, concerts, or sporting events. (Example definitions provided by parents/guardians of students with disabilities are included Table 1)

Table 1

Topics of Definitions Provided by Parents/Guardians of Students with Disabilities

Response Theme	Examples of Responses	Percentage of Responses (n = 15)
Inclusion in Activities	Finding ways for my child to feel included in regular activities and classes when possible.	70%
Peer Interaction	Getting to be surrounded by peers who attend regular education classes.	20%
Accommodations	When IEP accommodations are being honored by all teachers.	10%

Special Education Teachers' Definitions of Inclusion

In examining the opinions of special education teachers, the definition that is most prominent is very similar to the definition that the parents have for their students. Most definitions given by special education teachers (47% of definitions see Table 2) mention the ability of the student to participate in general education curriculum while getting the accommodations and support that they need to be successful in the classroom.

Table 2

Topics of Definitions Given by Special Education Teachers

Response Theme	Examples of Responses	Percentage of Responses (n = 49)
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Students get to Participate	All students are able to participate fully in all aspects of education without undue effort on their part.	47%
Students are Included	Including all individuals regardless of ability, emphasizing each individual's strengths, and providing accommodations as needed.	19%
Access to Activities and Curriculum	Equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. Every student has access to the same curriculum and social activities as their same age peers.	16%
Providing a Safe Place	Everyone feels welcome, safe, important, and included.	12%
Create Diversity in the Classroom	Having others with differing looks, thoughts, academic level, etc. together collectively with no animosity amongst the group for the differences in which they have.	6%

Administrators Definition of Inclusion

Administrators generally gave the same three types of definitions regarding inclusion. Most administrators (56% see Table 3) defined inclusion as a sense of belonging and providing opportunities to all students regardless of any defining characteristic.

Table 3

Topics of Definitions Given by Administrators

Response Theme	Examples of Responses	Percentage of Responses (n = 18)
Sense of Belonging and Providing Opportunities to All Students	All Students feel like they belong. Ensuring all students (people) have equal access to opportunities and resources available to support them in their educational and life journeys.	56%
Participation in General Education	Having a culture where all students feel safe to participate in any team, club, or classroom that they want to.	22%
A Safe Place for all Students	The act of doing what you can to involve, engage, welcome, and provide a safe environment for others that see the world differently than you.	22%

General Education Teachers Definitions of Inclusion

With a large sample of general education teachers many different definitions of inclusion were given. The most common definition of inclusion that was provided by general education teachers was that inclusion is a way to involve everyone and increase participation of any student (45%) There was a very small number (1% see Table 4) who defined inclusion by negative behaviors and attitudes of students should limit their accessibility into a general education setting.

Table 4

Topics of Definitions Given by General Education Teachers

Response Theme	Examples of Responses	Percentage of Responses (n = 231)
All Students Can Participate in Classes	Allow all students the opportunity to participate and be part of the class.	45%
Equal Opportunities and Access	Allowing all students equal access and opportunity utilizing a variety of strategies and scaffolding.	32%
All Students are Welcome	A classroom where all students feel welcome and are able to learn to the best of their abilities.	14%
Acceptance and Safe Place	Acceptance and safe environment for all. Acceptance of all students.	8%

Behaviors and Attitudes	The behaviors or attitudes of certain students should disqualify them from participating in general education classes.	1%
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Respondents' Perspectives Regarding Inclusion

In this section of the results, I compared the attitudes and beliefs between special education teachers, general education teachers, and administrators based on each of these participant groups' responses on the survey. I will also present the results from parent participants regarding their feelings about inclusion in their student's school setting and district wide. In most cases I combined or grouped the top two categories and the bottom two categories from the data scales together to provide one number to examine. In many instances there was only one or two responses of the most positive or negative results to interpret.

When looking at the question of should people with disabilities be included in all aspects of society there is wide support from all groups. Overall, 68% of the respondents across all groups reported feeling that people with disabilities should be included in all aspects of society. Looking at the minority opinion, 14% of all respondents reported feeling that people with disabilities shouldn't be included. Of the three groups the highest number of respondents for non-inclusion comes from general education teachers (23 total teachers), followed by special education teachers (4 total teachers), and administrators (2 total administrators).

