

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRINCIPALS' ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS  
OF THEIR PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES  
IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING

By  
Debra Delaine

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my precious son, Malik. My son was five years old when I started this journey, and he has truly preserved. Malik is now eight and a half, and he has been the sweetest most patience little boy I could ever be blessed to have. I have missed countless celebrations, games, awards, and birthday gatherings during this dissertation journey. Through my guilty tears, he will always give me a hug and a kiss and tell me, "It's ok, Mommy". Malik, I love you to the moon and back! Thank you for not giving up on Mommy and staying patience with me! This work is for you!

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## ABSTRACT

The transformative role of the school principal has been the topic among several states for almost 40 years. Researchers have documented the disconnect between educational leadership programs and real-world experiences for principals. The push continues for principals to move away from solely focusing on the managerial aspects of the job to becoming the instructional leaders of their building with an emphasis on student outcomes, which has caused a sense of urgency among principals and educational leadership preparation programs. Students with disabilities were typically the responsibility of the special education director, until the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. Principals were now being held accountable for all students. Using a causal comparative quantitative research design, this study included 105 principals from elementary, middle, and high schools in the states of Georgia and Illinois. The study measured principals' attitudes and beliefs about supporting students with disabilities in the general education setting based on their educational leadership preparation programs. The data were collected using a survey and were analyzed utilizing a series of one-way ANOVAs. The results indicated statistically significant differences between principals who participated in educational leadership programs with concentrated special education course work and principals who did not participate in educational leadership programs with concentrated special education course work in the broad areas of federal legislative knowledge, contextual knowledge, and foundational knowledge. The findings of this study could lead to educational leadership programs in Georgia incorporating more concentrated special education courses for aspiring principals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....x

LIST OF FIGURES ..... xi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ..... 1

    Background of the Program .....1

    Statement of the Problem.....4

    Purpose of the Study .....5

    Research Questions and Hypotheses .....6

    Conceptual Framework .....8

    Methodology Overview .....9

    Delimitations and Limitations.....9

    Definition of Terms.....10

    Significance of the Study .....12

    Summary .....14

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....16

    Introduction.....16

    Conceptual Framework .....22

    Legislation.....27

    Evolution of the School Principal .....41

    Supporting the Special Education Teacher .....44

    Educational Leadership Programs .....48

    The Principal as Instructional Leader .....61

    Principals and Special Education.....71

    Educational Leadership Programs: The Redesign .....91

    Summary .....96

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY .....98

    Introduction.....98

    Research Design.....99

    Role of the Researcher .....103

    Participants.....103

    Instrumentation .....104

    Data Collection .....108

    Data Analysis .....111

    Summary .....114

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....115

    Introduction.....115

    Participants.....116

    Findings.....121

        Research Question 1 .....122

        Research Question 2 .....125

Research Questions 3 .....	127
Summary .....	131
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION .....	133
Summary of the Study .....	133
Analysis of the Findings .....	134
Limitations of the Study.....	148
Recommendations for Future Research .....	139
Implications of the Study .....	141
Conclusion .....	142
REFERENCES .....	144
APPENDICES .....	158
Appendix A: Frost (2010) Survey Items.....	159
Appendix B: Demographic Items .....	166
Appendix C: Written Approval to Use Survey from Dr. Frost.....	168
Appendix D: Initial Recruitment Email.....	169
Appendix E: IRB Approval Email.....	170
Appendix F: IRB Modification Approval Email .....	171
Appendix G: Informed Consent.....	172
Appendix H: Second Recruitment Email.....	174
Appendix I: Third Recruitment Email .....	175



LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Questions.....105

Table 2. Alpha Coefficients for Scales by Group .....108

Table 3. Dummy Coding for Demographic Items .....111

Table 4. Participants’ Responses on where They Obtained their Educational Leadership  
Degree .....118

Table 5. Frequencies and Percentages for Current School Level by Group .....119

Table 6. Frequencies and Percentages for Years of Experience as Principal by Group .120

Table 7. Frequencies and Percentages for being a Special Education Teacher or having a  
Special Education Certification by Group .....121

Table 8. Descriptives for Federal Legislative Knowledge Items by Group .....124

Table 9. Frequencies and Percentages for Federal Legislative Knowledge Items by  
Group .....124

Table 10. Frequencies for Contextual Knowledge Items by Group .....127

Table 11. Frequencies and Percentages for Contextual Knowledge Items by Group ....127

Table 12. Descriptives for Foundational Knowledge Items by Group .....129

Table 13. Frequencies and Percentages for Foundational Knowledge Items by Group .130

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The components of an instructional leader based on the researcher’s conceptual framework.....	26
Figure 2. Concept analysis chart for educational leadership programs .....	59
Figure 3. Concept analysis chart for principals and special education .....	88

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Problem

During colonial times the role of the principal, or head teacher, as they were called, began with little clarity on what the responsibilities entailed. The first schools and the systems surrounding them were unstructured, without any procedural process or policies. Very few students attended school during this time. Girls attended schools during the early grades and were not encouraged to continue more advanced education. African-American children did not attend school until the mid-19th century. Students with disabilities did not begin accessing public education until the early 1970s (Gainey Stanley, 2015; Rousmaniere, 2013). As the role of the principal developed over the years, the job duties progressed into a managerial role with responsibilities focusing solely on maintaining the building and sustaining the order, and ensuring students were disciplined for infractions. Student achievement has always been a priority for principals, although academic achievement has not always been foremost in terms of defining their role in the school building (Lemoine, Greer, McCormack, & Richardson, 2014; Lynch, 2012; Rousmaniere, 2013).

The publication of the *Nation At Risk* report, in addition to the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, was the catalyst that broadened the role of the principal from manager to instructional leader. Conversations centering around accountability measures for student achievement began to surface for principals in their new role as

instructional leader (Nelson, 2016; Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). Students with disabilities during this time were still mainstreamed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as determined by their individual education plans (IEPs); however, the responsibility for their educational programming from the principal's perspective was the role of the special education director until the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001; Lynch, 2012).

The NCLB Act and the reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) dramatically changed the educational focus for students with disabilities; schools were now required to improve student achievement on standardized assessments (Lynch, 2012; Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006). Principals were required to be instructional leaders for all students in their buildings, including students with disabilities. To ensure alignment with the NCLB Act, the reauthorization of IDEA 2004 reiterated students with disabilities should have access to the LRE as much as the IEP team deemed appropriate. As the instructional leader for all students in their building, veteran and novice principals found themselves in precarious positions embracing a new role, which seemed unfamiliar to them (Lynch, 2012).

Principals were not prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting and were unable to provide the needed support to teachers. Principals struggled to find qualified special education teachers to fill vacancies in their buildings due to the high rate of attrition in the field, the inability to meet the certification requirements, the overwhelming job requirements, and the lack of administrator and staff support (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Plash & Piotrowski, 2006; Thornton, Peltier, & Medina, 2007). Retaining special education teachers

presented a challenge for administrators, especially retaining teachers who worked with students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Prather-Jones, 2011). Teacher preparation programs were not graduating enough special education teachers to meet the need; therefore, principals hired out-of-field teachers to support classrooms, but the pre-service preparation for these content area teachers differed from pre-service preparation for special education teachers. Special education teachers receive extensive pedagogical training on instructional strategies, positive behavior supports, and communication skills, in addition to their program area specialty (Banks, Obiakor, Beachum, Alogozine, & Warner, 2015; Bettini, Kimerling, Park, & Murphy, 2015; Thornton et al., 2007).

The professional life span of both out-of-field and in-field special education teachers varies between 1 and 3 years. This variation could be due to a lack of knowledge for out-of-field teachers, a lack of professional development, and the increased difficulties of struggling students, who encounter several barriers that impede their ability to achieve. Research has found that teachers who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds than their students tend to struggle more significantly (Banks et al., 2015; Thornton et al., 2007). Researchers indicated that the lack of administrative support for struggling teachers to meet the needs of this diverse population of students influenced their decision to either move to a general education setting or leave the field of education entirely (Banks et al., 2015; Thornton et al., 2007).

The teacher shortage in special education continues, as the principal of the building sets the climate and culture for accepting and supporting students with disabilities. When teachers feel supported and the school climate is positive and collaborative, the support will translate into the classroom environment for students

(Lynch, 2012; Roberts & Guerra, 2017; Thornton et al., 2007). Research has supported the indirect link between principals and student achievement (Roberts & Guerra, 2017). In order for principals to feel comfortable and confident to support in-field and out-of-field special education teachers, they should be knowledgeable of instructional and behavioral supports, as well as legal compliance. Redesigning the curriculum of educational leadership programs could be essential to ensure each principal is able to become the instructional leader for all students when they effectively assume the role of principal.

#### Statement of the Problem

A problem exists with how educational leadership programs prepare aspiring principals as instructional leaders to support students with disabilities. When principals assume their new roles, they are unprepared to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. The evolution of the principal's role from manager to instructional leader has been the focus of school districts and university systems for over 35 years. Currently, most educational leadership programs do not contain any course work in their program of study directly related to special education. Some educational leadership programs may have special education topics integrated into one or two courses within the program (McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, & Terry, 2010). When principals lack the necessary preparation to support students with disabilities, they are also unable to support teachers, which has led to low teacher retention in the field, especially teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (DiPaola et al., 2004; Prather-Jones, 2011; Thornton et al., 2007). The principal sets the tone for the school. When the principal is not properly prepared to provide instructional supports, the lack of support

has a negative impact on in-field and out-of-field special education teachers and students with disabilities (Prather-Jones, 2011). In the mid-1990s, some states opted to revamp their education leadership programs to include course work to prepare principals as instructional leaders (Levine, 2005). As university systems started the restructuring process to align their educational leadership programs to real-world job duties, the focus during this time was on general education students. The focus on students with disabilities did not come to the forefront for principals until the passage of the NCLB Act. Principals were now held accountable for the academic achievement of students with disabilities as measured by statewide standardized assessments. The focus for principals was now on ensuring students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible (Lynch, 2012). This study examined the differences in the attitudes and beliefs of principals on their preparation from educational leadership programs in Georgia and Illinois to support students with disabilities in the general education setting.

#### Purpose of the Study

This causal comparative quantitative study examined the difference in the attitudes and beliefs between principals who attended an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who attended an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education. The study assessed the federal legislative knowledge, contextual knowledge, and foundational knowledge that principals obtained from their educational leadership programs.

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions/hypotheses on which this study was based are as follows:

- 1) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?

*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about the federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

- 2) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?



*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

- 3) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?

*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and

principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

### Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework, according to Imenda (2014, p. 189), is derived from the collection of several small individual pieces of information gathered together to obtain a clear picture of how a relationship could exist. This research focused on three concepts: educational leadership programs, IDEA 2004, and the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards 2.0, 5.0, and 6.0. The ELCC standards emphasize the principal's application of knowledge in promoting the success of all students by sustaining school culture, ensuring principals are leading with integrity, and advocating for students, families, and caregivers. The passage of IDEA 2004 aligned with the NCLB Act and focused on students with disabilities having access to the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible. Educational leadership programs were not preparing principals for this change. Incorporating concentrated special education course work to the program of study for aspiring principals could potentially provide the needed support for principals. All three broad concepts collectively form the conceptual framework on the importance of the principal's role as the instructional leader for students with disabilities in the general education setting.

When a researcher begins the journey to uncover or examine questions and possible answers to those questions, each researcher's point of view, as Imenda (2014) describes, is his or her conceptual framework. Essentially, Imenda (2014, p. 185) further describes the conceptual framework as the soul of the researcher's study because the study guides the direction and flow of the project. Therefore, the three broad concepts

referenced in the previous paragraph and their relevance to the role of the principal as an instructional leader to support students with disabilities in the general education setting are the proverbial heartbeat of this study and are intertwined throughout this research.

### Methodology Overview

A causal comparative quantitative research design was utilized for this study. A causal comparative research design is a nonexperimental research design. In this design, the independent variable is difficult or impossible to manipulate because it has already happened (Schenker & Rumrill, Jr., 2004). The researcher submitted a request to access the database of certified Tier 2 educational leaders in the state of Georgia from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC). The educational leadership Tier 2 certification in Georgia includes only those educators who have met the certification criteria to become a principal. In the state of Illinois, the researcher requested access to a similar database of qualified educators eligible to become a principal by utilizing a Freedom of Information Act request through the Illinois State Board of Education. Educators received a web-based version of Frost's (2010) survey utilizing the Qualtrics platform. The analyses were conducted utilizing inferential statistics, more specifically a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs).

### Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitation of this study was that the participants consisted solely of principals who were currently working at the elementary, middle, or high school levels in the states of Illinois and Georgia. The researcher assumed the principal served as the instructional leader of the building (Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, & Simieou, 2010). A limitation of this study was the quantitative design chosen by the researcher. The

causal comparative research design by definition lacks random assignment and manipulation of the independent variable, which affects the generalizability of the findings (Schenker & Rumrill, Jr., 2004). The GaPSC oversees educator preparation instead of the Georgia Department of Education (GaPSC, 2018). In the state of Illinois, the State Board of Education oversees educator preparation. The researcher viewed this difference in certification processes as a limitation of the study.

#### Definition of Terms

The following terms were utilized in the researcher's study. The terms are defined as they pertained to this current work.

- *Attitudes and Beliefs* are behaviors and values, such as honoring commitments to the organization of the school staff that can demonstrate a principal's point of view on inclusive practices (Praisner, 2003).
- *Contextual Knowledge* is research- or evidence-based curriculum and instructional approaches that align with state standards and are appropriate to individual student needs (Frost, 2010, p. 8).
- *Educational Leadership Programs* are programs designed to prepare aspiring leaders to assume leadership positions in P-12 schools and district offices that require certification as determined by the GaPSC and the Professional Educator Licensure Administrative Endorsement as determined by the Illinois State Board of Education (GaPSC, 2018; Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.).
- *Federal Legislative Knowledge* is the understanding of state and federal laws, including IDEA, Section 504, identification and evaluation,

procedural safeguards, the NCLB Act, and Response to Intervention (Frost, 2010, p. 9).

- *Foundational Knowledge* is the understanding of activities, such as LRE, and continuum of services, related to ensuring an effective model of service provision for students with disabilities (Frost, 2010, p. 9).
- *General Education* is a program of study for students in a classroom with typical same-aged peers that does not require the teacher to provide specialized instructional strategies or modifications to the content in order for students to access the curriculum as a result of an identified disability under IDEA 2004 (Kent & Giles, 2016).
- *Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC)* “was created by the Georgia General Assembly on July 1, 1991 to assume full responsibility for the preparation, certification, and professional conduct of certified personnel employed in Georgia public schools” (GaPSC, 2018, para. 1).
- *Lack of Support* is defined as special education teachers who experience poor school climate, excessive case load, lack of professional development, and/or lack of regard by fellow colleagues. Special education teachers who do not feel supported by their principals have a higher probability of leaving the profession (Thornton et al., 2007).
- *Preparedness* is defined as the special education related course work received by principals during their educational leadership program (McHatton et al., 2010).

- *Principals* are building level administrators in Georgia who hold an educational leadership Tier 2 certification or building level administrators in Illinois who have been trained on instructional methods to support students served by special education and English language learners along with reading methods and content area reading (GaPSC, 2017; Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). Principals are also the heads of the local school units in both Georgia and Illinois (GaPSC, 2017; Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.; White et al., 2016).
- *State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board (SEPLB)* is an organization that approves every university offering one or more programs to prepare professional educators to become licensed in the state of Illinois (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.).
- *Student with Disabilities* is defined under IDEA 2004 as a student who receives specially designed instruction. A student can be determined eligible to receive services in one or more of the 13 categorical areas of eligibility in special education. For example, a student can be eligible in the area of emotional and behavioral disorder (Causton & Theoharis, 2014).

### Significance of the Study

The role of the principal has evolved significantly within the last 45 years, from when students with disabilities were not allowed to attend their neighborhood schools with their same-aged peers. The passage of The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the reauthorization in 1990 as IDEA, and the 1997 amendments ensured

students with disabilities were educated to the maximum extent possible with their same-aged peers in the LRE. The changing of the role of principal from manager to instructional leader took place during the same timeframe as the United States began focusing on student outcomes, including *The Nation At Risk* report in the 1980s and the Improving America's School Act in the mid-1990s (Nelson, 2016; Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized again as the NCLB Act in 2002. The IDEA 1997 was reauthorized as IDEA 2004 with the purpose of aligning with the NCLB Act. The accountability for the academic achievement for students with disabilities has shifted to principals; however, they are unprepared to meet the needs of this new population of students and could not provide support to their teachers. Principals have continued to struggle with being able to support their teachers due to their lack of knowledge in special education. Unfortunately, this struggle has impacted teacher retention rates and the overall culture of the school building negatively (Thornton et al., 2007). As a result of the special education teacher retention rates, principals struggle to find highly qualified teachers to support students with disabilities. Vacant special education teaching positions are filled with teachers who have not received prior preparation in special education; therefore, student achievement could continue to be depressed if teachers who lack special education preparation cannot receive support from their building level administrators on instructional and behavioral accommodations (Thornton et al., 2007).

This study could benefit principals, special education teachers, students, and ultimately educational leadership programs in Georgia as they are preparing aspiring

principals. The researcher's goal for this study was to bring to the forefront the concern that educational leadership programs are not preparing aspiring principals to be instructional leaders for students with disabilities. A potential contribution of the study is to bring awareness and change to educational leadership programs. Aspiring principals need academic support and training in the areas of special education; educational leadership programs could be the catalyst for this support. Educational leadership programs in Georgia could begin incorporating instructional special education course work and internships into their programs of study for aspiring P-12 principals.

### Summary

The principal's role has transitioned from manager to instructional leader with the focus on academic outcomes for students. During this evolution, educational leadership programs have struggled to keep up with the changing role of the principal. When the U.S. Congress passed The Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, the doors to public education were opened for all students with disabilities. During the 1980s and 1990s as student accountability began taking the forefront, the lens for principals became clearer. The sole role of the manager was becoming obsolete; unfortunately, educational leadership programs were still behind in revamping their programs of study to meet the need of school districts. The Education for All Handicapped Students was reauthorized in 1990 and renamed IDEA, which afforded more rights to students with disabilities; however, the role of the principal as the instructional leader for this particular subgroup did not come into effect until the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001. The NCLB Act initiated several conversations regarding student achievement and access for principals who became accountable for all subgroups, including students with disabilities. Ensuring



students with disabilities had access to the general education curriculum was now a shared responsibility with principals and general education teachers. The reauthorization of IDEA 1997 was aligned with the NCLB Act. Educational leadership programs, unfortunately, are still not prepared to assist aspiring principals to meet the instructional needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This review of literature examined the principal's role and how it has evolved over the years, more specifically the role of principals and their ability to support students with disabilities. The researcher investigated the federal laws related to students with disabilities, their impact on the principal's accountability, and their role in the principal's educational leadership programs. Included in this review of literature were research studies focused on students with severe disabilities, such as severe and profound, autism, and emotional and behavioral disorders. These disabilities were not the focus of the researcher's study; however, teachers who serve these populations were selected as participants for research related to teacher support and retention. The researcher's focus on students with disabilities includes all students with disabilities, not just the ones with severe disabilities.

From the passage of The Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 by the U.S. Congress to the amended Act of IDEA in 1997, schools have tried to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the LRE and provide them with specially designed instruction. The push to try and meet the educational needs of students with disabilities brought a sense of urgency to schools, especially in the early days of The Education of All Handicapped Children Act, but also to educational vendors to provide curriculum support to assist school staff with instructional materials designed for this new population

of students (Bateman & Bateman, 2015). Prior to the passage of The Education of All Handicapped Children Act, neither teachers nor principals had any formal training on these respective areas of disabilities or how to meet the instructional and behavioral needs of the students who were now being served in the general education setting. Teachers turned to principals for guidance and support (Bateman & Bateman, 2015). As the years passed, the requirements for teacher certification changed from a two-year certification to a four-year certification program. This change in certification pushed teacher preparation programs to keep up with the movements that were taking place during this time period. After the passage of The Education of All Handicapped Children Act, teacher preparation programs began training special education teachers and additional support staff, such as speech pathologists and occupational and physical therapists to meet the needs of students (Marciano, 2016).

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act opened the door for millions of students who were disabled and denied access to a public education, which meant the demand for special education teachers to provide specialized instruction for this new population of students increased substantially. This increase in the need for special education teachers continued until the early 2000s. The increased need for special education teachers has continued; however, the number of qualified special education teachers entering the field has decreased (Marciano, 2016). Researchers indicated that this decline could have been a result of the NCLB Act and the stringent requirements on special education teachers to be highly qualified in all subject areas they were teaching (Dewey et al., 2017; DiPaola et al., 2004; Marciano, 2016).

In the state of Georgia, to obtain certification from an education preparation provider (EPP), the university housing the educational leadership program must seek approval from the GaPSC to offer the tiered preparation programs for interested applicants (GaPSC, 2018). Each EPP must ensure that each academic program of study is described correctly via the websites, catalogs, or syllabi adhering to the Georgia Educational Leadership Standards that were adopted from the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (GaPSC, 2018). The GaPSC gave EPPs the latitude to examine additional standards while developing their programs of study for each tier. Georgia incorporated the following additional standards, Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning, Georgia Teacher Leadership Standards, and the Model Principal Supervisor Standards. The evaluation standards are the Georgia Teacher Keys Effectiveness System and the Georgia Leader Keys Effectiveness System (GaPSC, 2018).

The EPP has seven education standards for leaders in Georgia, and each standard has several elements, which describes how the leader will address the standard. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused only on the standards that describe how a leader could apply the standard to support students with disabilities. The standards do not specifically address students with disabilities, but the language could be applied to students with disabilities (GaPSC, 2018).

- “Standard 1: Education leaders build vision of student success and well-being through a shared vision and mission” (GaPSC, 2018, p. 2).
- “Standard 3: Education leaders create a school environment that is conducive to culturally responsive practices to promote the academic achievement success of a diverse population” (GaPSC, 2018, p. 3).

- “Standard 4: Education leaders champion and support instruction and assessment that maximizes student learning and achievement” (GaPSC, 2018, p. 2).
- “Standard 5: Education leaders cultivate a caring and inclusive school community dedicated to student learning, academic success, and the personal well-being of every student” (GaPSC, 2018, p. 4).
- “Standard 6: Education leaders manage and develop staff members’ professional skills and practice in order to drive student learning and achievement” (GaPSC, 2018, p. 4).

Entry level or Tier 1 level certification will prepare applicants for school-based leadership positions in P-12 and does not include principal positions. This certification does not include district level positions, and the applicant cannot supervise principals. The Tier 2 or advanced certification includes school and district levels positions. At the school level, this certification includes the role of P-12 principals, and the certification includes the supervision of principals and district level positions, including superintendents. Once candidates have met all of the requirements of their academic programs regardless of the tier, they must receive passing scores on the Georgia Assessments on the Certification for Educators and the Georgia Code of Ethics for Educational Leadership (GaPSC, 2017). Additional requirements for candidates to gain Georgia educational leadership certification is completion of the special education requirement and obtaining the performance-based certificate (only applicable for Tier 2 candidates).

In the state of Illinois, if a university decides to offer one or more programs to prepare educators, the programs must be recognized through an EPP. The State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board (SEPLB) is the organization in Illinois responsible for approving an EPP once all requirements have been met (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). Some of the requirements outlined by the SEPLB of the university should be regionally accredited, approved to operate as a post-secondary degree granting university by the Illinois Board of Higher Education, and should provide a program of study that will lead to licensure (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.).

Certification for principals in the state of Illinois requires an administrative endorsement, which first must be accompanied with the Professional Educator Licensure (PEL) in addition to a master's degree or equivalent from a regionally accredited university. The requirements of the PEL were newly implemented on July 1, 2013. Candidates must provide documentation of completed course work addressing the methods of teaching students with disabilities, English language learners, reading methods, and content area reading. An internship experience or equivalence is required, and at least four years of teaching or school support personnel experience (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). Candidates must pass the content specific licensure assessments, which will remain valid indefinitely (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.).

Accountability for the academic achievement of students with disabilities as defined by the NCLB Act is also the responsibility of the general education teacher in conjunction with the principal. Students with disabilities are now spending the maximum extent possible in the general education classroom to ensure they have access to the

general education curriculum (Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006). Dual teacher certification in general and special education began to rise as colleges and universities prepared their graduates to meet the needs of students with disabilities regarding inclusion as outlined in IDEA 2004. Kent and Giles (2016) conducted a mixed methods research study at a university located in the southeastern part of the United States to examine the effectiveness of teacher candidates' field experience. The university recently revamped their teacher certification program to include special education curriculum. The addition of special education to the curriculum for the teacher certification program allowed candidates to receive dual certification in elementary education for Grades K through 6 and in collaborative special education for Grades K through 6 (Kent & Giles, 2016). The participants for this study were candidates who had already graduated from the program, cooperating teachers, principals, and university professors. An electronic survey was sent to all participants via email.

Kent and Giles (2016) received 61 responses from the graduating candidates. The survey consisted of 11 Likert-type items with three open-ended questions. The cooperating teachers received a different electronic survey. A nine-item electronic survey was administered to 31 cooperating teachers. Twenty-seven of the participants were general education teachers, and four participants were special education teachers. The survey included two open-ended questions as well. Focus groups were held at the midpoint of three semesters for 23 of the graduating candidates, at the end of each of the three semesters for seven principals, and at the conclusion of the third-semester experience for university professors (Kent & Giles, 2016). Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Cooperating teachers reflected difficulties of implementing the

program, but the benefits for the students outweighed the challenges. Candidates indicated the course work did not adequately prepare them and their field experience was more beneficial. Candidates also expressed confidence in the ability to differentiate instruction for general education students and high-functioning students with disabilities; however, candidates expressed trepidation with their lack of ability to support lower-functioning students (Kent & Giles, 2016).

Results from the university professors expressed concerns in three areas: organizing field hours, professional attitudes of the candidates, and preparing candidates appropriately to support students with severe disabilities. The limitations of their research included the use of self-reported data. The last limitation mentioned by the researchers centered on the focus groups. The sharing of feelings in the group environment may have impacted the actual perceptions of the participants' feelings (Kent & Giles, 2016). Kent and Giles (2016) recommended further research on the impact of field experiences between high-functioning and low-functioning students with disabilities.

### Conceptual Framework

The concerns surrounding principal preparation began almost four decades ago when the focus of education moved away from the postindustrial age to preparing students for the 21st century. Educational leadership programs were still preparing principals to be great managers, when the actual job responsibilities required principals to become more participative and servant leaders (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). Conversations in the educational leadership community during the mid-1980s focused on ways of amplifying the leadership skills of principals, especially with the release of the



1987 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, *Leaders for America's Schools*. As a result of this report, the spotlight on the caliber of leadership skills embedded in the U.S. schools and school districts shifted to the revamping of preparation programs responsible for preparing leaders (Murphy & Shipman, 1998). In an effort to address the growing concerns surrounding the disconnect between the preparation of principals during their educational leadership programs versus the realities of the job responsibilities, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) was created by Scott Thomson in 1994 (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Murphy, 2003; Murphy & Shipman, 1998; Pannell, Peltier-Glaze, Hayes, Davis, & Skelton, 2015). During this time, Scott Thomson was the Corporate Secretary of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), and ISLLC initially consisted of 24 states. Several of them were members of NPBEA and other professional educational organizations (Murphy, 2003, p. 2). The ISLLC standards were revised in 2008 and renamed the Educational Leadership Policy Standards. These standards were formed in response to the changes occurring in the everyday life of a principal. No longer was the principal responsible for ensuring the buses were on time or the school's finances were managed appropriately; principals were now responsible for being the instructional leaders, data managers, and change leaders for their staff (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The ISLLC 2008 was designed to assist the state in strengthening the selection process of educational leadership programs to ensure licensure and enhance professional development for leaders.

In 2010, the NPBEA received approval from ISLLC 2008 to revise the standards, which became the ELCC. The ELCC had seven program standards for educational

leadership programs. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on a framework around ELCC standards 2.0, 5.0, and 6.0 (NPBEA, 2011). The ELCC standards are:

- ELCC Standard 2.0: A building-level education leader applies knowledge that promotes the success of every student by sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning through collaboration, trust, and a personalized learning environment with high expectations for students; creating and evaluating a comprehensive, rigorous and coherent curricular and instructional school program; developing and supervising the instructional and leadership capacity of school staff; and promoting the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning within a school environment. (NPBEA, 2011, pp. 9-10)
- ELCC Standard 5.0: A building-level education leader applies knowledge that promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner to ensure a school system of accountability for every student's academic and social success by modeling school principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior as related to their roles within the school; safeguarding the values of democracy, equity, and diversity within the school; evaluating the potential moral and legal consequences of decision making in the school; and promoting social justice within the school to ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling. (NPBEA, 2011, p. 18)

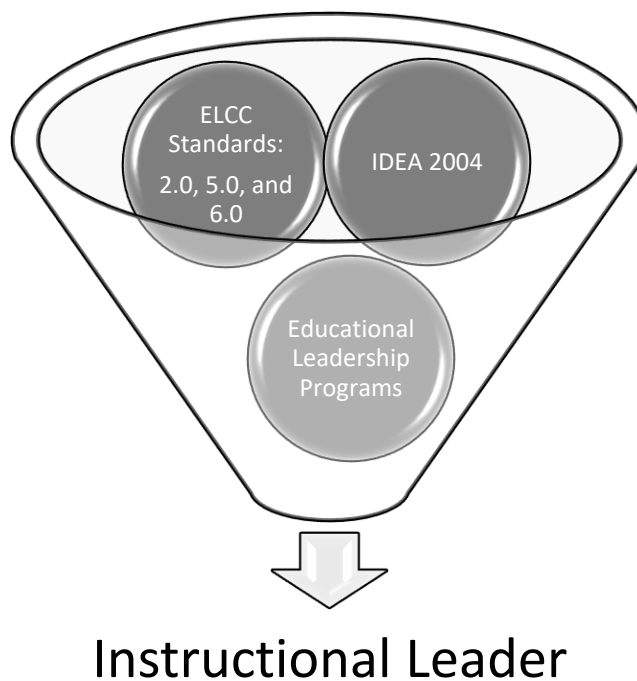
- ELCC Standard 6.0 A building-level leader applies knowledge that promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context through advocating for school students, families, and caregivers; acting to influence local, district, state and national decisions affecting student learning in a school environment; and anticipating and assessing emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt school-based leadership strategies. (NPBEA, 2011, p. 21)

Although these standards do not specifically mention students with disabilities or any other subgroup, the language of the standards are inclusive of all students when the standard states “every student”.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975 and reauthorized in 1990 with a name change to the IDEA 1990. The IDEA 1990 was reauthorized again in 1997 and was known as IDEA 1997. The education and programming needs for students with disabilities from the principal’s perspective during this time was not his or her responsibility. Students with disabilities could be exempted from statewide assessments; therefore, no accountability was placed on the principal for the academic growth of this student population until the passage of the NCLB Act. The NCLB Act was a paradigm shift, not only for principals, but also for general education teachers. Principals were now accountable as the instructional leader for all students, and the academic achievement of students with disabilities would be measured on statewide assessments. The exemption code could not be used as it had been previously, and a maximum was placed on the percentage of students who could qualify for an exemption. The reauthorization of IDEA 1997 passed in 2004 to include an amendment for the

purposes of aligning with the NCLB Act, which was now referred to as IDEA 2004.

Becoming the instructional leader for this new population of students who were required to have access to the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible left principals untrained and unprepared.



*Figure 1.* The components of an instructional leader based on the researcher's conceptual framework.

Imenda (2014, p. 189) describes a conceptual framework as a synthesis of concepts, or an integrated way of looking at the issue or problem. Several concepts by themselves can play a part in the success of principal. If each concept is brought together and utilized collectively, the principal's success will expand to reach all students in his or her building. The ELCC standards 2.0, 5.0, and 6.0, in addition to IDEA 2004 regulations and educational leadership programs, form a conceptual framework for principals. The intent of this framework is to emphasize the significance of the role of

the principal as the instructional leader to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. The visual representation of the researcher's conceptual framework in Figure 1 illustrates the components needed to work as a collective unit in order for the principal to become an instructional leader for students with disabilities. The framework includes three broad topics (i.e., ELCC standards, IDEA 2004, and educational leadership programs). The components of the educational leadership program consist of course work in special education. The course work in special education could include an instructional component as well as a legal component (White et al., 2016). The illustration depicts the relationship among all three broad topics in a funnel intertwining together, with the output becoming an instructional leader.

### Legislation

The history of parents advocating for their children's right to receive equal access to meaningful educational opportunities dates back to the 1930s (Gainey Stanley, 2015). The advocacy of parents led to the court system taking legal action to force public schools nationwide to ensure equal access for students who were historically separated. Parents of students with disabilities formed organizations to advocate for their children with disabilities, such as the United Cerebral Palsy Association, the National Society for Autistic Children, the National Association for Down Syndrome, and the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (Gainey Stanley, 2015; Keaney, 2012). During this time, public education would accept students with certain disabilities. Some students were in separate facilities, while other students may have been in the same building or hallway as the general education students. Students with more severe disabilities were either institutionalized, stayed at home, or participated in the parent-formed organizations

that created educational programs for students who were not allowed access to public education (Frost & Kersten, 2011; Gainey Stanley, 2015; Keaney, 2012). The 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 89). This court decision encouraged parents of students with disabilities that separate facilities for their children were not equal and denied them a right to a meaningful educational opportunity under the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Frost & Kersten, 2011; Gainey Stanley, 2015). The landmark court cases in the early 1970s of *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* gave students with disabilities the right to an equal opportunity to an education (Gainey Stanley, 2015; Keaney, 2012). The doors of the public schools were now open to all students with disabilities (Gainey Stanley, 2015; Keaney, 2012). In 1973, U.S. Congress enacted the Rehabilitation Act. This law is designed to guarantee individuals with disabilities who participate in federally funded programs protection from discrimination (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a civil rights legislation, which is utilized more frequently in the public-school setting. The purpose of Section 504 is to prohibit the discrimination against any individual solely on the basis of having a disability. The intent of the law is to level the playing field for students who have been identified as having a disability under Section 504. The major components of Section 504 are

No otherwise qualified individual with handicaps shall solely by the reason of her or his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal

financial assistance. (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 13; The Rehabilitation Act of 1973)

The definition of a disability under Section 504 has three major prongs. A person is considered to have a disability if he or she “(1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, (2) has a record of such an impairment, and (3) is regarded as having such an impairment” (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 13; The Rehabilitation Act of 1973; Smith, 2001). Section 504 is enforced by any entity that receives federal financial assistance (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Smith, 2001). After the landmark cases in Pennsylvania, an investigation from the U.S. Congress resulted in the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This act gave students with disabilities a federally protected civil right to a free and appropriate public education and due process protections for eligibility and placement (Gainey Stanley, 2015; Keaney, 2012). State and local agencies were provided federal financial assistance through the Education of All Handicapped Children Act to help with the expense of providing special education and related services to students with disabilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 6). The Education of All Handicapped Children Act expanded 10 years later to include infants and toddlers between the ages of 3 and 5.

Over the next few years, the rise of students with disabilities enrolling in public schools increased. In 1990, a civil rights law called the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed. This law protects individuals from discrimination who are considered to have a disability as described by the act, like Section 504; however, unlike Section 504, the law is enforceable regardless whether the entity receives federal funds or

not. Churches and private clubs are exempt from ADA coverage (Smith, 2001). For students in public schools, ADA and Section 504 share the same definition and criteria of what is determined to be a disability. Both terms are most often used interchangeably in education (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Smith, 2001). In 1990, U.S. Congress also reauthorized the Education of All Handicapped Children Act and renamed it as IDEA. The addition of this new population of students forced a paradigm shift for teachers and principals on how to provide educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Gainey Stanley, 2015; Keaney, 2012). Students with disabilities were required to be educated in the LRE and have access to the general education curriculum in their home school.

Seven years later, IDEA received a significant overhaul with the 1997 amendment. The 1997 IDEA amendment kept the existing wording in place, but the amendment added supports for students with disabilities. Additions to the new law increased the priority of general education teachers' involvement in the IEP development process for students with disabilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 10; Yell, Shriener, et al., 2006). Discipline issues were defined under this amendment, as well as guidelines on the evaluation process to reduce racial and cultural biases. Evaluations for the determination of special education eligibility could not be given in a whole group setting or in a language different from the student's native language. The definitions of the 13 categorical areas of eligibility were defined in this amendment as (1) mental retardation, (2) hard of hearing, (3) deaf, (4) speech or language impaired, (5) other health impaired, (6) autistic, (7) deaf-blind, (8) multi-handicapped, (9) specific learning disability, (10) traumatic brain injury, (11) visually disabled, (12) seriously emotionally disturbed, and



(13) orthopedically impaired (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 10). The term *pecially designed instruction* came from this legislation as the definition of special education, and the term is used when school teams are discussing how to meet the needs of students with disabilities. When determining how to meet the appropriate academic and/or behavioral needs of students, IEP teams should understand the continuum of services as it pertains to students with disabilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). Bateman and Bateman (2001) clarified the intention of IDEA 1997 and the purpose of the continuum of services, which is “schools must maintain a continuum of alternative placements such as special classes, resource rooms, and itinerant instruction” to ensure the educational needs of students with disabilities are met (p. 14). The 1997 amendments were vast and included additional revisions to transition services (Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006).

The decision in 2004 to reauthorize IDEA again was the attempt by the U.S. Congress to align the legislation with the NCLB Act. The reauthorization was called the IDEA 2004 (Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006). In addition to aligning to NCLB Act, this latest reauthorization encompassed several enhancements to the previous amendments of IDEA 1997. In order to maintain consistency with the NCLB Act, the U.S. Congress assured IDEA 2004 included requirements for special education teachers to become highly qualified in all subject areas in which they were providing instruction. This amendment is consistent with the language found in the requirements of the NCLB Act (Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006). Each state must assess eligible students on their state created alternate assessments, which is another requirement under the NCLB Act. The reauthorization of IDEA 2004 significantly affected the areas of evaluations and eligibility. A 60-day

timeframe (including weekends) from parental consent for the evaluation to eligibility is now a requirement. A change from IDEA 1997 is that the local education agency can no longer override a parent's decision to refuse placement or consent for an evaluation to consider special education (Yell, Shriver, et al., 2006). The exclusionary clause for eligibility purposes became in effect during this reauthorization. This clause indicates that a student is not a student with a disability and will not meet the eligibility criteria for special education and related services due to a lack of exposure in the areas of reading and math (Yell, Shriver, et al., 2006). In addition to the academic areas, the exclusionary clause included students who had a lack of attendance, limited English proficiency, and vision or hearing impairments (Yell, Shriver, et al., 2006).