When looking at opinions about students with disabilities being included in all aspects of education the numbers are very similar. Out of all respondent groups 68% of respondents reported feeling that students with disabilities should be included in all aspects of education

where 13% of respondents disagreed and felt that students with disabilities should not be fully included in all aspects of education. Seventy five percent of respondents felt that inclusion is important in a school setting. Respondents were asked to what extent students with disabilities were a positive aspect to the classroom. Ninety percent of special education teachers (n = 44) indicated that students with disabilities were a positive aspect to their classroom. In comparison only 56% (n = 130) of general education teachers felt that students with disabilities were a positive aspect to their classroom.

When asked about students with disabilities participating in school based extracurricular activities, 67% of all respondents answered in the affirmative. Twelve percent of respondents disagreed with the notion that students with disabilities should be included in school based extracurricular activities.

Respondents were asked how they felt about the school district and how inclusive they are in their practices and actions. The data shows quite a discrepancy between the groups as 93% of general education teachers (n = 215) felt that the district was very inclusive and doing a fantastic job in ensuring inclusion. Sixty-six percent of administrators (n = 12) felt that the district was inclusive in their practices and actions, but only 29% of special education teachers (n = 14) felt that the district was inclusive. This is quite a large gap between the three groups of participants. When examining the schools where the respondents were employed it was found that 92% of general education teachers (n = 214) felt that the school, they worked in was inclusive in its actions and practices. This number correlates with the opinion of general education teachers on how inclusive the district is as well. Eighty-three percent of administrators (n = 15) felt that their schools were inclusive. Seventy-three percent of special education teachers (n = 36) felt that their school was inclusive in its actions and practices.

Most general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators reported feeling that there is support for inclusion in their own classrooms. Seventy one percent of all three groups reported that they feel they are supported in their own personal classroom with regards to inclusion.

There was one set of questions in the survey intended to only be answered by special education teachers. These questions asked special education teachers to indicate the extent to which they feel students with disabilities are appreciated and included in their school. Special education teachers indicated that when it comes to students with disabilities being appreciated and included in their school there is some appreciation and inclusion. Twenty-seven percent (n = 13) of special education teachers responded there is high appreciation and inclusion. Fifty-nine percent (n = 29) responded that there was some appreciation and inclusion. Fourteen percent (n = 7) stated that there was little to no appreciation, and there wasn't a respondent who felt that there was no appreciation and inclusion.

Thirty-seven percent of special education teachers (n = 18) reported feeling that general education teachers and administrators are somewhat welcoming or interested. In contrast 47% of special education teachers (n = 23) felt that general education teachers and administrators were unwelcoming or uninterested in their input. Sixty-five percent of respondents (n = 32) did report feeling that general education teachers and administrators did treat students with disabilities fairly. Sixty-five percent of special education teacher respondents also felt that students with disabilities received the same amount of attention from administrators that general education students received. Seventy-one percent of special education teacher (n = 35) participants responded that they felt that all staff including administration, all teachers, office staff, custodians, and others at their schools treated students with disabilities with respect.

When looking at the responses and opinions of parents of students with disabilities 93% of parents (n = 14) reported feeling that their student is appreciated and included in their secondary school. Sixty percent of parents (n = 9) reported feeling that their input is important and welcomed by teachers and administrators in schools. Eighty percent of parents (n = 12) reported feeling that their student's special education teacher is an advocate for their student. Out of the parent/guardian group of respondents 67% (n = 10) reported feeling that the staff at the student's school as well as general education teachers and administrators treat the students equally, fairly, and with respect. Sixty percent of parents (n = 9) responded that they believe their student gets the same amount of attention from the administration that their general education peer receives.