The eligibility requirements for specific learning disability underwent a major change with the reauthorization of IDEA 2004. The significant discrepancy model was utilized and was considered to be the "wait to fail" model. States are no longer required to use this method. The state educational agencies have the option of utilizing the *response to intervention* method, which was designed to target the appropriate students who should be eligible for special education, while providing those at-risk students with the interventions they need in a timely manner, prior to a referral to special education (Yell, Shriver, et al., 2006). The IDEA 2004 now required students with disabilities who graduated with a regular education diploma or turned 22 to receive a summary of academic achievement and functional performance.

IDEA 2004 made significant additions to the IEP procedures regarding communication with parents. Parents can now attend IEP meetings by utilizing a variety of different methods of acceptable communication, such as conference calls or video

conferencing. Members of the IEP team could be excused from the meeting by the parent if their area or input was not needed. Short-term objectives and benchmarks were no longer included in the IEPs for students who were not on an alternate curriculum (Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006). Students' IEPs are now written in measurable terms and progress monitored frequently and adjusted if needed. Parents of students with disabilities should receive reports on their students' academic performance during the same timeframe that school districts release report cards for the general education students (Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006, p. 14).

The IDEA 2004 addressed several areas related to discipline. Major discipline changes had an impact on the interim alternative educational setting and the manifestation determination meetings. Previously under the IDEA 1997, a student was placed in an interim alternative educational setting for 45 calendar days; under IDEA 2004, the placement is for 45 school days. IDEA 2004 also included serious bodily injury upon another person while at school as an offense for the placement in an interim alternative educational setting (Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006, p. 18). Manifestation determination now includes questions, such as language to examine a direct and substantial relationship between the student's behavior and his or her disability, and to determine if the student's behavior is a direct result of the school district's failure to implement the student's IEP (Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006, p. 18). Other notable additions to the reauthorization of IDEA 2004 are the expanded definition of who can act in the role of parent, child find, and homeless students, and school nurses are now a part of the related services offered for students (Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, these new laws did not eliminate all barriers for parents. As opportunities for students appeared to become more accessible, parents began to experience obstacles as they advocated for their students (Gainey Stanley, 2015). Gainey Stanley (2015) conducted a qualitative study, in particular a transcendental phenomenological approach, with 12 African American mothers who had students with disabilities in a southeastern North Carolina school district. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with the mothers. The first interview consisted of 15 open-ended questions, which focused on each mother's experience advocating for her child and her ability to utilize her advocacy skills. The second open-ended interview contained seven questions, and the mothers were queried on their experience and understanding of community resources or networks that might be helpful or beneficial for their child (Gainey Stanley, 2015). Gainey Stanley (2015) looked for common themes and utilized Moustaka's adaptation of the Van Kamm method to analyze the data. The researcher identified six key themes from the first set of interview questions. The themes were "(a) advocacy begins early, (b) advocacy looks different, (c) advocacy includes locating and utilizing community resources, (d) advocacy includes ongoing communication within schools, (e) advocacy is doing what it takes, and (f) advocacy is being visible" (Gainey Stanley, 2015, pp. 10-12). The key themes from the second interview questions were (a) facilitators to advocacy efforts, (b) barriers to advocacy efforts, and (c) rurality (Gainey Stanley, 2015, pp. 12-13).

The implications of this study focused on the removal of barriers for African American mothers to ensure that when they advocate for their children with disabilities, their voices are heard and valued by teachers and administrators. The mothers, according

to Gainey Stanley (2015), wanted open lines of communication, which the mothers felt could develop a sense of trust and mutual respect rather than a feeling of being disrespected and devalued. An additional area identified by the mothers to reduce the impediments for them was a collaborative relationship with teachers to align IEP meetings and conferences with their work schedules. Gainey Stanley (2015) indicated a significant gap in the research in this particular area; however, this particular study focused on the importance of the principal setting the tone for the school staff on acceptance and tolerance. Acceptance for students with disabilities, their parents, and families regardless of their race, religion, or national origin could build bridges and foster a sense of communication and collaboration between students, parents, and principals.

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act on April 11, 1965 to ensure that all students regardless of their socioeconomic status had access to public education (Casalaspì, 2017; Nelson, 2016). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was the federal government's commitment to support K-12 education by providing over 1 billion dollars of funding each year, which focused on disadvantaged youth. Funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was allocated for subgroups, such as bilingual education students and students with disabilities (Nelson, 2016, p. 359). Several years after the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and after several billions of federal dollars had been spent on public education, student achievement in the 1980s appeared to be at an all-time low. Uncertainties about the outcomes of student achievement began to surface when the *A Nation At Risk* report was released in the 1980s. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized in 1994 as the Improving America's School Act, which

began addressing accountability for the outcomes of student achievement (Nelson, 2016; Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006). The Improving America's School Act laid the foundation for the tougher accountability measures addressed in the NCLB Act, which was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Nelson, 2016; Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006).

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the NCLB Act; the goal was to obtain 100% proficiency in reading and mathematics for all elementary and secondary school-aged students as measured by statewide standardized assessments by 2014 (Bland, 2014). States are required under the NCLB Act to set rigorous performance standards in reading, mathematics, and science and develop assessments to measure students' outcomes. Student outcomes are assessed in Grades 3 through 8 and once a year in high school (Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006). The NCLB Act placed an emphasis on high quality teaching for underperforming subgroups, specifically students with disabilities, by stating that teachers needed to be highly qualified to teach in the content area of instruction (DiPaola et al., 2004; Yell, Shriner, et al., 2006). States are required to report their adequate yearly progress. This requirement supported inclusion for students with disabilities in the general education setting to ensure they have access to quality instruction (Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006).

Prior to the NCLB Act, principals, teachers, or parents could elect to exclude students with disabilities from the assessment process. Providing high quality education that were fair and equal to all students is key for the NCLB Act (Bland, 2014; Darrow, 2016; Koyama, 2011; Lynch, 2012; Macfarlane, 2012). Under the amended act of IDEA 1997, students with disabilities are mandated to have access to the general education

curriculum, and the NCLB Act strengthened this requirement by adding the measurement of standardized assessments to determine student achievement. For students with severe cognitive disabilities, the NCLB Act requires states to develop an alternate assessment. In order to implement the alternate assessment, states can develop alternate standards that aligned with grade level standards with varied degrees of difficulty (Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006).

The IDEA 2004 included language that continued to focus on inclusion and improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities, which mirrored some of the provisions of the NCLB Act (Lynch, 2012; Macfarlane, 2012; Sullivan & Castro-Villarreal, 2013; Zirkel, 2013). The requirements of these federal laws solidified educational reform with the focus on achievement for underperforming subgroups (Macfarlane, 2012; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Russell & Bray, 2013). The NCLB Act and IDEA 2004 changed the way educational opportunities for students with disabilities were viewed by principals (Lynch, 2012; Macfarlane, 2012). The principal could no longer rely solely on the special education director to manage the instructional programming for students with disabilities (Lynch, 2012). Principals are responsible for understanding and enforcing parental rights, participating in IEP meetings, ensuring the LRE is provided, and delivering free and appropriate education (Lynch, 2012; Milligan, Neal, & Singleton, 2014; Pazey & Cole, 2013). Free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities is not a “one size fits all” approach; therefore, the principal’s ability to ask pertinent questions in the IEP meeting to ensure appropriate accommodations and/or modifications are being considered as instrumental in ensuring instructional supports are provided (Bateman & Bateman, 2001).

Both federal laws highlighted students with disabilities by focusing on improving educational outcomes and by providing access to the general education curriculum with accountability measures attached to the legislation of the NCLB Act. Some educators became concerned with the language in the laws because the NCLB Act appeared to contradict IDEA 2004 (Russell & Bray, 2013). Russell and Bray (2013) conducted an exploratory qualitative study to examine how the laws as written were both aligned favorably and appeared contradictory. The study also discussed how schools and district leaders solved problems when meeting the needs of students with disabilities. The researchers collected data through interviews with superintendents, principals, and teachers that were administered annually over a 3-year period from 2004 to 2006 in six school districts in the states of California, Georgia, and Pennsylvania (Russell & Bray, 2013). In addition, Russell and Bray's (2013) research team collected data through sample visits of 20 elementary and middle schools during the spring of 2004 and spring of 2006. During each of the 3 years, two elementary schools were visited, and one middle school was visited. Selected teachers at each school were interviewed as well as the mathematics and literacy coordinators. Principals and the superintendents were interviewed during the first and third year of the study (Russell & Bray, 2013, p. 5). The interview questions were semi-structured, broad, and open-ended with the intention of allowing the participants to share their perceptions of the NCLB Act on their current teaching practices, district influences as a result of the NCLB Act, and accountability as it related to state assessments.

The researchers discovered the exploratory nature of this study when they discovered the recurrent topic of students with disabilities in 106 out of 347 interviews



(Russell & Bray, 2013). The participants discussed the alignment between the two laws and trying to adhere to both laws with fidelity. Russell and Bray's (2013) analysis identified three emerging themes from the participants to express how their interpretations and perceptions of both laws influenced and guided their implementation. The first theme was "All participants agreed both laws were clear, specific, and consistent with defining the criteria for what a highly qualified teacher should possess" (Russell & Bray, 2013, p. 9). Both laws became a challenge for self-contained teachers and principals as they tried to meet these requirements. The second theme was "Complimentary reinforcement: A Mandate for full inclusion - The interpretation of both laws created confusion" (Russell & Bray, 2013, p. 10). IDEA 2004 had always promoted LRE and exposure to the general education setting; however, the NCLB Act had not mandated inclusion. Schools under the NCLB Act would be held accountable for the academic achievement of all students, including students with disabilities, as measured by statewide assessments. Educators have interpreted the NCLB Act to mean students with disabilities should be mainstreamed into the general education setting, including almost full inclusion in some cases. Full inclusion is not LRE for every student with a disability, which provided internal and moral conflicts for special education teachers trying to comply and interpret both laws. The last theme was "Contradictory instructional theories of action: Frustration and unintended consequences" (Russell & Bray, 2013, p. 12). This theme caused more frustration for special education teachers than other participants because of their perception of the conflicting laws of the NCLB Act and IDEA 2004. Superintendents and teachers viewed the theme differently. Overall, superintendents felt positively about inclusion and supported inclusive practices,

whereas special education teachers were ambivalent. The researchers noted from the teachers that if they followed the students' goals as stated in the IEPs, it conflicted with the standardized grade-level requirements of the NCLB Act.

Russell and Bray (2013) discovered a couple overarching implications from their research. Russell and Bray recommended that a shared understanding of expectations was needed when the level of ambiguity in federal policies impacted the fidelity of implementation by educators in the building. The researchers also indicated a difference between the teaching staff and the administration in how the various roles in the school district interpreted the NCLB Act and IDEA 2004. Russell and Bray also recommended districts have a thorough plan for students with disabilities prior to transitioning to a full inclusive model districtwide. The researchers did not formerly reference any recommendations for future studies; however, they recommended that districts revisit the alignment between their work, the NCLB Act, and IDEA 2004 (Russell & Bray, 2013).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known at this time as the NCLB Act, was once again reauthorized and signed on December 10, 2015, by President Barack Obama as the Every Student Succeeds Act. The Every Student Succeeds Act replaced the NCLB Act, although some of the key components remained the same (Darrow, 2016). New items were added to Every Student Succeeds Act, and some components from the NCLB Act changed (Darrow, 2016). The government moved accountability back to the states and local districts regarding assessments. The spirit of the NCLB Act in regard to assessments did not change in terms of grade level (i.e., Grades 3 through 8 and once a year in high school) and content (i.e., reading, mathematics, and science); only the area of accountability changed (Darrow, 2016). A goal of the Every Student Succeeds Act was

to ensure students are prepared for college and career; therefore, discussions regarding different pathways were embedded in Every Student Succeeds Act. The Every Student Succeeds Act regulation for students with disabilities remained the same as the NCLB Act, with the exception of the maximum placed on the number of students who could be assessed on the alternate assessment (Darrow, 2016, p. 2). The importance of instructional practices and inclusion for students with disabilities as a result of the NCLB Act brought key instructional conversations to the forefront. Conversations surrounding inclusion, access, specialized instruction, teacher attrition, and principal preparation are now commonplace.

Researchers suggested that the role of the principal is key to motivating teachers and creating a positive school climate and culture. This kind of supportive environment for special education teachers could ease the stress of the overwhelming amounts of paperwork requirements, challenging classrooms, and lack of parental support (DiPaola et al., 2004; Thornton et al., 2007). Principals struggle to comply with the NCLB Act and IDEA 2004 along with the increasing shortage of special education teachers. Administrators are left with filling teaching vacancies with out-of-field teachers, who are hired on emergency certificates. Principals themselves are not prepared to support these teachers because they lack the necessary course work and field experience from their own educational leadership programs (DiPaola et al., 2004).

#### Evolution of the School Principal

During the colonial period through the Civil War school leaders were known as preceptors, head teachers, or principal teachers, with the sole responsibility of teaching their students (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 9). In most cases, principals, who were previously

head teachers with additional administrative responsibilities, were elevated to the new role. School leaders did not have local or state administrative standards to follow; therefore, school leaders could lead schools the best way they saw fit using their own vision and initiatives (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 7). The first schools were funded by the community, and schools were offered at the elementary level only. The schoolhouse operated in a one- or two-room school building. The focus for teachers during this time was basic reading and mathematics skills. The resources available for teachers ranged from the *Bible*, the dictionary, or early readers (Rousmaniere, 2013). Students proceeded at their own academic pace; however, there were no defined grade levels, and classes were multi-aged.

When schools began to separate based on grade, age, and achievement during the mid-19th century, the need for a singular role for the principal started to form, and the head teacher became the supervising authority over the teachers, with additional responsibilities (Rousmaniere, 2007). The principal's role began to change from a teaching principal with responsibilities connected inside the classroom to the singular job as principal. The focus of the position was neither on instruction nor operations during this time period but expediency. In 1841, Cincinnati, Ohio was one of the first cities to authorize the position of principal officially, although the duties for this position were not defined and consisted of ringing the bell and monitoring student examinations (Rousmaniere, 2013). As the years passed, the job responsibilities for principals continued to increase. Principals were able to enroll and suspend students, employ individuals to assist with duties around the building, report on tardiness and absences of teachers, and complete inventory (Rousmaniere, 2013).

During the process of building the infrastructure of a school system, the developing role for principals did not come with a job description or any legal ramifications. The principal did not have a set of policies or procedures to utilize as a guide to explain what the role or job responsibilities of a principal were. The roles of the principal and superintendent began to become blurred; some of their responsibilities began to look similar, especially in rural communities (Rousmaniere, 2013). In smaller communities, one principal would have supervised a group of schools, whereas in a neighboring community, a superintendent would have supervised teachers as a principal would. In some rural communities, the decision by school boards was to elect a head teacher or principal teacher versus a principal as a result of the ambiguous singular role of the principal. As the principal's role became clearer in the 19th century principals in rural districts continued to possess the dual roles of head teacher and principal (Rousmaniere, 2007). Difficulties between local and district controls over issues related to staff selections and terminations began to manifest (Rousmaniere, 2007). The responsibilities for principals continuously grew, which led to the official separation of the principals from the classrooms.

As time passed, student enrollment increased. The principal's role shifted to managing teachers, enrolling students, keeping up with attendance, and managing student behavior (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Rousmaniere, 2013). This new role for principals began to bring an unexpected level of criticism to the profession. The managerial role, which came with an abundance of required paperwork, expectations, and timelines, was criticized for not being visible in the building or in the classrooms (Rousmaniere, 2007). The managerial tasks were still essential; however, principals were being asked why they

were not visible in their buildings or classrooms. After the shift from head teacher to principal, a few teachers reported experiencing an abuse of power with their newly appointed principal; however, all teachers did not have the same experiences (Rousmaniere, 2007). The principal's role continued its evolution further with the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, which introduced a new group of students who required additional personnel, programs, and training (Rousmaniere, 2013).

### Supporting the Special Education Teacher

As the principal's role evolved, the support required of the principal for the special education teachers began the transformation process as well. The NCLB Act led the way in terms of accountability, more specifically requiring special education teachers to be highly qualified in all content areas they taught (Green, Utley, Luseno, Obiakor, & Rieger, 2015; Thornton et al., 2007). The requirements of both the NCLB Act and the IDEA 2004 presented numerous challenges for both the principal and the special education teacher. The inability to be certified in all of the content areas that special education teachers were teaching created challenges for both the special education teachers and their principals (Banks et al., 2015; Green et al., 2015; Thornton et al., 2007). Principals and researchers began to focus on retaining the number of special education teachers who were highly qualified and reducing the special education teacher attrition numbers. Researchers have documented several factors contributing to the shortage of special education teachers. Thornton and colleagues (2007) referenced a need for a teacher induction program specific to special education teachers in addition to a mentoring program for new teachers, professional development to improve on academic

skills, improved working conditions, and administrative support. Working with the diverse and unique needs of their students, in addition to excessive meetings, limited classroom space, and mounting paperwork, presented a number of challenges for the special education teacher. When managing the daily workload coupled with a lack of administrative support, these concerns can be a deal breaker for the special education teacher.

Arnold and Otto (2005) conducted a quantitative research design to articulate the perceptions of veteran special education teachers of their school administrators in South Texas. A retention survey was sent to 48 school districts and charter schools, which equated to 750 experienced (i.e., 5 or more years of experience) special education teachers. The number of returned surveys from experienced special education teachers was 228. The survey utilized a Likert-type scale, and participants could respond *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* for each item. Analysis of the data suggested 69% of the respondents indicated that they had administrative support, whereas 12% rated they did not have administrative support and 17% rated neutral (Arnold & Otto, 2005). A recommendation for future studies was to determine the difference in the literature between beginning special education teachers and veteran teachers regarding administrator support.

Plash and Piotrowski (2006) conducted a study in Baldwin County, Alabama on the attrition, retention, and migration of special education teachers. A 63-item questionnaire was given to 260 special education teachers in the county; 117 of these teachers agreed to participate in the survey. Seventy of these special education teachers were rated as highly qualified and were utilized as sample participants. The

questionnaire assessed the following areas: job satisfaction, administration responsiveness, pre-employment preparation, and specific reasons for terminating employment. Results from the study suggested the main reasons for attrition of the special education teacher were centered on the demands of the job, especially as they pertain to insufficient time for planning, excessive paperwork, diversity of student's needs, and compliance issues (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006). The teachers also indicated they were given opportunities for input and provided staff development. Implications of the study from the selected special education teachers indicated that the only reasons they would leave the education profession would be to take care of a family member or due to employment relocation of their spouse (Plash & Piotrowski, 2006).