Sixty-seven percent of parent/guardian respondents (n = 10) indicated that they feel that all teachers (both general educators and special educators) are knowledgeable about their student's accommodations. Seventy-three percent of parents (n = 11) indicated that special education teachers provide accommodations to their students. In comparison 27% of parents (n = 4) reported feeling that general education teachers provided accommodations to their students. When asked about the reasonableness of parent's expectations, general education teachers, administrators, and special education teachers indicated that parents of students with disabilities had reasonable expectations 33% of the time (n = 5). Twenty-seven percent of respondents (n = 4) felt that parents had an unrealistic or unreasonable expectation for their student.

When looking at the aspect of things that need to change the division between the groups becomes more apparent. Administrators mentioned that training and co-teaching practices should be implemented to help encourage inclusion in the classroom. Some administrators also mentioned increasing the number of adapted classes. They also indicated that this would be

difficult as the entire school body continues to grow. With the increase in the number of students overall in the school, specialized classes are more difficult to provide to students with disabilities.

General education teachers reported more issues that they felt needed to change with regards to inclusion. Most general education teachers indicated support for the practice of inclusion. In most cases teachers reported feeling that students with disabilities deserved the right to participate in classes and were willing to accommodate them in any way that is needed.

One of the main complaints or issues that many teachers reported feeling is that having students with disabilities enrolled in their class impacts the curriculum and slows the class down, which was impacting the education of the general education students. A minority of general education teachers (8%, n = 21) reported feeling that the impact on general education students in their classrooms was too much of an issue to want to include students with disabilities. One general education teacher said, “depending on the disability, there must be an involved adult with each student. It is next to impossible to attend to the needs of disabled students the way teachers would like. The general population is full of students with various needs as well.”

Another problem that general education teachers reported is that class sizes are already too large and that there aren't enough spaces for general education students to participate in class. When a student with disabilities is enrolled in a class, they take up a spot, but general education teachers also must find a spot for a peer tutor or paraprofessional which also limits the number of students that can be enrolled in that class period.

Some general education teachers also reported feeling that accommodations for students with disabilities are vague or not applicable to the teacher's classroom. Some general education

teachers (6%, n = 15) even reported feeling that accommodations were unreasonable, not needed, or couldn't understand how they could provide certain accommodations in their classroom.

Training is another issue that general education teachers reported throughout the survey. Teachers reported feeling that they were unprepared to work with students with disabilities and that they needed some sort of training to help them in their classroom. Some general education teachers indicated that they felt that besides the lack of training that students with disabilities are just put into their class and it's difficult to know what to do. For example, a general education teacher stated, "I could use more training specific to my student's abilities and disabilities. Paraprofessionals and peer tutors need more training. Instead of creating an adaptive class, 10 Essential Elements [sic] students are put into a regular ed classroom without thought to spacing and seating for them, their equipment, and their helpers."

In contrast some special education teachers (47%, n = 23) reported feeling that general education teachers were unsupportive and that they are unwilling to support students with disabilities in a general education setting. Some special education teachers (21%, n = 11) reported feeling that when they place a student in a general education class the teacher will be unwilling to reach out to the student with a disability.

Special education teachers' comments also mentioned accommodations and their responses reflected the opposite opinion of many general education teachers. Most special education teachers who responded to the survey mentioned the importance of accommodations and indicated the belief that general education teachers need to give support and understand how accommodations benefit the student with a disability in the classroom (74% of special education respondents, n = 37). These responses highlighted that the accommodation is not a hinderance but a method to increase participation in a classroom for a student with a disability. An example

of this response states, “accommodation feels like a chore for many teachers instead of a way to include students in their classes. Administration seems to stay far away.” This statement leads to another complaint from special education teachers where some reported feeling that the administration in their school is inactive or unwilling to help promote inclusion through general education class enrollment or attendance for a student with a disability.

Lastly, some special education teachers (27%, n = 13) brought up the feeling of not being supported by the school and that their students aren’t recognized as being part of the student body. Some (10%, n = 5) reported feeling that students with disabilities are treated as if they are part of their own school and that they aren’t part of the overall student body.