School administrators experience special education teacher shortages and challenges with finding qualified personnel, especially for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. Prather-Jones (2011) conducted a qualitative study to concentrate on the positive reasons why teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders remained in the classroom. Focusing on retaining existing teachers rather than replacing and training new teachers should be the goal according to Prather-Jones. Retaining existing special education teachers has been intensely linked to the perceptions of the support teachers feel that they receive from school administrators (DiPaola et al., 2004; Prather-Jones, 2011). When special education teachers perceive they are not supported by their administrators, they are more likely to leave the profession.

Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were utilized by Prather-Jones (2011) to obtain participants. The participants included 14 candidates (i.e., self-contained emotional and behavioral disorder teachers), and 13 emotional and behavioral disorder



teachers agreed to participate. The participants worked in all levels and included both males and females. Data collection included one or two face-to-face informal open-ended interviews and a focus group discussion. Results of the study suggested that administrator support had an impact on the teacher's decision to remain in the role as a self-contained emotional and behavioral disorder teacher (Prather-Jones, 2011). Defining exactly what administrator support means for teachers was one of the goals of this study for Prather-Jones (2011). Based on the responses from the participants, three themes emerged:

- (1) Teachers looked to principals to enforce reasonable consequences for misconduct;
  - (2) Teachers felt supported by principals who made them feel respected and appreciated;
  - and (3) Teachers need support from other teachers in their schools, and principals play an important role in building these relationships.
- (Prather-Jones, 2011, pp. 4-5)

Implications of this study were that principals needed to know more about special education in order to help provide the necessary support teachers need, which could retain special education teachers. Prather-Jones (2011) recommended that if principals could take graduate courses or professional development in the area of special education to gain the basic instructional and behavioral competency to assist teachers, the difference in retaining teachers would be beneficial. Recommendations for future studies focused on quantitative research with special education teachers who have already left the field to determine the reason these teachers left their positions as self-contained emotional and behavioral disorder teachers. An additional recommendation by Prather-Jones was to improve educational leadership programs and investigate the relationship

between educational leadership programs and job performance. More specifically, Prather-Jones wanted future researchers to investigate the influences certain program components had on student outcomes and teacher retention.

The findings from all three studies were consistent in regard to the special education teachers' perceptions of administrator support and their decision to remain in the field (Arnold & Otto, 2005; Plash & Piotrowski, 2006; Prather-Jones, 2011). The lack of support for the special education teacher tends to begin with the administrator and have an impact on the school climate, which results in a decrease in teacher retention for the special education field (Thornton et al., 2007).

#### Educational Leadership Programs

The credentialing process for professionals began in colonial New England by the local clergy, or selectmen, who licensed schoolmasters if they showed themselves sound in their faith, not scandalous in their lives, and giving due satisfaction to the rules of Christ (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 44). In the earlier years, becoming a principal did not require a master's or specialist's level degree or a leadership endorsement. Whoever had served the longest as a teacher in a school building or whoever was liked by the school board met the initial prerequisite for the position of principal (Rousmaniere, 2007, p. 8). In this new role, principals were viewed as disciplinary figures with the focus of following the rules and maintaining the order (Rousmaniere, 2013). The first college level courses dedicated to principals began during the late 1800s with graduate programs beginning during the late 1800s to 1910s. During the early 1920s and through the 1930s, several states were examining the credentialing process requirements for aspiring principals. Educational leadership programs in the 1920s developed course work for

elementary school principals on specific courses, such as child study, to support the credentialing process of elementary principals (Rousmaniere, 2007, p. 17). Most principals did not hold a bachelor's degree. The requirement for the job focused on their experience as teachers versus any professional training they might have. By late 1937, 12 states did not require a bachelor's degree for principals of elementary schools, whereas high school principals had more training, which included academic training and collegiate education (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 45).

Collegiate professors during the early 20th century argued on the value of formal education for principals to support their changing role, not only in the areas of academics, but also school law, finances, building management, testing, and supervision. In 1925, California was the first state to require school administrators to hold a teaching certificate, a four-year bachelor's degree, and a minimum of 1 year of teaching experience (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 46). Distinctions between the role of a teacher and a principal began to clarify by the type of courses principals were taking, which focused on finance and management versus pedagogy practices. The requirement that continued to remain consistent in the qualifications for a principal during this time was the prerequisite of previously serving as a teacher (Rousmaniere, 2007). Discussions continued on the preparation process, although, by the 1950s, the majority of the states still did not have any certification requirements to become a principal (Rousmaniere, 2013). As educational leadership programs began to develop, the debate on the programs' focus also began among scholars. Levine (2005) noted that the deans from James Earl Russell and Harvard disagreed on whether principals should be prepared as a practitioner or in a style similar to the law and medical schools. The role of the principal focused on

managing personnel, finance, and the facilities; therefore, principal preparation programs were structured to prepare principals to lead schools as managers (Pannell et al., 2015).

The shift for principals from the singular focus of management of the school building to accountability of academic achievement began to take form during the school reform movement, when the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, was published (Levine, 2005). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized soon after as Improving America's School Act, in an attempt to address the accountability of student outcomes. The NCLB Act followed with more stringent guidelines to address accountability and outcomes for students (Pannell et al., 2015; Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006). The principal's ability to motivate and build capacity in the school staff was essential, as principals were being held accountable for increasing student achievement (Corcoran, 2017; Pannell et al., 2015). Preparation for principals to ensure they transformed from managers to instructional leaders became the focus of several states and school district leaders.

In this era of accountability, Hess and Kelly (2007) conducted a qualitative study to address the specific knowledge and skills being taught in the educational leadership programs for aspiring principals. A stratified sampling process was utilized to collect data from 210 syllabi from 31 programs between February and December 2004. The purpose of the syllabi examination was to compare the core courses across the programs that were required for principal preparation (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Hess and Kelly's (2007) analysis contained at least four core course syllabi from each of the 31 programs that were selected for weekly course coding comparisons. The researchers' goal was to

determine how aspiring principals were spending their academic course week during a core academic semester to determine if these weeks would be beneficial to assist with job readiness skills. Hess and Kelly wanted to take a deeper look at what aspiring principals were actually studying during a given week. The course weeks were coded in seven areas, “managing for results, managing personnel, technical knowledge, external leadership, norms and values, managing classroom instruction, and leadership and school culture” (Hess & Kelly, 2007, p. 9). The findings of this study indicated consistency across all educational leadership programs, in terms of the lack of preparation given to principals (Hess & Kelly, 2007). The researchers noted the limited viewpoint by making assumptions from the syllabi when a possibility of more in-depth teaching might take place in the classroom. Recommendations for future research suggested distinguishing between principals, assistant principals, and specialists.

The states of Mississippi and North Carolina were the first to begin examining their educational leadership programs in the mid-1990s. In collaboration with the Southern Regional Education Board, the state of Tennessee started the redesign process 10 years later in the mid-2000s (Pannell et al., 2015). Barnett (2004), professor in the Educational Leadership Department at Morehead State University in Kentucky, administered a series of interview questions based on the ISLLC standards to school and district leaders in the Kentucky school system. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the effectiveness of the leaders’ educational programs compared to their actual duties and responsibilities on their jobs. The participants were grouped into two categories, Morehead graduates and non-Morehead graduates (Barnett, 2004). The results from the Morehead and non-Morehead state graduates indicated a high frequency rate of job

completion, although the duties were not related to any preparation skills from their educational leadership programs. Barnett (2004) recommended a comprehensive evaluation of course offerings in educational leadership programs to measure alignment with actual on-the-job requirements. The researcher recommended implementing authentic instruction and assessment for the adult learner, developing and expanding portfolios for students as they progress through this process, continuing communication with the technology department, and ongoing communication with the university professor. The overall mean score for all six ISLLC standards for both groups was 4.12. Morehead State University graduates had a mean score of 4.15 on ISLLC standards, and the non-Morehead State graduates had a mean score of 4.07 (Barnett, 2004). This minor difference between the mean scores indicated that the Morehead graduates viewed their training on the ISLLC standards as narrowly more involved than the non-Morehead graduates viewed their training.

During the year of 1994, the Superintendent of Education in the state of Mississippi created a task force and conducted an audit on all principal educational leadership programs. The decision to close all principal educational leadership programs were made based on the audit results. All programs had to reapply for accreditation. Accreditation was not granted to any program during the first round of resubmittals (Pannell et al., 2015, p. 9). The University of Mississippi Principal Educational Leadership Programs offered two distinctly different tracks to obtain certification, including a traditional track and an alternative track, called Principal Corps. The traditional track was an 18-month cohort program, which encompassed 30 hours of course work and 400 hours of internship, which could be completed at the graduate's

school building where the graduate may be employed full-time. The traditional program track consisted of 36 credit hours (Pannell et al., 2015, p. 11). The Principal Corps program was a 13-month comprehensive training program, which consisted of graduates completing course work while simultaneously working on two full-time internships at two different schools (i.e., one in the fall and one in the spring). Pannell et al. (2015) conducted a quasi-experimental study on the graduates' impact on student achievement from both certification tracks, measured by the Quality of Distribution Index scores. The purpose of the study was to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in score differentials between the graduates from both program tracks over 3 consecutive years (Pannell et al., 2015, p. 17).

The study included 66 participants (i.e., principals or assistant principals) who graduated from either the traditional track or the alternative track. The traditional track had 41 participants, and the alternative track (i.e., Principal Corps) had 25 participants. The researchers utilized SPSS to conduct a series of independent sample *t*-tests to determine the mean difference between participants on the respective program tracks in the first 3 years of their leadership as compared to the state's student achievement scores on the Mississippi Curriculum Test and the Subject Area Testing Program (Pannell et al., 2015, p. 18). Pannell and colleagues (2015) utilized the previous year's scores as the baseline for each of the schools. The results indicated that the students' achievement scores for the participants on the traditional track were higher than the achievement scores for the participants on the alternative track across all 3 years. Although the results were not significantly different, the researchers concluded that both principal educational leadership program tracks from the University of Mississippi had positive impacts on

student achievement (Pannell et al. 2015). Recommendations from Pannell et al. (2015) included continued program evaluation on both principal educational leadership program tracks and on student achievement, as well as adding a qualitative component to the study as a follow-up.

The state of Florida has a two-tiered certification process for prospective candidates interested in principalship. Applicants interested in becoming an assistant principal would apply for a Level I certification, and those applicants interested in becoming a principal would apply for a Level II certification (Taylor, Pelletier, Trimble, & Ruiz, 2014). Taylor et al. (2014) conducted three parallel mixed methods studies to determine the effectiveness of a school district's Preparing New Principals Programs in preparing assistant principals with the adopted Florida Principal Leadership Standards. The aspiring assistant principals who completed the programs between 2008 and 2011 and were rated by their principal supervisors and district level administrators. The purpose of the ratings was to determine if aspiring assistant principals would be successful based on the Florida Principal Leadership Standards. The researchers received a high response rate, which included 56 aspiring assistant principals, 36 principal supervisors, and 23 senior level administrators (Taylor et al., 2014). The ratings consisted of two open-ended questions and interviews to address the qualitative aspect of this research. The data collection included 18 interviews, which included six aspiring assistant principals, six principal supervisors, and six district administrators.

The results from Taylor et al. (2014) reflected a difference between perceptions of preparedness among aspiring assistant principals in schools with more free and reduced lunch students than in schools that were more affluent. Aspiring assistant principals felt



that they were well prepared to align their skills successfully to the Florida Principal Leadership Standards in schools with 50% or less free and reduced lunch students as well as they could in schools with 75% or more free and reduced lunch students. Principal supervisors from more affluent areas agreed with them; however, principal supervisors who were not from the affluent neighborhoods did not agree that the applicants were prepared in the domains outlined in the Florida Principal Leadership Standards.

Instructional leadership was rated by all groups as an area of needed growth for all groups. Ethical leadership was documented as the group's strength. The results from the qualitative data supported the area of need in instructional leadership, which was also documented in the quantitative data, as was a lack of principal mentor relationship.

Implications of this study by Taylor et al. referenced the need for educational leadership programs to target standards that are valued by school districts. Recommendations from Taylor et al. focused on additional research on the influence of district level administrators on aspiring assistant principals.

Educational leadership programs across the United States have been responding to the need for assistance from various stakeholders to provide the necessary and appropriate support to principals. Providing principals with real-world experiences during their educational leadership programs, in addition to prioritizing classroom theory, could give them the training to support teachers with instructional and behavioral supports for all students. Missouri embedded the requirement to maintain a quantitative and qualitative data component for evaluating program effectiveness during their educational leadership programs (Friend & Watson, 2014). Friend and Watson (2014) founded the organization called the Higher Education Evaluation Committee. This

organization met monthly with the purpose of discussing program evaluation for the 17 educational leadership programs, licensures, and any additional state related topics that were relevant to the organization. These meetings were attended by members of the department of education, leadership licensure programs, and each of the educational leadership programs (Friend & Watson, 2014).

Friend and Watson (2014) utilized a mixed methods research design for this study. The researchers emailed a 60-item survey to all educational leadership programs in the state of Missouri in 2008 and again in 2012. The return rate on the surveys from the leadership programs were favorable; 15 out of 17 leadership programs responded in the academic year of 2007-2008, and 16 out of 17 leadership programs responded during the academic year of 2011-2012 (Friend & Watson, 2014). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis. Open-ended survey responses from the Higher Education Evaluation Committee meetings were utilized as the qualitative form of data collection. The data were analyzed and went through the process of coding to explore preliminary themes; the preliminary themes were refined and organized into emergent themes.

The quantitative results indicated significant disparities between the years. Friend and Watson's (2014) results from 2008 reflected a decrease in full-time tenured faculty from 98 in the 2007-2008 academic year to 71 in the 2011-2012 academic year. The adjunct faculty significantly increased in the academic school year of 2011-2012 to 264 as compared to 98 in the academic school year of 2007-2008. This increase of adjunct faculty members occurred alongside the increase in the number of faculty members of color, in addition to an increase of male faculty members (Friend & Watson, 2014, p. 36).

Additional results reflected a decline in the partnership between educational leadership programs and school districts from 87% ( $n = 13$ ) in the academic school year of 2011-2012 versus the 36% ( $n = 4$ ) in the academic school year of 2007-2008 (Friend & Watson, 2014). The results from the survey documented that online courses doubled, the time requirement for course completion of the degree decreased for students, and the competition for enrollment in the program increased (Friend & Watson, 2014).

The emergent theme that resonated from the qualitative data focused on the lack of valuable principal internship experiences that students received prior to assuming their roles as principals. The majority of the students typically completed their internships within the current school building where they were employed. The experience was viewed as inconsequential (Friend & Watson, 2014).

As a response to the overall results of the survey, the researchers recommended that educational leadership programs be intentional about inclusive practices in the recruitment practices of faculty members to include females and people of color. The relationships between school districts and universities should be strengthened, as well as internship requirements and principal mentorship. Friend and Watson (2014) recommended that educational leadership programs examine the relationship between the course work, student achievement, and school effectiveness.

The literature examined the need to have effective and comprehensive educational leadership programs for principals to make the change from manager to instructional leader. Educational leadership programs from various states have examined their programs of study regarding the needs of today's principals. Campanotta, Simpson, and Newton (2018) explored the components of an effective educational leadership program

to determine how the content and delivery methods impacted the quality of the program. A qualitative research design was utilized to analyze master level exemplary educational leadership programs in the United States. The data were collected using interviews, observations, and narratives. Common themes and data points were used from the narratives. Analysis of the data reflected common themes mentioned by all educational leadership programs on their responses to their success. The common themes mentioned were district partnerships, collaborative cohorts, principal coaching, meaningful internships, customized course work, readily available course work, and a selective admissions process (Campanotta et al., 2018, p. 224).

The implications and recommendations of this study emphasized how essential the selection and recruitment process was to be a successful program, in addition to a quality internship, effective mentorship, and course work tied to real-world experiences (Campanotta et al., 2018). Additional implications mentioned by Campanotta et al. (2018) focused on the advantages of school district and university partnerships for aspiring principals. The cohorts provided opportunities for aspiring principals from various backgrounds to have valuable, enriching, and informative conversations. These qualities provided the guidance and direction educational leadership programs needed to evaluate their current practices (Campanotta et al., 2018).

In summary, consistent themes with the lack of preparation that principals received emerged among the majority of the research, including Hess and Kelly's (2007) evaluation of the course syllabi and Barnett's (2004) comparison of Morehead and non-Morehead graduates. Additionally, Taylor et al. (2014) indicated educational leadership programmatic structures were not aligned to the needs of the school district, and Friend

and Watson's (2014) research in Missouri recommended alignment of the course work for principals with real-world job duties. Figure 2 displays the concept analysis chart for educational leadership programs.

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
Hess & Kelly (2007)	Explored the knowledge and skills being taught in the educational leadership programs for aspiring principals.	210 syllabi from 31 programs between February and December 2004	Qualitative Study: A stratified sampling	All leadership programs were consistent in terms of the course work lacking in the preparation given to aspiring principals.
Barnett (2004)	Determined the effectiveness of leaders' educational leadership programs compared to their actual duties and responsibilities on their jobs.	Morehead graduates and non-Morehead graduates	Frequency rate measured from interview questions	Principals job duties were not related to any preparation skills from their educational leadership programs.
Pannell et al. (2015)	Determined if graduates from two different certification tracks had a different impact on student achievement.	66 principals or assistant principals (41 from the traditional track and 25 from the alternative track)	Quasi-experimental	Achievement scores for students on the traditional track scored higher than students on the alternative track, although the difference was not statistically significant.

Taylor et al. (2014)	Determined the effectiveness of a school district's Preparing New Principals Programs in preparing assistant principals with the Florida Principal Leadership Standards.	56 aspiring assistant principals, 36 principal supervisors, and 23 senior level administrators	Three parallel mixed methods research studies	Assistant principals perceived themselves to be just as prepared to work in schools with more free and reduced lunch as they are in more affluent schools. Principals from schools with more free and reduced lunch disagreed. Instructional leadership was rated as an area that needed growth. Ethical leadership was a strength. Principal mentorship was noted as an area of need.
Friend & Watson (2014)	Evaluated the effectiveness of Missouri's educational leadership programs.	15 out of 17 leadership programs in 2008 and 16 out of 17 leadership programs in 2012	Mixed methods	University and school district partnerships needed to be strengthened, as well as internship requirements and principal mentorships.
Campanotta et al. (2018)	Determined how the content and delivery methods impact	Five exemplary leadership principal programs in the United States	Qualitative	The reasons for success included district partnerships,

	the quality of the program.			collaborative cohorts, principal coaching, meaningful internships, customized course work, readily available course work, and a selective admissions process.
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*Figure 2.* Concept analysis chart for educational leadership programs.

### The Principal as Instructional Leader

The role of the school principal has evolved from a manager with the responsibilities of personnel, finances, and facilities to an instructional leader (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Ediger, 2014; Lemoine et al., 2014; Lynch, 2012; Sanzo, Clayton, & Sherman, 2011; Singh & Al-Fadhli, 2011). As the instructional leader, the focus includes pedagogical practices and purposeful involvement in the academic achievement and well-being of all students, including students with disabilities, especially with the passage of the NCLB Act and IDEA 2004 (Bland, 2014; Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Ediger, 2014; Lemoine et al., 2014; Lynch, 2012; Macfarlane, 2012; Sanzo et al., 2011). As principals embrace the role of instructional leader for their buildings, they encourage collaboration with teachers to develop a mission and vision that emphasizes academic achievement for students in a supportive learning environment (Dematthews, 2014; Kellar & Slayton, 2016; Lemoine et al., 2014). By placing academic achievement of all students in the forefront, the principal could ensure that continuous progress monitoring is taking place in conjunction with data-based decision making (DiPaola et al., 2004).

Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, and Simieou (2010) conducted a qualitative research study on a sample of 35 principals from the Houston, Texas area to determine their perception of their level of involvement in curriculum and instruction in their school buildings. The researchers additionally wanted to investigate the principal's level of support and how that support was provided to teachers via classroom observations and professional development. Thirty-five principals from various school districts were selected for the study (i.e., 15 were from elementary, 10 from middle school, and 10 from high school). The method of data collection utilized for the study was 30-minute individualized interviews. The data were analyzed using the content analysis approach, which identified emerging themes. The interviews were transcribed into the Crawdad software. This software was designed to look for keywords, comparisons, and clusters (Grigsby et al., 2010).

The emerging theme at the elementary level focused on being an instructional leader in the school building and providing purposeful and meaningful professional development for teachers. Principals at the middle schools had emerging themes with the focus on instructional strategies and providing support and training for teachers. The high school themes were different from the themes of elementary and middle school groups; high school principals deferred their instructional duties to their leadership teams within their schools. Principals would attend the meetings arranged by the leadership team members and oversaw the meetings; however, they were not the driver of the instructional focus or direction of the school building (Grigsby et al., 2010). The overall results reflected that elementary school principals had moved away from a managerial model of leadership towards an instructional model of leadership. The middle school



principals were moving towards the instructional model of leadership, whereas the high school principals were still in the managerial mentality and depended solely on their leadership team to oversee the process.

The implications for this study were directed at educational leadership programs and their lack of preparation for aspiring principals on being instructional leaders, especially as principals are being held accountable for the outcomes of student achievement. The researchers recommended principals could provide support for teachers, such as modeling lessons, providing walk-throughs, and offering meaningful feedback. Grigsby et al. (2010) additionally recommended that principals could increase their collective understanding of curriculum and suggested visiting curriculum writers during the summer professional development.

Researchers, such as Grigsby et al. (2010), Lynch (2012), and Lemoine et al. (2014), have emphasized that moving away from the managerial role to the role of the instructional leader is vital to increase student achievement. Most principals tend to struggle with how to manage the leadership role and the managerial role effectively without letting the one role consume the other role. In 2002, Louisville, Kentucky began an Alternative School Administrative Study to investigate how principals utilized their time (Sheng, Wolff, Kilmer, & Yager, 2017). A school administration manager (SAM) was an individual who could perform the managerial tasks for principals, such as lunch duty, bus duty, or master scheduling, which would allow the principals more time to be instructional leaders. The SAM model was piloted in three schools and yielded positive results by increasing the principals' time for instructional leadership.

Sheng et al. (2017) conducted a mixed methods research study in an Iowa school district to determine if there was a difference in the implementation of the SAM model at the elementary and middle school level in regard to the principals' focus on managerial and instructional leadership duties. The SAM model was not implemented at the high school level in Iowa at the time of the study; therefore, only the elementary and middle schools were selected in this study. Participants selected for this study were teachers from four middle schools and 11 elementary schools. The researchers developed a survey to collect data from the teachers. Qualitative data were collected from focus group interviews to determine if and how the SAM model supported principals in their management and leadership duties. The data collection involved five focus groups, which included two groups of SAMs and three groups of principals. Triangulation was utilized to determine trustworthiness in the collected data from all participants (Sheng et al., 2017).

Results from the quantitative data indicated an improved instructional leadership support from both elementary and middle school teachers as a result of the SAM model. Teachers received increased interactions with principals and students with the managerial duties delegated to another individual. The focus group results were consistent with the survey results. The SAM model allowed principals to clarify their roles as instructional leaders of the building and also emphasized the importance of the cohesive relationship between the SAM and the principal (Sheng et al., 2017).

Sheng et al. (2017) viewed the school district as a limitation of the research. This limitation was based on the districtwide support of the SAM model, which yielded positive results in addition to the funding support for implementation by the Wallace

Foundation. An additional limitation mentioned by the researchers referenced the survey's purpose of measuring the perceptions of teachers on the improvement of instructional and managerial duties, although the SAM model was already in place. Sheng et al. expressed concern that the teachers' perceptions might create a level of bias on survey results. The final limitation mentioned by Sheng and colleagues referenced the evaluation component of the SAM's influence on the management and leadership duties of the principal. The results indicated that when principals were able to delegate a majority of their management responsibilities, they were able to have a positive impact on instructional duties. This delegation of duties could create a positive link between management and instructional duties and the impact on the performing principal. Recommendations for future research were to extend the SAM study and investigate the relationship between the model and increased student achievement.

Teachers who choose to enter the special education profession receive specific training to help provide specialized instruction for students with disabilities. General education teachers may have one or two courses that focus on students with disabilities in their preparatory programs but not enough of a concentration to make them feel comfortable to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Alfaro, Kupcznski, & Mundy, 2015; Algozzine, Anderson, Olsen, & Smith, 2015; Keaney, 2012; Kent & Giles, 2016). Since the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, the responsibilities of principals have increased with more emphasis on students with disabilities. The expectations for novice principals are to possess a good understanding of the details of special education laws and how to meet the instructional and behavioral needs of students with disabilities (Lynch, 2012; Pazey & Cole, 2013). This expectation of knowledge

could be the foundation of support for their teachers as they rely on principals for assistance.

As the instructional leader, principals are expected to support special education programs by ensuring students have access to the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible in the LRE (Frost & Kersten, 2011; Lynch, 2012). Researchers suggested that principal educational leadership programs do not prepare principals as instructional leaders to support the achievement for students with disabilities (Frick, Faircloth, & Little, 2012; Frost & Kersten, 2011; Lynch, 2012; Pazey & Cole, 2013).

The value of providing new principals with a mentor in the beginning years of their principalship has been mentioned in this review of literature as beneficial for on-the-job success if the teaming was completed purposefully. The state of Missouri has implemented several initiatives to provide support to aspiring principals. As part of the state's effort to improve educational leadership programs, the Administrator Mentoring Program was created in 2005 to provide support to beginning principals during their first 2 years. The support from the Administrator Mentoring Program consists of on-going communication between new principals and veteran principals via phone calls, emails, site visits, and collaborative professional development (Gettys, Martin, & Bibgy, 2010).

Gettys et al. (2010) conducted a study to examine how beginning principals viewed the support provided through the Administrator Mentoring Program or their district-created mentoring program. The researchers initially selected 100 principals throughout the state of Missouri who were within the first 5 years of their principalship. Only 49 principals agreed to participate in the study, and four of these principals did not have mentors; therefore, 45 participants were included in the study (Gettys et al., 2010, p.

98). Geographical representative sampling was utilized by Gettys et al. (2010), which reduced the sample size to six principals. The researchers utilized a qualitative design to gather and analyze data from the six principals. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. Systematic coding was applied, and transcribed data were explored for emerging themes and categories (Gettys et al., 2010).

Results yielded six common themes, which included effective communication, making a proper match in order to develop a supportive and cohesive relationship, need for program guidelines, techniques for observation and feedback, values of the program, and amount/method of support (Gettys et al., 2010, p. 102). The overall interpretation from Gettys and his colleagues (2010) of both mentoring programs from the principals' perceptions indicated that the programs needed some significant adjustments. The principals were not receiving the level of support that the programs were designed to ensure. The managerial duties were made a priority at the expense of instructional duties, such as utilizing data to drive instructional practices. Beginning principals experienced ineffective communication with their mentees, which could have also been caused by inappropriate matches (Gettys et al., 2010). The challenges that the principals were receiving from their designated mentees could be remedied by applying some of the recommendations from Gettys et al. (2010). Ensuring the appropriate school and location match between mentors and mentees would be helpful. Confirming veteran principals were strong instructional leaders instead of the managerial style leaders would be valuable when placing them with beginning principal mentees. Gettys and colleagues emphasized the important role of educational leadership programs in preparing aspiring

principals, especially with the accountability mandates at the state and federal levels.

The researchers voiced their concern that principals were entering the field unprepared (Gettys et al., 2010).

Sanzo and colleagues (2011) conducted a study that focused on reading and how the skill was taught to students with disabilities in the self-contained and general education settings at the secondary level. The purpose of this study was to investigate how special education teachers and principals were implementing the special education reading program (Sanzo et al., 2011, p. 3). The survey used for the study was developed by district leaders with expertise in reading, leadership, special education reading, and research design. Surveys were sent to special education teachers, principals, and assistant principals. Surveys were received from 41 of the 122 special education teachers, 5 of the 10 principals, and 8 of the 29 assistant principals (Sanzo et al., 2011). The researchers utilized descriptive statistics to examine the data; however, an inductive approach was used to explore the data for similar themes and responses. The results were grouped into the four themes, “remedial reading instruction, understanding and sense-making, and leadership behavior” (Sanzo et al., 2011, p. 8). Results of the survey indicated inconsistencies among principals, assistant principals, and special education teachers. When asked if a special education reading program existed in the building, administrators overwhelmingly believed a program existed in the building; however, special education teachers did not think a program existed (Sanzo et al., 2011).

The results indicated confusion among special education teachers and administrators on the terminology of what was a reading program versus how reading instruction was delivered. Analysis of the data showed a clear disconnect with all of the

participants in regard to the purpose of the special education reading remedial program. Implications of the study suggested that the district should provide training on explicit reading instruction for both special education teachers and administrators and follow up with instructional coaching and observations (Sanzo et al., 2011). The researchers discussed the valuable role of the principal as the instructional leader and the impact the leader had on student achievement. Sanzo et al. (2011) recommended that districts provide support for special education teachers and principals in the area of reading because educational leadership programs did not equip either group with instructional practices to support students with disabilities.

Researchers also suggested that principals who possessed strong instructional leadership skills were knowledgeable about evidenced based practices for students, and communicated high expectations for students were successful with increasing achievement for all students with and without disabilities (Dematthews, 2014; Frick et al., 2012; Lynch, 2012; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Sanzo et al., 2011; Soehner & Ryan, 2011). Rinehart, a former special education teacher, principal, and current special education director, noted that her former principal colleagues struggled and were at a disadvantage with instructional support for students with disabilities (Rinehart, 2017, p. 57). Rinehart (2017) discussed several studies pertaining to principals' perceptions of their preparation from their educational leadership program to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. In one study, principals indicated that if they had at least one course, the knowledge from the course would have made a difference in their preparation as principals, whereas in another study, completed in Alabama, the educational leadership programs focused solely on the legal aspects of educating the

student served by special education only (Angelle & Bilton, 2009; Rinehart, 2017). The increased responsibility for procedural safeguards and programming for students with disabilities magnified the need for training in this area for aspiring administrators (Frick et al., 2012; Pazey & Cole, 2013).

The most litigated area in education is special education; therefore, the need for administrators to understand special education laws is crucial in order to ensure teachers are meeting the needs of their students with disabilities as outlined in their IEPs (Bateman & Bateman, 2015; Pazey & Cole, 2013). Some principal educational leadership programs offer at least one course related to special education, but several programs do not offer any course work in special education. According to one of the researchers within Rinehart's (2017) work, the suggestion for educational leadership programs was to move beyond the sole focus of only offering special education courses on the legal aspect of special education and to focus on instructional practices as well. Currently, principals leave their leadership programs feeling that they have been trained to meet the needs of their new roles. Unfortunately, after going through the litigation process, principals realize they do not have knowledge of special education laws or specialized instruction to support and monitor their teachers' implementation of the students' IEPs (Bateman & Bateman, 2015; Pazey & Cole, 2013). Principals who tend to have a better understanding of special education have taken the initiative to learn more independently or have taken a course on their own (Bateman & Bateman, 2015).

In summary, the research by Grigsby et al. (2010) and Sheng et al. (2017) highlighted the need for principals to be the instructional leaders of their school buildings. In the Grigsby et al. (2010) study, high school principals had not taken the



leap from their role as manager to instructional leader, and the research on the SAM model was not completed on high school staff. Perhaps, if the SAM model was made available for high school principals in the Houston, Texas where Grigsby et al. conducted their study, the managerial role would be easier to move beyond for the Texas principals.

### Principals and Special Education

Research has documented that principal educational leadership programs are not preparing aspiring principals as instructional leaders to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. McHatton and colleagues (2010) conducted a quantitative research study in a large metropolitan district in the United States. The focus of the research was on principals' perceptions of their preparation to support their teachers who work with students who receive special education and gifted services. A survey was sent to 169 principals; 64 principals responded to the survey, and 61 surveys were able to be used for analysis. The survey was created by faculty in the special education and gifted departments and piloted for validity with a group of educational leadership students (McHatton et al., 2010). The data were analyzed using a MANOVA for the following areas: preparation, practice, and perception of self-efficacy. In the area of preparation, principals were asked to provide examples of the specific course work, which they received during their educational leadership programs that directly aligned with supporting students who received special education and gifted services. Principals were also asked to specify any additional professional development they would be interested in obtaining (McHatton et al., 2010). Researchers reported that about half of the participants ( $n = 30$ ) received no course work in special education, and the remaining participants received either three or fewer courses depending on the program.

McHatton and colleagues (2010) reported that the majority of the participants ( $n = 16$ ) did not receive one gifted course with the remaining participants receiving as few as one course or as many as three courses depending on the program. The findings indicated that legal and funding information for special education and gifted programs appeared to be offered in some format during their educational leadership programming. Instructional modifications and accommodations for special education and gifted programs were provided for principals as professional learning opportunities at the district level (McHatton et al., 2010). Principals were queried to determine if they were prepared to facilitate special education and gifted services, such as leading initial eligibility and IEP meetings, conducting observations of special education and gifted teachers, and reviewing lesson plans. Principals rated themselves as least prepared to participate and handle initial eligibility meetings and develop IEPs; however, principals felt better prepared to observe teachers in special education and gifted classrooms (McHatton et al., 2010).

The last area that the principals rated themselves was the perception of their self-efficacy with conveying knowledge in the areas of legal, funding, modifications, and accommodations for special education and gifted programs. The results of McHatton et al. (2010) indicated that the principals were least comfortable and prepared with funding and legal issues and very comfortable and prepared with instructional modifications and accommodations and discipline. The sample size was a limitation of this study because the study included one U.S. school district. A larger sample size might yield different results. McHatton et al. recommended additional research to expand the sample size to other areas of the United States. An examination of additional studies to address the

development of the curriculum and to explore school districts and district partnerships could be beneficial in developing a more comprehensive preparation program.

The significance of the principal's role as it relates to student achievement evolves through the creation of a cohesive working environment. A cohesive working environment promotes a collaborative and supportive climate that positively influences the teacher, who will create a positive classroom environment for students (Lynch, 2012). If principals are consciously or unconsciously displaying characteristics or attitudes to indicate that the inclusion of students with disabilities is not a good idea, then the support will decrease, as well as the achievement scores (Lynch, 2016). The definition of support from the perspective of the special education teacher might appear different than what a principal might envision the teacher's support should be. Principals' lack of knowledge in the area of special education could hinder their ability to support their teachers' needs effectively.

Roderick and Jung (2012) conducted a study in Southern California to determine if a relationship existed between the leadership behaviors that special education teachers perceived were valuable and supportive and those behaviors that principals perceived were valuable and supportive to their special education teachers. The quantitative research included 15 secondary schools, which were recruited from two unified school districts. The researchers emailed surveys to 200 special education teachers and principals; 95 surveys were completed and returned. Of those 95 completed surveys, 35 were from principals, 59 were from special education teachers, and one was from an individual who did not identify their position (Roderick & Jung, 2012). The survey that Roderick and Jung (2012) utilized in this research consisted of 52 leadership traits, which

were categorized into four domains (i.e., emotional, instrumental, instructional, and technical). To determine if a significant difference existed between the four behavior traits, the researchers utilized a one-way ANOVA. The results yielded a difference between the perceptions of special education teachers and principals in the emotional, instructional, and technical domains. The results on the instrumental domain did not indicate a difference between behaviors that the teachers and principals perceived as valuable and supportive. Roderick and Jung's overall findings indicated that special education teachers and principals typically had different viewpoints on what they perceived as valuable support. Special education teachers were typically concerned with instructional strategies in the classroom. With the emphasis on accountability for all students, more specifically students with disabilities, principals' perception of valuable support will look significantly different from that of special education teachers (Roderick & Jung, 2012). Principals can no longer only focus on the general education curriculum; the focus should be on all programs in the building. Principals are responsible for instructional strategies for students with disabilities and, therefore, should provide support to the special education teacher (Roderick & Jung, 2012). Roderick and Jung (2012) indicated that a limitation to their research was the inclusion of only secondary principals and teachers. The sample size was small, and the survey data collection method limited the results.

In Praisner's (2003) study, the researcher examined the attitudes of elementary principals on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Praisner surveyed 408 elementary principals using the Principals and Inclusion Survey. The percentage of students with disabilities within the schools ranged

from 6% to 10% of the student population. The Principals and Inclusion Survey consisted of 28 questions with four sections embedded in the survey, including demographics, attitudes towards inclusion, training and experience, and the principal beliefs about the appropriate placement (Praisner, 2003, p. 136). The analysis of the data indicated that principals were positive about the purpose of inclusion; however, when examining the data related to the attitude scores, the scores were high but within the uncertain range. After further investigation, Praisner (2003) realized that if principals felt forced to embrace inclusion, their attitudes were not as positive versus if inclusion was voluntary (Praisner, 2003). Prior experiences with special education also played a role in how principals viewed inclusive practices; 83.6% of principals participated in training on special education law and the characteristics of the students with disabilities.

Data analysis also indicated that 13.2% of principals were involved with instructional strategies, suggesting that instruction was an area of concern for principals (Praisner, 2003). The research supported inclusive practices; however, the role of the principal was pivotal in this process. The principal ensures the culture and climate at the school building, which could foster an environment that allows for the success of students with disabilities (Praisner, 2003). One limitation of this study included the singular focus on elementary schools in one state. Another limitation of the study was the inclusion of students who were identified as severe and profound in the inclusive setting, which Praisner (2003) believed could have reduced the positive attitude toward the inclusion score as well as the assumption that all principals work under the same criteria. Praisner identified three implications of this study, which included investigating the disability

category differences, involving principal educational leadership programs, and ensuring a positive experience.

School districts in rural areas tend to have more difficulties with retaining special education teachers and principals. Attrition of principals and special education teachers occurs for a variety of reasons that might not pertain to the job alone but could be due to economic challenges and the geographic location. In smaller rural school systems, principals often perform multiple roles, instead of solely being the building administrator. Additional difficulties exist in rural areas, such as limited resources and high attrition rates for special education teachers, which can cause additional stress on principals, especially those principals with limited knowledge in special education (Lynch, 2012, 2016).