The biggest complaint that parents of students with disabilities reported in the survey was that they wanted their student to be supported, recognized, and treated as any other student who attends the school. Parents mentioned the importance of accommodations and that teachers should know them and provide them. In addition to knowing the student’s accommodations parents reported feeling that general education teachers should have an idea of what is in the student’s IEP. Parents want teachers to know their student and would like to see relationships being created between their student and the student’s teachers. One parent responded to the survey by saying, “find a way to give general education teachers the time to build relationships with SPED students in their class. They need to have that so they understand the need for the accommodations.” Another parent respondent said, “any kind of involvement with our kids with special needs is always good.” In most cases parents reported having positive relationships with teachers in both special education and general education.

The last areas of data that were examined were looking at the questions of the positive aspects of inclusion already in place in schools. All groups indicate many positive things going

on like the inclusive activities mentioned already in this discussion. Unified sports was one of the more common factors that was mentioned by those who responded to the survey. Seventy-eight percent of those who responded indicated that they thought unified sports was a great way for both students with disabilities and general education students to make meaningful friendships and relationships. Another positive aspect that was mentioned by all groups (73% of all responses) was the benefit that peer tutors had in the school experience for students with disabilities. Peer tutors help students with disabilities to transition into general education classes and give support that comes from a school peer and not a teacher or paraprofessional.

Discussion

Main Findings

Different Definitions of Inclusion

Many of the definitions provided in this study about what inclusion is are very similar. Even though people have similar definitions of what inclusion is there are many different opinions on how to ensure that inclusive education is effective. There are also some in the school district that would argue against the practice of inclusion and its importance to the education of all students attending the school. Inclusion for students with disabilities not only benefits the student with a disability but general education students as well. Previous research shows that general education students who have high exposure and personal relationships with students with disabilities tend to be less ignorant, prejudiced, or engage in stereotypes (McDougall et al., (2004).

Respondents who reported feeling that it is not beneficial to promote inclusion in the district, school, or their own class may feel this way for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons may have merit as in class sizes are continually growing and when a student with a disability is enrolled in that class, they often do bring either paraprofessional or peer support with them which takes up another seat in an already crowded classroom. Other respondents may also just not be comfortable working with students with disabilities. It can be intimidating or fearful to work with a student who you aren't sure how to interact with or teach. Agran and colleagues (2020) examined systemic barriers to inclusive education. The authors state, "teachers tended to place hypothetical students with intellectual disability in settings removed from general education curriculum and peers. These biases may reflect the fact that many teachers remain fearful of serving students with severe disabilities" (Agran et al. 2020 pg. 7). Better communication between general education teachers and special education teachers could benefit the relationship and attitudes towards students with disabilities participating in a general education setting.

Parents Attitudes and Expectations

Findings from this survey show that the desire of parents/guardians of students with disabilities is that their student gets the opportunity to experience the common or what is considered normal school life of a secondary school student. Parents/guardians want their students (if they choose to do so) to participate in general education classes, learn as much of the curriculum as possible, and interact with their general education peers. Prior research shows that an inclusive education helps students prepare for the real world, teach them life skills, help them to learn social interactions, and build relationships with general education peers (Sharma and

Trory 2019). Parents would like their students to be included in school activities and events. Parents don't want their students excluded from activities or events based on a disability.

Special Education Teachers Attitudes and Expectations

It was not a surprise to see that special education teachers felt that there was a divide between themselves and general education teachers. Both groups feel that they don't receive support from the other group. Special education teachers feel that when they place a student into a general education class there will be some backlash from the general education teacher about the student with a disability attending.

The results of the study indicate that students are more often placed into inclusive non-academic elective classes rather than core content academic classes. Prior research confirms this, in a previous study it was found that 80% of respondents felt that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in non-academic elective classes, but only 40% of respondents felt that students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in academic core classes (Siperstein et al., 2007). This may be because teachers and other individuals on students' IEP teams consider elective classes as an easier transition for the student and that there is a better chance for that student to participate and succeed. Additionally, the transition may also be easier for the special education teacher as they can place the student in an elective class that the student has an interest in.

Special education teachers had a very low opinion on how the district does overall at providing inclusion in secondary schools. General education teachers and administrators had a much different opinion. The interesting aspect here is that typically special education teachers have a better understanding of if their students are being included in general education classes or

school activities. Inclusion is only an issue for a general education teacher if they are presented with the situation of a student with disabilities participating in their class.

Findings also show that special education teachers feel that their input isn't accepted or wanted from administrators or general education teachers. As class sizes continue to grow the opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in general education classes shrink. The comments provided about this issue in the survey are reflective of perspectives I have heard from teachers and administrators in my role as a special education teacher in the district. In a recent faculty meeting at my own school, it was mentioned by the administration that specialized classes with less than 20 students would be taken away as there is a need to provide as many seats as possible to students because of student body growth (School Faculty Meeting 3/20/2024). The spot in an elective class falls to a general education student who will graduate, and needs required credits where the student with a disability who may be moving on to a post high school setting is pushed into a specialized contained classroom. In many cases in my own school setting within the district, general education teachers have supported the idea of teaching additional adaptive classes just for students with disabilities. When asked about the possibility of the class in future discussions it has been indicated by the general education teacher that the administration can't allow the adapted class as the need for classes that provide credit to general education students who are graduating is more pressing. Adapted elective classes that were offered to students with disabilities are replaced by classes for general education students with the thought that students with disabilities can participate in those classes. But once enrolled in the class it becomes an issue as the general education teacher feels that it's impossible for them to teach everyone because the student with a disability is slowing the class down. Prior research

shows (Sharma & Trory 2019) that class pace is an issue that some parents of general education students feel could be a disadvantage of inclusion.

Research from the survey shows that an advantage of inclusion is the relationships made between students and the social learning that exists because of an inclusive education. The social advantages of inclusion benefit both general education students and students with disabilities. Prior research has shown that a school that focuses on social structure, inclusion, and being a welcome safe place enhances relationships between all students (McDougall and colleagues 2004).

Special education teachers simply want their students to be acknowledged and recognized as a part of the school. Many times, students with disabilities are looked at as the students of the teachers who teach special education and not looked at as part of the student body. Students with disabilities are valuable members of the study body, and the knowledge gained by getting to know them, and building relationships can further a person's learning in ways not learned from a book. Special education teachers simply want to get to a point where their students aren't labeled and are just simply students going to a school.

Limitations

There are a few limitations that can be considered when looking at the results of this survey about inclusion. The first is that only one school district was looked at to gather data. The school district that was evaluated is a larger district in the state and only a handful of secondary schools participated. This district is in a more urban area of the state which could impact the answers that respondents gave to the questions, in particular because the district is located in an area impacted by a lot of recent population growth. Another limitation is that only secondary

schools were examined. Results may have been much different if research was conducted in both elementary and secondary settings. Additionally, even with a higher-than-expected response rate the participants only represent a small fraction of the number of teachers, administrators, and parents in the school district. To some the practice of inclusion is a political issue that has been created to provide support where it is not needed. The focus of inclusion in the school setting gets lost in political disagreement. This was an issue in prior research that was conducted for this survey (Paseka & Schwab 2020). Further limitations from this study that match up with prior research are with regards to unified sports. In their study (McConkey et al., 2019) found that it's difficult to see the overall benefit of unified sports as not everyone can participate. In the case of unified sports, there are people who don't like to play sports, so it would be unlikely for them to identify benefits of unified sports. It is possible that lack of exposure to unified sports limited the findings of the study conducted by McConkey and colleagues (2019). In relationship to this study, if a respondent had little exposure to inclusive education, their responses would be quite different than a respondent who had a great deal of exposure to inclusive education.