As a result of the numerous barriers facing principals in rural areas, their role as the instructional leader is essential to building a positive culture and climate for the school environment. Limited resources are the reasons why rural principals are more likely to wear multiple hats, which emphasizes the need for educational leadership programs to incorporate special education course work into their program of study for aspiring principals. Lynch (2016) conducted a study on the perceptions of three rural middle school principals' knowledge of evidence-based instructional strategies to support students with disabilities. Lynch's purpose for this study was to advise educational leadership programs of the need to train principals on instructional strategies to support students with disabilities. The methodology used for this study was a qualitative multiple case study in a mid-Atlantic state. The participants for the study consisted of a principal from School A, a principal and assistant principal from School B, and a principal from

School C (Lynch, 2016). Lynch (2016) checked the certification requirements for the state where this research was conducted to determine if special education course work was a condition for certification, and it was not a requirement. Five principal educational leadership programs were available in this particular state. The researcher also checked to determine if any of the programs included course work in special education. None of the programs included course work related to special education (Lynch, 2016, p. 28).

Data were collected utilizing predetermined questions in a face-to-face interview with principals. Validity and reliability were established by reviewing existing literature on instructional leadership for students with disabilities (Lynch, 2016, p. 29). The researcher established independent analysis by recruiting one university faculty member and two principals. Lynch (2016) did not rely solely on the face-to-face interviews for the data collection process. Multiple embedded sources of evidence were used to confirm or refute the interview data. The analysis process involved cross-case synthesis. Once codes emerged, the researcher applied the concept of convergence, and overarching themes or patterns manifested (Lynch, 2016, p. 29). The overarching themes were defining effective instruction, defining what was not instruction, where students with disabilities were educated, and checks and balances (Lynch, 2016, p. 29).

The data indicated that principals had limited understanding of effective instructional practices. Principals struggled to understand the methods of delivery and evidence-based instructional strategies to support students with disabilities. The researcher quoted disappointing statements from a principal and the assistant principal at School B in regard to students with disabilities. As the researcher continued to query the administrators regarding instructional strategies, an assistant principal stated, “they

probably wouldn't achieve mastery anyway," and the principal of the same school continued with "they're not, they're not going to be above mastery or even mastery" (Lynch, 2016, p. 33).

Principals who are unclear about their role as an instructional leader for students with disabilities tend to be more comfortable in their role as the manager. The principal's role as a manager is defined and is not directly related to student achievement. When the role changed, and the emphasis for principals shifted from focusing solely on general education students to students with disabilities, the majority of principals and educational leadership programs were not prepared for the shift (Lynch, 2012). Principals, especially in rural areas, did not know how to instructionally support their newly identified students. Principal A's response indicated that he did not believe in the inclusion process and supported this position (Lynch, 2016). A limitation of this study was the absence of the general and special education teachers. Lynch (2016) recommended further qualitative research on the identified themes. Implications of the study revealed that educational leadership programs did not offer course work in special education. Therefore, the researcher suggested that the certification criteria for states should require principal educational leadership programs to offer special education course work as a part of their program of study. School districts should also provide professional development opportunities for principals on evidence-based instructional practices to ensure that they are able to support their teachers (Lynch, 2016, p. 34).

Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) conducted a study to investigate the implementation of special education programs with rural principals and school officials who were viewed as principals. The researchers provided each of the participants with a 42-item survey



adapted from Billingsley, Farley, and Rude (1993). Survey participants consisted of 98 elementary principals, 78 secondary principals, 19 elementary/secondary principals, and 50 central office and other administrative officials (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006, p. 575). The backgrounds of the participants were examined to determine if prior knowledge in special education existed or if it was a post-secondary requirement. In the states of Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming, where the researchers conducted their study, each state required at least one course in special education. The analysis of the data was positive and indicated that principals were integrating special education programs in schools through effective leadership (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006). Specifically, the analysis of the data from Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) suggested that majority of principals were embedding students with disabilities into the school fabric by communicating their intentions to all staff. Principals managed the curriculum of the general and special education teachers, monitored all students' progress, and promoted a positive school climate. Administrators also rated collaborative planning time as a priority and noted the value of assisting with problem solving with the family members of students with disabilities (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006). Prior knowledge or course work in special education could have played a part in the success of this integration, although the researchers did not specifically suggest a correlation between the two ideas. Cruzeiro and Morgan (2006) recommended that, if this study were replicated, principal perceptions should be validated by a variety of stakeholders. The researchers noted that the results from this survey might not lend themselves to similar results in different studies of rural or urban settings, which could be due to differing expectations from state to state (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006).

Several researchers over the last 20 years and currently have identified numerous criteria needed for principals to ensure that they are effective instructional leaders for students with disabilities. Frost and Kersten (2011) identified three themes based on previous research, which included principals maintaining a positive and collaborative relationship with parents, principals maintaining a school environment that was inviting to parents, and principals encouraging a collaborative relationship with teachers and staff. The researchers emphasized the importance of principals' participation in the IEP process and their knowledge of special education legal requirements. The ability to navigate through the programming of special education concerning the academic and behavioral supports for students was an essential skill for principals as instructional leaders (Frost & Kersten, 2011, p. 5). Frost and Kersten (2011) conducted a study to explore elementary principals' perception of their special education knowledge and their instructional leadership involvement with special education teachers. The study was conducted in a county in Illinois, and 132 elementary principals received a web-based survey that consisted of four sections; however, 56 useable surveys were returned. The first section requested the demographics of the participants, the second section requested information pertaining to principals' legal knowledge, foundational knowledge, and contextual knowledge of special education, and the third section asked the principals to document the amount of time that they engaged in instructional leadership behaviors with special education teachers. The last section of the survey consisted of an open-ended question given to participants, and 12 themes were produced from the responses. Results of the survey reflected that more than half of the elementary principal participants had additional staff in their buildings, such as special education coordinators, lead teachers,

assistant principals, or co-principals, to provide support to special education teachers, whereas the remaining participants did not have the same level of additional support (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

Collectively, all principals rated themselves higher on understanding the knowledge of special education activities associated with providing students with disabilities an effective delivery model and the conforming laws accompanying them. About 25% of the principals who responded to the survey held special education certification, and their ratings indicated that they were better prepared to support students with disabilities (Frost & Kersten, 2011, p. 15). Principals who had additional support and held special education certification viewed themselves as more experienced and rated themselves higher in having more knowledge as it pertained to special education; however, they were not as involved with the special education staff at their schools. Principals who did not hold special education certification reported their involvement in special education as relatively higher than their knowledge in the subject area (Frost & Kersten, 2011, p. 18). On the other hand, all participants ranked themselves higher with their involvement in foundational knowledge and contextual knowledge, with the exception of their involvement with legal matters (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

Frost and Kersten (2011) indicated a level of surprise with the overall results of the survey in the area of special education knowledge and justified the higher than expected ratings to Illinois requiring rules and regulations for school districts to implement the Response to Intervention process. This “district and school-wide” initiative began in the 2010-2011 academic year. The data indicated low scores for principals on the familiarity with creating a program development plan and designing a

curriculum for students with disabilities aligned with the state standards. Frost and Kersten suggested several implications from their research. Principal educational leadership programs should offer additional course work and field experiences to support principals. This additional training could provide principals with the expertise to support teachers and thereby reduce the teacher shortage. The researchers recommended that, if educational leadership programs did not provide this experience for principals, then the school district should provide professional development opportunities for principals (Frost & Kersten, 2011). Additional implications focused on developing exit data interviews for special education teachers regarding attrition and utilizing the data for professional development opportunities for principals. Further implications by Frost and Kersten (2011) were support for new or less experienced principals, recruitment of principals from educational leadership programs with a focus on special education, and required annual instructional workshops to help support teachers (Frost & Kersten, 2011).

The limitations that Frost and Kersten (2011) referenced were the small sample size, the responses may not have been authentic, the location of the survey, and the validity of the survey. In addition, Frost and Kersten stated the interview data were limited to the participants (Frost & Kersten, 2011, p. 19). The concern that this study included with elementary principals only and the familiarity of the participants with the researcher may have caused some bias (Frost & Kersten, 2011, p. 19).

Research has been consistent with referenced statements from principals who completed a minimum of one course in special education and perceived themselves as more confident to support students with disabilities than those principals who have not completed any course work in special education (Bateman & Bateman, 2015; Cruzeiro &

Morgan, 2006; Frost & Kersten, 2011). Loiacono and Palumbo (2011) conducted a study in the southeastern region of New York with 51 elementary school principals. The researchers conducted a survey to determine the perception of support that principals provided to their special education teachers who taught students with autism in an inclusive classroom. The principals were assured of their anonymity and were provided a questionnaire consisting of eight questions (Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011, p. 215). The analysis of data indicated that 62.7% of the participants felt confident in their pedagogical practices to support general and special education teachers of students with autism. Principals had taken courses in special education either during their undergraduate or graduate years in college. Some administrators had completed course work in applied behavior analysis or through professional learning opportunities within their school district (Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011, p. 218).

Administrators who indicated that they were not as confident with applied behavior analysis therapy as their colleagues recommended that fellow principals could be a resource of support, as well as the district professional learning team. Loiacono and Palumbo (2011) discussed three limitations of their study. The first limitation that was noted by the researchers was the survey data collection method (Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011, p. 218). The researchers referenced concerns with the accuracy of the responses from the principals, which was noted as a second limitation, and the last limitation was that the survey was not validated or tested for reliability (Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011, p. 218). Recommendations for future research by Loiacono and Palumbo (2011) were consistent with the recommendations of the other researchers (e.g., Christensen, Roberston, Williamson, & Hunter, 2013; Frost & Kersten, 2011; Lynch 2012, 2016;

McHatton et al., 2010; Roberts & Guerra, 2017), which was ensuring that principal educational leadership programs were adding course work and field opportunities for aspiring principals to ensure they were able to provide support to special education teachers.

In a study conducted by Roberts and Guerra (2017), they utilized the survey developed by Frost and Kersten (2011) to explore the perceptions of principals' knowledge of special education in predominantly Hispanic schools in Texas. The researchers' aim was to determine recommendations to improve educational leadership programs for principals to support students with disabilities. Hispanic students can have a disability under IDEA and also be an English language learner. The principal should be knowledgeable and skilled enough to advocate for the appropriate services for all students in their building; therefore, educational leadership programs should prepare principals for this vital role (Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

Roberts and Guerra (2017) sent a survey to 456 principals in 37 school districts in the South Texas region of the state, close to the Mexican border. The researchers received 84 responses from principals on their survey; 11 of these participants had special education teacher certification, and 73 participants did not have special education teacher certification. The participants represented all school levels, as well as a varied range of experience as a principal. Roberts and Guerra were purposeful in their selection of Section II of Frost and Kersten's survey, which focused on three areas of special education knowledge. The knowledge section measured principals' perceptions of their knowledge of special education and consisted of the three subsections embedded under knowledge, which were legal knowledge, foundational knowledge, and contextual

knowledge. Similar to Frost and Kersten (2011), an open-ended question was asked of the participants. Participants were asked if they perceived themselves as having adequate legal knowledge for effective leadership in special education. With a concentration on services for students, such as related services, the LRE, and the continuum of services, participants were asked if they perceived themselves adequate in foundational knowledge (Roberts & Guerra, 2017). In the last area of the survey, Roberts and Guerra (2017) asked participants to complete items on instructional practices for students with disabilities. Participants were asked if they perceived themselves as adequate with contextual knowledge to support students with disabilities.

The data analysis indicated that principals scored themselves positively regarding legal knowledge and foundational knowledge; however, they rated themselves lower on contextual knowledge. The open-ended question asked the principals for suggestions that they would give principal educational leadership programs (Roberts & Guerra, 2017, p. 11). Although principals rated themselves as having adequate legal knowledge, the majority of the principals recommended that they would want educational leadership programs to include this area. Roberts and Guerra (2017) included the recommendation for educational leadership programs to integrate the universal design of learning and multicultural education as part of the special education content. A limitation of this research was that the study was conducted in predominately Hispanic schools; therefore, the study may not be transferable to different demographic groups (Roberts & Guerra, 2017, p. 13).

Throughout this review of literature, the consistent theme that has resonated was the need for principal educational leadership programs to add special education course

content to the program of study. Results from various studies have indicated that at least one course could be beneficial, although the need for support would warrant more than one course in a program to ensure effective special education programming that focused on instructional and behavioral supports in combination with the legal and compliance obligations (Frost & Kersten, 2011; Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011; Roberts & Guerra, 2017).

Christensen et al. (2013) conducted a study with 64 principals in a southern metropolitan school district to determine what principals believed educational leadership programs should include to support the academic achievement of students with disabilities. Principals were provided with 22 Likert-type questions and two open-ended questions. Data were analyzed to determine what principals considered as most important for them to learn in educational leadership programs. The frequencies of the responses were combined and reanalyzed. The following responses received the highest ratings: (1) How to modify the curriculum, (2) IDEA discipline guidelines, (3) State testing accommodations, (4) Mentoring new special education teachers, (5) Inclusive culture, (6) Special education law, (7) IEP, (8) Inclusion and co-teaching, and (9) Classroom discipline. The results indicated the need for additional training for themselves in the area of special education, specifically how to modify the general education curriculum to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Christensen et al., 2013, p. 102). Additionally, principals wanted educational leadership programs to focus on course work related to legislation. When determining course work for principals, the results indicated that educational leadership programs should consider the daily length of time a principal spent on special education related issues (Christensen et al., 2013). The



researchers indicated some limitations for this study. This research was conducted in one southern urban school district, which was a limitation of the study. An additional limitation to consider was the time of year that the survey was conducted may have had an impact on the results. IEP meetings tended to be completed during the beginning and end of the school year, which could have an impact on the time an administrator would spend with special education. The survey was conducted in the middle of the year, which contained fewer IEP meetings (Christensen et al., 2013).

In summary, the studies in this section focused on either the principal's preparation to support students with disabilities (Frost & Kersten, 2011; Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011; Lynch, 2016; McHatton et al., 2010; Roberts & Guerra, 2017) or their willingness to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Lynch, 2016; Praisner, 2003). Several studies focused solely on either the elementary population (e.g., Frost & Kersten, 2011; Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011; Praisner, 2003) or the secondary population (e.g., Roderick & Jung, 2012). Research was either conducted in one school district (e.g., McHatton et al., 2010) or one state (e.g., Frost & Kersten, 2011; Praisner, 2003; Roberts & Guerra, 2017), and the sample size was small for some studies (e.g., Frost & Kersten, 2011; McHatton et al., 2010).

Recommendations were made to adjust for these limitations within each study.

Regardless of these limitations, this review of literature did not deviate from the initial concern for the lack of preparation that principals are receiving in educational leadership programs to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. Figure 3 displays the concept analysis chart for principals and special education.

STUDY	PURPOSE	PARTICIPANTS	DESIGN/ ANALYSIS	OUTCOMES
McHatton et al. (2010)	Explored the perception of principals who work with students who receive special education and gifted services.	61 principals	Quantitative: MANOVA	Majority of principals do not receive course work in special education and gifted services. Instructional support for both programs are provided at the district level.
Roderick & Jung (2012)	Explored the relationship between what behaviors leadership and special education teachers perceive are valuable and supportive.	95 completed surveys (i.e., 35 principal surveys, 59 special education teachers)	Quantitative: one-way ANOVA	Principals and special education teachers have different viewpoints on valuable support.
Praisner (2003)	Explored the attitudes of elementary principals on inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.	408 elementary principals	Quantitative	Principals were positive about inclusion if the decision was voluntary, prior experience played a role in how a principal viewed inclusion, and they were not involved in instructional strategies for students with disabilities.

Lynch (2016)	Explored the perceptions of three rural middle school principals' knowledge on instructional strategies to support students with disabilities.	three principals and one assistant principal	Qualitative multiple case study	Principals struggled to understand instructional strategies to support students with disabilities.
Cruzeiro & Morgan (2006)	Investigated the implementation of special education programming with rural principals and school officials who were viewed as principals.	98 elementary principals, 78 secondary principals, 19 elementary/secondary principals, 50 central office and other administrative officials	Quantitative	Principals were integrating special education programming in schools through effective leadership.
Frost & Kersten (2011)	Explored elementary principals' perceptions of their special education knowledge and their leadership involvement with special education teachers.	132 elementary teachers were surveyed, and 56 useable surveys were returned.	Quantitative	Principals who held special education certification and had additional staff were more involved with special education in their schools. All participants rated themselves low in legal knowledge.
Loiacono & Palumbo (2011)	Determined the perceptions of support that principals provided to	51 elementary principals	Quantitative	Majority of principals had taken special education courses in

	their special education teachers who taught autism in an inclusive classroom.			college or completed applied behavioral analysis course work and felt confident in their pedagogical practices to support students with disabilities.
Roberts & Guerra (2017)	Explored the perception of principals' knowledge of special education in predominantly Hispanic schools in Texas.	84 principals	Quantitative	Principals scored themselves positively regarding legal knowledge and foundational knowledge and lower on contextual knowledge.
Christensen et al. (2013)	Determined what principals believe educational leadership programs should include to support achievement of students with disabilities.	64 principals	Quantitative	Principals supported additional training for modifying the curriculum to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Course work in special education should be added to the program of study.

*Figure 3.* Concept analysis chart for principals and special education.

### Educational Leadership Programs: The Redesign

The redesign of principal educational leadership programs has not been a new concept, and a few states have addressed the issue. The states of Mississippi and North Carolina were the first two states, in the mid-1990s, to address redesigning principal educational leadership programs (Pannell et al., 2015). In 2004, Governor Bob Riley of the state of Alabama, in addition to the state superintendent of schools and other stakeholders, convened a task force to discuss the leadership programs and the need for redesigning existing programs. A major component resulting from the task force was the implementation of the university and school district partnership (Reames, 2010).

The state of Kentucky created a task force in 2006 with various stakeholders to improve principal educational leadership programs. In 2009, principal educational leadership programs were required to implement the Kentucky Cohesive Leadership System Continuum for Principal Preparation and Development, which aligned with ISLLC standards (Hearn, 2015). The redesigned programs needed to include the following requirements:

- Signed collaborative agreements with school districts that specified joint screening of candidates by professors and practitioners.
- Evidence that the university and school district cosigned and agreed to codevelop and codeliver courses. Evidence of collaboration with academic disciplines and programs outside of the field of education that will supplement the candidate's skill set. Evidence of the school district's collaboration with providing high quality field experiences.

- Candidates are required to conduct a capstone project and must be defended before university professors and school district administrators. (Browne-Ferrigno, 2011, p. 742)

The literature has been inundated with several studies and researchers (e.g., Barnett, 2004; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Friend & Watson, 2014; Taylor et al., 2014) who have documented the need to redesign the programmatic course work of the educational leadership programs. The purpose of redesigning the programs has been to ensure that aspiring principals' educational leadership experiences align with the real-world job experiences. The University of Texas collaborated with their school district systems to address the needs of the then current small principal applicant pool. Attention was focused on the at-risk areas in the school districts where principals needed more support to begin their roles as principals (Hernandez, Roberts, & Menchaca, 2012). The goal for the university's educational leadership program was to provide the aspiring principals with the knowledge in curriculum instruction, aspects of school operations, and real-world field experiences to ensure they were prepared when they assumed their new roles. Hernandez et al. (2012) conducted a mixed methods research study to determine the effectiveness of the program from the perceptions of superintendents and the graduates by analyzing and comparing the current program with other programs, in an effort to improve any areas of need.