Directions for Future Research

Research about this topic is important and new training, legislation, and ideas are being incorporated into the school setting. More encompassing research could be done to gather more information about how other teachers and individuals in the state or nation feel about the topic of inclusion. This could help to create better ideas that can have a larger impact on students with disabilities in their schools. Research could also be done at an elementary level to see if there are any distinctive differences that could change the perception of inclusion at a younger age. The need for more training for general education teachers to help them in working with students with disabilities could be another direction for future researchers to pursue. Researchers may also

focus more intently on the types of inclusive activities to find out what makes the biggest impact for students with disabilities. While this study gathered information about the different types of inclusive activities occurring in secondary schools in this district, it also focused on how respondents view the impact of unified sports on inclusion. Given that the majority of respondents indicated positive links between unified sports and inclusion, future research should examine whether unified sports has an impact on inclusion. Prior research has indicated that inclusion in sports did not address to what extent there was a greater inclusion in other aspects of students with disabilities lives. However, such research could be expanded.

Conclusion

Inclusion has become a topic that is discussed throughout schools worldwide. This study examined the opinions and attitudes of those employed in a secondary setting in one school district in the Mountain West. Results indicated that definitions, opinions, beliefs, and the overall effectiveness of inclusion in the classroom are varied and defined by the respondent's position in the school district. While most agree that all students should be allowed to participate and receive a quality education some disagree on what that should look like. Data shows that different school activities benefit the act of inclusion. This study specifically looked at the impact of unified sports on inclusion and found that it had an overwhelming positive aspect in all respondent groups that participated in the survey. Participants' responses show that the act of inclusion for students with disabilities has come a long way but there is still much room for improvement.

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Appendix A

EVERYONE:

1) Select the option that best describes your current role.

- Administrator
- General education teacher
- Special education teacher
- Parent of a student with disabilities?

[IF ADMINISTRATOR, GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER, OR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER IS SELECTED]

2) What is the level of the school at which you are employed?

- Junior High School
- High School
- Post High School

(3) How many years have you taught or been an administrator overall?

- 0-1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 or more

4) How many years have you taught or been an administrator at your current school?

- 0-1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-4 years

5 or more

5) How do you define inclusion? (Open ended question)

6) People with disabilities should be included in all aspects of society? (Likert Scale)

7) Students and youth with disabilities should be fully included in all aspects of education?
(Likert Scale)

8) Students and youth with disabilities should be fully included in school based extracurricular activities? (Likert Scale)

9) Have you ever had a student with disabilities in your classroom?

Yes

No

10) What subject of general education class do you teach?

11) Select all the different disability types/classifications of students with whom you've interacted:

Physical disabilities (e.g., students who use wheelchairs, assistive devices to walk, missing limb, etc.)

Intellectual disabilities (e.g., students with Down syndrome, other low-incidence disabilities)

Behavioral disabilities (e.g., student with an emotional and/or behavioral disability)

High incidence disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, etc.)

Sensory disabilities (e.g., hearing impaired/deaf, vision impairments, deaf/blind)

Other (write in blank: _____)

Not applicable (I haven't interacted with students with disabilities)

12) Indicate all the inclusive activities that you are aware of occurring in your school:

Snack cart/school store

- Unified sports
- Clubs
- Adapted classes
- Other: _____
- I am unaware of any inclusive activities that occur in my school

13) To what extent do you feel that the school district is inclusive in their actions and practices? (Likert Scale)

14) To what extent do you believe that students with disabilities are a positive aspect to your classroom? (Likert Scale)

15) To what extent do you believe that inclusion is important in a school setting? (Likert Scale)

16) To what extent do you feel that your school is inclusive in their actions and practices? (Likert Scale)

17) To what extent do you believe you have the support of your school for the inclusion of students with disabilities in your classroom? (Likert Scale)

18) To what extent do you believe that parents of students with disabilities have unreasonable expectations for their students? (Likert Scale)

19) Describe any positive aspects of inclusion already in place at your school. (Open ended question)

20) Describe any areas at your school that can be improved with regards to inclusion. (Open ended question)

SPED PARENTS:

1) What is the level of the school your student attends?

- Junior High School
- High School
- Post High School

2) How many years has your student attended their school?

- 0-1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-4 years

3) Select the primary disability types/classification of your student:

- Physical disabilities (e.g., students who use wheelchairs, assistive devices to walk, missing limb, etc.)
- Intellectual disabilities (e.g., students with Down syndrome, other low-incidence disabilities)
- Behavioral disabilities (e.g., student with an emotional and/or behavioral disability)
- High incidence disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, etc.)
- Sensory disabilities (e.g., hearing impaired/deaf, vision impairments, deaf/blind)
- Other (write in blank: _____)
- Not applicable (my student does not have a disability)

4) Does your student participate in general education classes, if yes which ones? (Pick all that apply)

- Math
- English
- Science
- History, Government, Humanities
- Fine Art
- Physical Education (PE)
- Seminary
- Other

5) How many general education classes does your student participate in over the school year?

0-1

1-2

2-3

3-4

5+

6) Indicate all the inclusive activities that you are aware of occurring in your school:

Snack cart/school store

Unified sports

Clubs

Adapted classes

Other: _____

I am unaware of any inclusive activities that occur in my school

7) Are there any activities that aren't already provided that your student could participate in to increase inclusion? (Open ended)

8) How do you define inclusion? (Open ended question)

9) To what extent do you feel it is important for your child/student to make academic progress on grade level standards? (Likert Scale)

10) To what extent do you feel it is important for your child/student to have opportunities to interact with non-disabled peers? (Likert Scale)

11) To what extent do you believe that inclusion is important in a school setting? (Likert Scale)

12) To what extent do you believe your school supports the inclusion of students with disabilities? (Likert Scale)

13) To what extent do you feel that your student is appreciated and included in their school? (Likert Scale)

14) To what extent do you feel that teachers are welcoming and interested in your input as a parent of a student with a disability? (Likert Scale)

15) To what extent do you feel that your student's SPED teacher personally knows and advocates for your student? (Likert Scale)

16) To what extent do you feel that staff at your child's school treat all students equally and with respect? (Likert Scale)

17) To what extent do you feel that administrators and general education teachers treat students with disabilities fairly? (Likert Scale)

18) To what extent do you feel that students with disabilities get the same amount of attention from administrators? (Likert Scale)

19) To what extent do you feel that all teachers (both SPED and gen ed) are knowledgeable about your student's accommodations?

20) To what extent do you feel that SPED teachers adequately provide your student's accommodations?

21) To what extent do you feel that general education teacher adequately provide your student's accommodations?

22) How can administrators, teachers, and the district show that inclusion is a high priority? (Open ended question)

23) If your student participates in Unified Sports which sport, do they participate in? (Select all that apply?)

Soccer

Basketball

Track

Other

24) To what extent do you believe that Unified Sports are important to promote inclusion in a secondary setting? (Likert Scale)

25) To what extent do you believe that Unified Sports promotes meaningful relationships between peers and students with disabilities? (Likert Scale)

26) Describe any positive aspects of inclusion already in place at your school. (Open ended question)

27) Describe any areas at your school that can be improved with regards to inclusion. (Open ended question)

[SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS]

1) Indicate the type of classroom that you teach in:

- o Essential Elements (EE)
- o Academic, Social, Communication (ASC)

2) To what extent do you feel that students with disabilities are appreciated and included in your school? (Likert Scale)

3) To what extent do you feel that administrators and general education teachers are welcoming and interested in your input as a special education teacher? (Likert Scale)

4) To what extent do you feel that administrators and general education teachers in your school treat students with disabilities fairly? (Likert Scale)

5) To what extent do you feel that students with disabilities get the same amount of attention from administrators? (Likert Scale)

6) To what extent do you feel that staff at your school treat all students equally and with respect? (Likert Scale)

7) How can administrators, teachers, and the district show that inclusion is a high priority? (Open ended question)

8) To what extent do you believe that Unified Sports are important to promote inclusion in a secondary setting? (Likert Scale)

9) To what extent do you believe that Unified Sports promotes meaningful relationships between peers and students with disabilities? (Likert Scale)

10) Are there any activities that aren't already provided that students with disabilities in your school could participate in to increase inclusion? (Open ended)