The researchers reviewed 42 separate educational leadership programs in the state of Texas and selected 10 programs based on similar demographics to the University of Texas. Hernandez and colleagues (2012) reviewed universities with similar profiles whose graduates had higher passing rates on the state certification examinations. The

research team compared programs of study from the 10 selected universities. The qualitative component of the study included a focus group of 16 superintendents. The superintendents were asked three open-ended questions (Hernandez et al., 2012). Hernandez et al. (2012) selected 315 graduate students of the past 3 years. The participants included 71 females and 24 males. The participant roles included administrators and teachers.

The quantitative data were analyzed utilizing a frequency distribution, and the qualitative data from the focus group discussions were analyzed for distinct themes. Based on the results of the study by Hernandez and her colleagues (2012), educational leadership programs were not aligned with other universities or colleges with similar demographics. The common themes from the superintendents included graduates were strong with their cultural pedagogical knowledge, they understood their role as instructional leaders, and they could make data-driven decisions. The superintendents did not want the educational leadership programs to remove the managerial courses completely from the programs because they were seeing some weaknesses in those areas (Hernandez et al., 2012). Hernandez et al. (2012) equated any combined domain at 10% or more as unacceptable, which were all areas for the graduate students. The areas were school community leadership, instructional leadership, and administrative leadership.

The next steps taken by Hernandez and her colleagues (2012) at the University of Texas were to redesign the educational leadership program to include the recommendations gathered from the comparative study of programs and feedback from superintendents and graduates. Follow-up studies would be conducted every 2 to 3 years to ensure continuous ongoing improvement.

Although the redesigns of the previous states programs were completed to address the changing role of the principal from manager to instructional leader, a curriculum that focused on special education issues, whether instructionally or compliance based, was not viewed as a need for principals during their educational leadership programs. The state of Illinois included students with disabilities in their redesigning of principal educational leadership programs.

In 2010, the state of Illinois legislatively required a complete redesign of all principal preparation programs in the state, effective in the year 2014 (White et al., 2016, p. 9). The redesign was Illinois's way of reshaping aspiring principals into highly effective leaders equipped with the knowledge to support the learning for all students. Prior to the redesign, if an educator was interested in becoming a principal or district administrator, they could earn a general administrative license, which allowed the educator to become a principal, special education director, or any other administrative position. The new endorsement was developed for principals specifically. The new requirements consisted of five non-negotiable criteria that all principal preparation programs must follow.

1. All programs had to establish formal partnerships with school districts.
2. Competency based internships focused on instructional activities with teachers from all PK-12 levels and serve all students in all settings (i.e., general education, special education, ELL, gifted) and must observe hiring, supervision, and evaluation of teachers. Candidates had to complete an internship based on the ISLLC standards successfully and were expected to be involved in leading at least 80% of the time rather than only participating.



3. Principal training was required to focus on instructional leadership versus school management.
4. Principal programs needed to prepare principals to work with all students from PK-12 including students with disabilities and English language learners.
5. Programs were expected to collect data to utilize data for continuous improvement. (White et al., 2016, p. 5)

In 2016, the Illinois Education Research Council conducted a study of the new legislative policy on principals' preparation programs to investigate the effectiveness of the implementation of the new requirements (White et al., 2016). The study examined several areas of the principal preparation programs in Illinois. The researchers wanted to determine if the partnerships between the school districts and the universities were being established. The next phase of the study was to examine the recruitment and enrollment process to ascertain if a decline existed with the new rigorous standards. Subsequent areas of focus were the curriculum, the internships, mentoring with current principals, and students of special populations. For the purpose of the current study, the researcher focused only on the aspects of the study results as they pertained to the implementation of curriculum that focused on improving supports for students with disabilities. The study consisted of site visits, syllabus reviews, and online surveys to selected preparation programs. White et al. (2016) had an initial list of 28 approved principal preparation programs to consider for this study; 26 of the 28 programs were approved to conduct site visits, and the researchers selected 12 of the 26 programs. For the syllabus review, the researchers selected 14 programs, and they submitted surveys to all 28 programs and received 21 responses (White et al., 2016, p. 14). The curriculum requirement for

preparation programs was to focus on instructional leadership skills for principals to ensure that course work embedded in the programs consisted of the following courses: School law to include students with disabilities and English language learners, the use of technology for teaching and administration, differentiated instruction, developmentally appropriated instruction, and research-based instruction and assessment (White et al., 2016, p. 37).

The data analysis indicated that preparation programs increased their level of focus on internships and course work for special populations, including students with disabilities. Additional courses were either added or enhanced, and discussions of the students with disabilities as well as the other special populations were addressed across the curriculum. Barriers were presented for students in rural areas as they were trying to complete their competency-based internships, specifically with some of the special populations (White et al., 2016). The results from the overall study of Illinois's implementation of the redesigned principal preparation programs indicated several successes with the new requirements. Some barriers were noted, although the state was moving in the right direction.

### Summary

The review of literature discussed how several states have redesigned their educational leadership programs to address the needs of the changing role of the principal from manager to instructional leader. This review of the literature documented the indirect relationship that the principal has on student achievement. States that have completed a redesign process have not focused on providing a course of study for principals geared toward students with disabilities. Unfortunately, this lack of emphasis

at the university preparation level has put principals in a position to not be able to support students with disabilities or the teachers who provide instructional services and supports for students with disabilities. This study examined the difference in the attitudes and beliefs of principals who attended educational leadership programs with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

A problem exists with how educational leadership programs are preparing aspiring principals as instructional leaders to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. Historically, principals have been viewed as managers of the school building, with the responsibilities of managing student discipline, overseeing the day-to-day operations of the building, and ensuring teachers were providing pedagogical practices to students. The push for principals to focus on student accountability began in the 1980s after the published report, *A Nation At Risk*, and continued with the passage of the Improving America's School Act in 1994 (Nelson, 2016; Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006). The NCLB Act and IDEA 2004 brought accountability for the academic achievement of students with disabilities to the forefront for principals. Educational leadership programs began answering the call to provide real-world job experiences to aspiring principals as instructional leaders for the general education population by revamping their programs of study. Included in the program of study was course work for providing instructional support; however, instructional support for students with disabilities was not addressed (Levine, 2005). Some educational leadership programs might offer only one special education course; however, most programs do not offer any special education course work in their program of study. As a result, principals are unprepared to support their teachers due to their lack of special education knowledge

(McHatton et al., 2010). This chapter outlines the researcher's methodology, which encompasses the research questions and hypotheses, the participants involved in the study, the data collection, and the data analysis.

### Research Design

The researcher conducted a causal comparative quantitative study (Johnson & Christensen, 2017) to examine the difference in the attitudes and beliefs of principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education. The researcher assessed the principals' federal legislative knowledge, contextual knowledge, and foundational knowledge that was obtained during their educational leadership programs. The research questions and hypotheses are as follows:

- 1) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?

*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

- 2) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?

*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

- 3) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in

an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?

*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

The researcher utilized a causal comparative quantitative research design for this study, which is a nonexperimental research design. During the decision-making process, the researcher ruled out a qualitative research design and a mixed methods research design. Qualitative research is exploratory, subjective, and used when a researcher would like to learn more about an area of interest (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 33). A qualitative research design would not be an appropriate design because the researcher seeks to examine differences in attitudes and beliefs. A mixed methods research design utilizes a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative research utilizes information through non-numerical avenues, such as words or pictures, to answer questions; whereas, quantitative research is more concrete, objective, and structured in answering research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The research questions for

this study examined if differences existed, which lends to quantitative research only. A mixed methods research design would not be an appropriate design for this research because the design utilizes a component of qualitative research, which would not have answered the researcher's questions.

The singular focus for the researcher was centered on the confirmatory scientific method, which focuses on testing a theory with specific data (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 17). The quantitative research design aligns with the confirmatory method. Within quantitative research, the research designs can be experimental and nonexperimental. In experimental research, the independent variable is manipulated with random sampling. In nonexperimental research, participants are not randomly assigned into groups, and the independent variable is not manipulated (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Therefore, the researcher could not select a quantitative experimental research design because the independent variable (i.e., exposure to concentrated special education course work during an educational leadership program) could not be manipulated. The researcher selected the causal comparative research design, which is a nonexperimental quantitative design. In causal comparative research, the independent variable is difficult or impossible to manipulate because the intervention has occurred already (Schenker & Rumrill, Jr., 2004). The independent, or grouping, variable for each ANOVA was whether or not the principals received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. The three dependent variables were federal legislative knowledge, contextual knowledge, and foundational knowledge.



### Role of the Researcher

The researcher earned her B.S. in Psychology and M.Ed. in Counseling and Student and Development. An educational leadership endorsement was achieved by the researcher in addition to the director of special education add-on certification. The researcher also earned her Ed.S. in School Psychology. The professional experience of the researcher included serving as a director of student services, director of exceptional student education, afterschool coordinator, instructional coordinator, school psychologist, and a school counselor.

The role of the researcher in a quantitative research design is merely objective. The researcher did not have any personal relationships with any of the potential participants. The researcher might have had a professional relationship as a colleague of some potential participants in the state of Georgia, but the survey data were anonymous.

### Participants

The participants for this study consisted of current principals at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in the states of Georgia and Illinois. The inclusion criteria for Georgia participants included all educators who possessed educational leadership Tier 2 certification, which indicated the participants had the state criteria to become a principal. The participants from Georgia were selected because the researcher resided within the state. The inclusion criteria for Illinois participants included all educators with a PEL administrative endorsement. The researcher selected participants from the state of Illinois because the state legislature required all principal preparation programs to be redesigned in 2010 (White et al., 2016, p. 9). The purpose of the redesign was to ensure principals were prepared to be instructional leaders for all students, including students

with disabilities. The exclusion criteria included individuals with educational leadership certification working in other areas, former principals, and assistant principals in the states of Georgia and Illinois. The first question on the survey determined if the survey participants were current principals. The second question on the survey asked the participants to indicate the state where they were currently employed. A participant's data was deleted from the dataset if he or she did not meet the inclusion criteria.

The researcher conducted a G\*Power analysis to determine the approximate number of survey responses that should be received from Georgia and Illinois participants. The researcher considered several variables prior to conducting the G\*Power analysis. The researcher used .50 for Cohen's *d*, which represents a medium effect size, and .05 for the critical *p* value. The G\*Power analysis computations for two groups indicated the researcher needed a minimum of 34 participants (Buchner, Erdfelder, Faul, & Lang, 2007).

### Instrumentation

Frost (2010) developed a 41-item special education survey (Appendix A) to assess the instructional knowledge of principals and determine the amount of support they were able to provide to special education teachers. The survey was sectioned into four parts. The researcher did not utilize Section I, which contained the demographic items, and Section IV, which consisted of two open-ended items for principals to determine their perceptions regarding supporting special education teachers. The researcher utilized Section II and Section III of the survey, which consist of 33 Likert-type items. The Likert-type items had a five-point response scale with the middle selection representing a neutral option between opposing positive and negative choices

(Cooper & Johnson, 2016). In Section II of Frost's (2010) survey, the five-point response scale ranged from *limited* to *excellent*. In Section III, the response scale ranged from *never* to *always*. Likert-type items are usually designed to measure the opinions and attitudes of the participants completing the survey (Cooper & Johnson, 2016, p. 174). The researcher developed 16 demographic items (Appendix B), which resulted in 49 survey items. Table 1 displays those additional demographic items developed by the researcher. The answer choices are displayed as multiple-choice options, except item 4, which was open-ended.

Table 1

*Demographic Questions Developed by the Researcher*

Demographic Item	Answer choices
1. Are you a current principal? <i>Condition: If "No" is selected, participant will be skipped to the end of the survey.</i>	a) Yes b) No
2. What state are you currently employed in as a principal?	a) Georgia b) Illinois
3. Where did you receive your educational leadership degree or leadership certificate?	a) Georgia b) Illinois c) Other
4. If you are currently employed in the state of Illinois, when did you receive your educational leadership degree or leadership certificate?	Add your year <input type="text"/>
5. What is your gender?	a) Male b) Female
6. What is your highest educational level?	a) Leadership endorsement b) Master's Degree c) Educational Specialist d) Doctorate
7. What school level are you currently working in?	a) Elementary b) Middle c) High d) Alternative Education

Demographic Item	Answer choices
	e) Other (Blended or virtual)
8. How many years of experience do you have in education?	a) 0 - 5 b) 6 - 10 c) 11 - 15 d) 16 - up
9. How many years were you an assistant principal?	a) 0 - 5 b) 6 - 10 c) 11 - 15 d) 16 - up
10. As an assistant principal, were you responsible for supporting special education related issues?	a) Yes b) No
11. How many years of experience do you have as a principal?	a) 0 - 5 b) 6 - 10 c) 11 - 15 d) 16 - up
12. Have you ever been a special education teacher?	a) Yes b) No
13. Do you have special education certification?	a) Yes b) No
14. Did your educational leadership program include specific concentrated course work in special education (e.g., special education law and understanding the special education child)?	a) Yes b) No
15. Did your educational leadership program include an internship designated specifically for special education?	a) Yes b) No
16. Did your educational leadership program include integrated special education content across the curriculum (e.g., school law with a reference to special education law versus a designated course such as special education law)?	a) Yes b) No

The researcher obtained written approval via email from Dr. Lea Anne Frost on June 5, 2019, to use the survey in the study (see Appendix C). The development of the Frost's (2010) survey initially took shape beginning with the alignment of the research

questions and the conceptual framework of her dissertation (p. 70). Additional alignment for Section II and Section III and the first part of Section IV consisted of a collective integration of the research questions with the conceptual framework and the literature review. The remaining parts of Section IV focused on additional sections from Frost's review of literature and the conceptual framework. Once Frost's survey was completed using this process, the 41-item questionnaire was validated by three former principals with special education knowledge. During the validation process, Frost provided each of the three principals with a copy of the draft survey, the conceptual framework, and the survey validation form, which served as a guide to ensure alignment (p. 71). During the validation process, they were asked to rate each of the items to determine if the items should be retained, modified, or eliminated. If principals determined that an item needed to be modified, then principals were asked to indicate how they would change the item (Frost, 2010). In order for Frost (2010) to ensure face validity, the majority of the principals needed to support the item for it to remain on the survey. As a result of this process, suggestions were made for modifications in Section I. No other suggestions were made prior to the submission of the research to the university's IRB (Frost, 2010). Prior to analyzing the collected data, the researcher for the current study conducted reliability analyses using Cronbach's alpha to determine if internal consistency existed among the items within each scale. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .60 was considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). All three scales were deemed to be internally consistent with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .92 to .96. Table 2 displays the alpha coefficients for each scale by group.

Table 2

*Alpha Coefficients for the Scales by Group*

Scale	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work	Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work
Federal Legislative Knowledge	.95	.92
Conceptual Knowledge	.95	.95
Foundational Knowledge	.94	.96

## Data Collection

The researcher created a web-based version of Frost's (2010) survey using a Qualtrics platform. An anonymous link for the web-based survey was embedded within the recruitment email to principals in the states of Georgia and Illinois (Appendix D). The two most popular ways of collecting data are email surveys and web-based surveys (Granello & Wheaton, 2004). Advantages of utilizing these two methods of data collection versus the traditional paper and pencil method include the rapid response time, increased anonymity, lower cost effectiveness, and ease of data entry. With any advantages, disadvantages exist. Response rates were noted by Granello and Wheaton (2004) as a disadvantage and an advantage. Studies have reported a variety of response rates as they relate to email surveys versus web-based or paper-pencil surveys via postal mail. The response rate needed for this research indicated by the G\*power analysis was 34 (Buchner et al., 2007).

After the creation of the web-based version of Frost's (2010) survey utilizing the Qualtrics platform, the researcher completed the IRB application and received approval (Appendix E) on September 30, 2019. On September 30, 2019, the researcher requested access to the email addresses of all educators in the state of Georgia who possess

educational leadership Tier 2 certification, which indicated the participants had the state criteria to become a principal (DR-20190930-2). The researcher was informed that the Georgia Department of Education did not retain email addresses (M. Vignati, personal communication, October 1, 2019). On October 3, 2019, the approved IRB addendum was submitted to the GaPSC to request the email addresses directly from that organization. In response to the researcher's request, the GaPSC agreed to send three recruitment emails with the contingency that the researcher provide a summary of the findings after the final dissertation was approved (A. Gant, personal communication, October 4, 2019). A Columbus State University IRB modification form (Appendix F) was submitted and approved on October 4, 2019. In the state of Illinois, a data request for the email addresses of all individuals with the PEL administrative endorsement was submitted on September 30, 2019 utilizing the Freedom of Information Act process (F000404-093019). The database from the Freedom of Information Act was received on October 21, 2019, and the database consisted of 1,525 educators with a PEL administrative endorsement in various roles.

The recruitment emails for the states of Georgia and Illinois were disseminated at different times during the research process. The initial recruitment email was sent from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission from the noreply@gapsc.com email address using the subject line "This email is sent on behalf of a doctoral candidate" to 5,228 educators; however, between 500 and 1000 email addresses were expected to be undeliverable (A. Gant, personal communication, October 10, 2019). Embedded in the recruitment email was a link to the web-based version of Frost's (2010) survey with informed consent (Appendix G) included at the beginning of the survey. The recruitment

email for the Illinois participants was emailed to all individuals with a PEL with administrative endorsement over the course of three days, October 22, October 23, and October 24, 2019. Approximately 650 emails were undeliverable. If a participant did not want to complete the survey, he or she could respond “I do not agree” to the web-based informed consent. Only one respondent selected this option. In addition, any participant could end the web-based survey at any time by exiting his or her internet browser. The last item on the survey asked each participant to provide his or her name and email address if he or she was interested in being entered into a random drawing for a \$50 Macy’s or Starbuck’s gift card for completing the survey.

After 1 week, the GaPSC sent a follow-up email on behalf of the researcher (Appendix H) to Georgia educators with Tier 2 certification on October 16, 2019, and the researcher sent the follow-up email (Appendix H) to the PEL administrative endorsement educators in Illinois on the three days between October 29 and October 31 to thank the participants again for their time and ask them to complete the survey if they had not had an opportunity to complete it. The final recruitment email (Appendix I) sent by the GaPSC on behalf of the researcher went out a week later on October 23, 2019, once again thanking participants for their time and asking the participants to complete the survey if they have not had the opportunity to complete it. Educators in Illinois received their final recruitment email (Appendix I) between November 5 and November 7, 2019 to thank them for their time and asking them to complete the survey if they had not had an opportunity to complete the survey.



## Data Analysis

At the end of the data collection process, the researcher downloaded the raw survey data into a SPSS file for data analysis. The researcher initially filtered all responses to include data from current principals only. The researcher's next step in the data analysis process involved the coding of the demographic items and Frost's (2010) survey items. Table 3 displays the dummy coding for the demographic items. Frost's survey items in Section II were dummy coded with 1 representing *limited*, 2 representing *modest*, 3 representing *average*, 4 representing *good*, and 5 representing *excellent*. Frost's survey items in Section III were also dummy coded with 1 representing *never*, 2 representing *seldom*, 3 representing *often*, 4 representing *frequently*, and 5 representing *always*.

Table 3

### *Dummy Coding for Demographic Items*

Demographic Items	Answer choices	Coding
1. Are you a current principal? <i>Condition: If "No" is selected, participant will be skipped to the end of the survey.</i>	a) Yes b) No	A = 1 B = 0
2. What state are you currently employed in as a principal?	a) Georgia b) Illinois	A = 1 B = 2
3. Where did you receive your educational leadership degree or leadership certificate?	a) Georgia b) Illinois c) Other	A = 1 B = 2 C = 3
4. If you are currently employed in the state of Illinois, when did you receive your educational leadership	Add your year <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	open-ended

Demographic Items	Answer choices	Coding
degree or leadership certificate?		
5. What is your gender?	a) Male b) Female	A = 1 B = 2
6. What is your highest educational level?	a) Leadership certificate b) Master's Degree c) Educational Specialist d) Doctorate	A = 1 B = 2 C = 3 D = 4
7. What school level are you currently working in?	a) Elementary b) Middle c) High d) Alternative Education e) Other (Blended or virtual)	A = 1 B = 2 C = 3 D = 4 E = 5
8. How many years of experience do you have in education?	a) 0 - 5 b) 6 - 10 c) 11 - 15 d) 16 - up	A = 1 B = 2 C = 3 D = 4
9. How many years were you an assistant principal?	a) 0 - 5 b) 6 - 10 c) 11 - 15 d) 16 - up	A = 1 B = 2 C = 3 D = 4
10. As an assistant principal, were you responsible for supporting special education related issues?	a) Yes b) No	A = 1 B = 0
11. How many years of experience do you have as a principal?	a) 0-5 b) 6-10 c) 11-15 d) 16-up	A = 1 B = 2 C = 3 D = 4
12. Have you ever been a special education teacher?	a) Yes b) No	A = 1 B = 0
13. Do you have special education certification?	a) Yes b) No	A = 1 B = 0
14. Did your educational leadership program include specific concentrated course	a) Yes b) No	A = 1 B = 0

Demographic Items	Answer choices	Coding
work in special education (e.g., special education law and understanding the special education child)?		
15. Did your educational leadership program include an internship designated specifically for special education?	a) Yes b) No	A = 1 B = 0
16. Did your educational leadership program include integrated special education content across the curriculum (e.g., school law with a reference to special education law versus a designated course such as special education law)?	a) Yes b) No	A = 1 B = 0

The researcher conducted a series of one-way ANOVAs to analyze the data that were collected from the participants. ANOVAs are used when comparing the difference of means for two or more groups that consist of one or more independent variables (Field, 2016). A series of one-way ANOVAs was used for this study (Field, 2016). Field (2016) referenced that an advantage of using an ANOVA is the ability to measure the outcomes of more than one independent variable and the effects of those variables (Field, 2016, p. 625). The researcher utilized demographic item #14 to create two groups (i.e., participants who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and participants who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education). A grouping variable was created and dummy coded using 1 for participants who received course

work in special education and 2 for participants who did not receive concentrated course work in special education. This dummy coded variable served as the independent variable for each analysis. For Research Question #1, the dependent variable was federal legislative knowledge. For Research Question #2, the dependent variable was contextual knowledge. For Research Question #3, the dependent variable was foundational knowledge.

### Summary

The purpose of Chapter III was to explain in detail the research design, the role of the researcher, and the participants. The researcher included the selection process for the participants in the states of Georgia and Illinois, as well as the instrumentation that was utilized to collect the data from the participants. The researcher used a web-based version of Frost's (2010) survey via a Qualtrics platform, which was sent via email to participants. The data were analyzed in SPSS using a series of one-way ANOVAs. Chapter IV will present the results of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

A problem exists with how educational leadership programs are preparing aspiring principals as instructional leaders to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. The role of the principal evolved historically from preceptors to the singular role as principal with the initial responsibility of monitoring student examinations and the ringing of the bell (Rousmaniere, 2013). As the principal's role transformed, principals began to be known as the managers of the schools with the responsibilities now encompassing student discipline and the daily operations of the school building. The principal's role remained in this metamorphosis process as the principal began monitoring the pedagogical practices of teachers; however, the focus on the accountability for student outcomes changed after *A Nation At Risk* was published in the 1980s and the passage of the Improving America's School Act in 1994 (Nelson, 2016; Yell, Katsiyannas, et al., 2006). The accountability for the academic achievement of students with disabilities became the responsibility of principals with the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001 and IDEA 2004. These laws instantly thrust principals into the instructional leadership role for students with disabilities. Principals were now held accountable for the academic achievement of this new population of students who were in their buildings (Lynch, 2012). In addition, educational leadership programs were not preparing aspiring principals as instructional leaders for students with disabilities in the

general education setting. Educational leadership programs across the United States began the process of revamping their programs of study to prepare principals to become instructional leaders in their school buildings, but course work to address the academic achievement of students with disabilities was missing from most programs. Aspiring principals were graduating from educational leadership programs unprepared to provide instructional support for students with disabilities (Levine, 2005). The course work at some educational leadership programs might consist of one or two special education courses within their programs of study; however, having an option to participate in at least one special education course was not the case for most educational leadership programs (McHatton et al., 2010). The purpose of this research was to examine the difference in the attitudes and beliefs of principals who attended an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who attended an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education. This chapter will outline the results of this causal comparative quantitative research study.

### Participants

The administration of the researcher's survey began in the state of Georgia on October 10, 2019, when the recruitment email and survey link were emailed to all educators in the state of Georgia with Tier 2 certifications by the GaPSC. The second email was sent on October 16, 2019, and the last email was sent on October 23, 2019. In the state of Illinois, the initial email was sent to 1,527 candidates with a PEL administrative endorsement. The initial recruitment occurred over the course of three days (i.e., October 22 through October 24, 2019). The second round of emails were sent

out between the dates of October 29 and October 31, 2019, with the last round of emails being sent between the dates of November 5 and November 7, 2019. The researcher received 457 responses, including 442 participants from Georgia and 15 participants from Illinois. The number of validated cases (i.e., without missing data) from both states was 105 with 91 of those responses from Georgia and the remaining 14 responses from Illinois.

Responses within the following tables were derived from the researcher's demographic items. The researcher utilized the responses from Question 14 as the grouping variable for this study. Question 14 asked participants to indicate if their educational leadership program included concentrated special education course work. Of the 105 participants, 59 (56.2 %) indicated that they received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs and 46 (43.8%) indicated that they did not receive concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs.

The participants included 28 (47.5%) male and 31 (52.5%) females who received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. Within this group, 52 (88.2%) participants earned either an educational specialist degree or a doctoral degree. The remaining 11.9% of participants obtained either a master's degree or a leadership endorsement. The participants included 16 (34.8%) males and 30 (65.2%) females who did not receive concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. Within this group, 40 (87.0%) participants earned either an educational specialist degree or a doctoral degree. The remaining 13.0% of participants earned a master's degree.

Responses to the demographic items reflected on Table 4 indicate the majority (i.e., 71.2%) of participants who received special education course work during their educational leadership programs earned their leadership degree or certification in the state of Georgia. A small percentage (i.e., 8.5%) of the participants from Illinois received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. The data indicated 20.3% of participants received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs in the area denoted as “other”, which included the following states: Alaska, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, and Tennessee. The states of Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and Alabama were indicated by 28.3% of the participants who did not receive concentrated special education course work in their leadership programs.

Table 4

*Participants’ Responses on where They Obtained their Educational Leadership Degree*

State	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work		Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Georgia	42	71.2	31	67.4
Illinois	5	8.5	2	4.3
Other	12	20.3	13	28.3
Total	59	100.0	46	100.0

Participants indicated that they did not remain in the role of the assistant principal for an extended period of time; 64.8% of them rated they were an assistant principal for five years or less. Almost half of the participants ( $n = 37$ ) who were in the assistant principal role five years or less received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs compared to the participants ( $n = 31$ ) who



did not receive concentrated special education course work. The data revealed that very few participants (i.e., 6.7%) were assistant principals between 11 to 15 years and 28.6% of the participants remained in the assistant principal's role between 6 to 10 years. During their years as assistant principals, 91.4% of participants indicated that they were responsible for supporting special education related issues compared to the 8.6% of participants who indicated that they were not responsible for supporting this diverse group of students when they were assistant principals. These findings suggest that assistant principals with 11 or more years of experience did not have as many opportunities to participate in concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. The majority of the participants (i.e., 59%) were elementary principals. Within each group, nearly 60% of the participants were from the elementary level. Table 5 displays the frequencies and percentages for current school level by group.

Table 5

*Frequencies and Percentages for Current School Level by Group*

School Level	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work		Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Elementary	34	57.6	28	60.9
Middle	9	15.3	6	13.0
High	15	25.4	6	13.0
Alternative Education	1	1.7	1	2.2
Other (Blended or virtual)	0	0.0	5	10.9
Total	59	100.0	46	100.0

Most of the participants (i.e., 77.1%) who completed the survey had 16 or more years of experience in the field of education. Based on the demographic data, when the participants made their career transition from the role of assistant principal to the role of principal, 66.7% of the responding participants were within 0 to 5 years of their current principalship experience, 19% were within 6 to 10 years, 11.4% were within 11 to 15 years, and 2.9% had 16 and more years of experience. According to the data, 44 (74.6%) participants who were currently within their first five years of principalship attended educational leadership programs with concentrated special education course work offered in their program of study. In contrast, for participants with 16 or more years of experience in their current role, limited opportunities for concentrated special education course work during the educational leadership programs were available. Table 6 presents the frequencies and percentages for years of experience as principal by group.

Table 6

*Frequencies and Percentages for Years of Experience as Principal by Group*

Years	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work		Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
0 - 5	44	74.6	26	56.5
6 - 10	9	15.3	11	23.9
11 - 15	6	10.2	6	13.0
16 - up	0	0.0	3	6.5
Total	59	100.0	46	100.0

The responses indicated over 75% of participants in both groups were not previous special education teachers nor did they have any special education certification. Concentrated special education course work was provided to 79.7% of participants who

were not previous special education teachers. Participants who received concentrated special education course work indicated at a rate of 76.3% that special education certification was not a part of their educational leadership course work. The majority of participants in both groups were not special education teachers and did not have any special education certification. Table 7 displays the frequencies and percentages for previous special education experience.

Table 7

*Frequencies and Percentages for being a Special Education Teacher or a having Special Education Certification by Group*

	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work				Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work			
	<u>Special Education Teacher</u>		<u>Special Education Certification</u>		<u>Special Education Teacher</u>		<u>Special Education Certification</u>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	12	20.3	14	23.7	9	19.6	9	19.6
No	47	79.7	45	76.3	37	80.4	37	80.4
Total	59	100.0	59	100.0	46	100.0	46	100.0

### Findings

A causal comparative research design was utilized to answer the research questions. The survey asked participants various questions to rate their knowledge and involvement on evidence-based curriculum and to assess their understanding of federal laws, LRE, and the continuum of services they obtained during their educational leadership programs. The survey questions consisted of Likert-type items, which had a five-point response scale. The second section of the survey focused on the special education knowledge that participants received during their educational leadership

programs. The responses ranged from *limited* to *excellent*. The third section of the survey items examined the principals' level of involvement in special education related topics based on their experiences during their educational leadership programs. The responses for this section ranged from *never* to *always*. The answers to the research questions were based on the principals' responses from Section II.

#### Research Question 1

- 1) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?

$H_o$ : There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

$H_a$ : There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about federal legislative knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

The items within the Federal Legislative Knowledge Scale examined the legal knowledge related to special education (e.g., the NCLB Act and IDEA 2004). Levene's

Test for Equality of Variances was conducted to determine if the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. The result was not statistically significant ( $F = 0.51$ ;  $p = .48$ ), meaning the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for federal legislative knowledge. For participants who received concentrated special education course work, the mean response for the federal legislative knowledge items was 3.26 with a standard deviation of 1.08. For participants who did not receive concentrated special education course work, the mean response for the federal legislative knowledge items was 2.77 with a standard deviation of 0.97. The researcher utilized a one-way ANOVA to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the groups. Analysis of the means indicated there was a statistically significant difference in the area of federal legislative knowledge ( $F = 5.90$ ;  $p = .02$ ); therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Participants who received concentrated course work rated themselves knowledgeable on topics related to IDEA ( $M = 3.64$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ) and the NCLB Act ( $M = 3.51$ ;  $SD = 1.18$ ). Responses to items related to Section 504 ( $M = 3.12$ ;  $SD = 1.18$ ) and the ADA ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) were slightly lower. Participants who did not receive concentrated special education course work rated themselves more knowledgeable with IDEA ( $M = 3.15$ ;  $SD = 1.12$ ) and ADA ( $M = 2.91$ ;  $SD = 1.11$ ) topics than with Section 504 ( $M = 2.67$ ;  $SD = 1.18$ ). The data received from the participants indicated they rated their overall knowledge on IDEA higher compared to their overall mean regardless if they received concentrated course work in special education from their educational leadership programs or not. Table 8 displays the descriptives for the federal legislative

knowledge items by group, and Table 9 presents the frequencies and percentages for federal legislative knowledge items by group.

Table 8

*Descriptives for Federal Legislative Knowledge Items by Group*

Item	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work				Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>max</i>
IDEA	3.64	1.16	1	5	3.15	1.12	1	5
NCLB	3.51	1.18	1	5	2.89	1.12	1	5
504	3.12	1.18	1	5	2.67	1.18	1	5
ADA	3.15	1.22	1	5	2.91	1.11	1	5
Illinois	2.30	1.34	1	5	2.00	1.41	1	4
Georgia	3.14	1.17	1	5	2.40	1.13	1	4
LRE	3.14	1.31	1	5	2.61	1.26	1	5

Table 9

*Frequencies and Percentages for Federal Legislative Knowledge Items by Group*

Item	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work					Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work				
	L	M	A	G	E	L	M	A	G	E
IDEA	3 (5.1%)	7 (11.9%)	14 (23.7%)	19 (32.2%)	16 (27.1%)	5 (10.9%)	6 (13.0%)	16 (34.8%)	15 (32.6%)	4 (8.7%)
NCLB	5 (8.5%)	5 (8.5%)	17 (28.8%)	19 (32.2%)	13 (22.0%)	6 (13.0%)	9 (19.6%)	19 (41.3%)	8 (17.4%)	4 (8.7%)
504	6 (10.2%)	11 (18.6%)	20 (33.9%)	14 (23.7%)	8 (13.6%)	8 (17.4%)	13 (28.3%)	15 (32.6%)	6 (13.0%)	4 (8.7%)
ADA	8 (13.6%)	8 (13.6%)	17 (28.8%)	19 (32.2%)	7 (11.9%)	5 (10.9%)	12 (26.1%)	14 (30.4%)	12 (26.1%)	3 (6.5%)
IL	3 (30.0%)	4 (40.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	1 (10.0%)	2 (50.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)
GA	6 (12.2%)	7 (14.3%)	15 (30.6%)	16 (32.7%)	5 (10.2%)	12 (28.6%)	10 (23.8%)	11 (26.2%)	9 (21.4%)	0 (0.0%)
LRE	6 (10.2%)	16 (27.1%)	13 (22.0%)	12 (20.3%)	12 (20.3%)	11 (23.9%)	12 (26.1%)	10 (21.7%)	10 (21.7%)	3 (6.5%)

*Note.* L = limited, M = modest, A = average, G = good, and E = excellent.

## Research Question 2

- 2) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about the contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?

*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about the contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about the contextual knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

The questions on contextual knowledge measured participants understanding of evidence-based instructional approaches for students with disabilities that are aligned with the state standards. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted to determine if the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. The result was not statistically significant ( $F = 0.12$ ;  $p = .73$ ), meaning the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for contextual knowledge. For participants who received concentrated special education, the mean response for the contextual knowledge items was 2.96 with a

standard deviation of 1.08. For participants who did not receive concentrated special education course work, the mean response for the contextual knowledge items was 2.50 with a standard deviation of 1.02. The researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA to analyze if there was a statistically significant difference between the groups. Analysis of the means indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the area of contextual knowledge ( $F = 4.36$ ;  $p = .04$ ); therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Participants from Georgia and Illinois who received concentrated special education course work responded high ( $M = 3.32$ ;  $SD = 1.04$ ) with understanding state learning standards for students with disabilities compared to the overall mean ( $M = 2.93$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ). Designing curriculum ( $M = 2.71$ ;  $SD = 1.29$ ) and understanding how to develop a plan for program improvement ( $M = 2.73$ ;  $SD = 1.23$ ) were low compared to the overall mean ( $M = 2.93$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ) in this broad area. Participants ( $M = 2.50$ ;  $SD = 1.02$ ) who did not receive any special education course work also rated themselves as knowledgeable about aligning state standards with students with disabilities ( $M = 2.74$ ;  $SD = 1.06$ ), which was high for this group, but designing a curriculum ( $M = 2.24$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ) was rated lower for this group of participants. Table 10 displays the descriptives for the contextual knowledge items by group, and Table 11 presents the frequencies and percentages for contextual knowledge items by group.



Table 10

*Descriptives for Contextual Knowledge Items by Group*

Item	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work				Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>max</i>
St. Stand	3.32	1.04	1	5	2.74	1.06	1	5
Instr. Pr	2.98	1.21	1	5	2.74	1.18	1	5
Aca. Ass	2.92	1.21	1	5	2.50	1.07	1	5
Des. Cur	2.71	1.29	1	5	2.24	1.10	1	4
Pro. Imp	2.73	1.30	1	5	2.37	1.14	1	5
IEP Eval	2.92	1.26	1	5	2.39	1.22	1	5

Table 11

*Frequencies and Percentages for Contextual Knowledge Items by Group*

Item	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work					Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work				
	L	M	A	G	E	L	M	A	G	E
St. Stand	4 (6.8%)	7 (11.9%)	20 (33.9%)	22 (37.3%)	6 (10.2%)	8 (17.4%)	8 (17.4%)	19 (41.3%)	10 (21.7%)	1 (2.2%)
Instr. Prac	10 (16.9%)	9 (15.3%)	16 (27.1%)	20 (33.9%)	4 (6.8%)	8 (17.4%)	12 (26.1%)	13 (28.3%)	10 (21.7%)	3 (6.5%)
Acad. Asses.	10 (16.9%)	10 (16.9%)	19 (32.2%)	15 (25.4%)	5 (8.5%)	10 (21.7%)	12 (26.1%)	16 (34.8%)	7 (15.2%)	1 (2.2%)
Desig Curr.	14 (23.7%)	12 (20.3%)	15 (25.4)	13 (22.0)	5 (8.5%)	16 (34.8%)	10 (21.7%)	13 (28.3%)	7 (15.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Prof. Impro	13 (22.0%)	12 (20.3%)	15 (25.4%)	16 (27.1%)	3 (5.1%)	12 (26.1%)	15 (32.6%)	11 (23.9%)	6 (13.0%)	2 (4.3%)
IEP Eval	11 (18.6%)	10 (16.9%)	17 (28.8%)	15 (25.4%)	6 (10.2%)	14 (30.4%)	12 (26.1%)	10 (21.7%)	8 (17.4%)	2 (4.3%)

*Note.* L = limited, M = modest, A = average, G = good, and E = excellent.

## Research Question 3

- 3) What is the difference in the attitudes and beliefs about the foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who

participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education?

*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is not a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about the foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a statistically significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs about the foundational knowledge between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in an educational leadership program without concentrated course work in special education.

The knowledge of understanding the LRE, the continuum of services, and related activities, such as placement and related services, were among the topics for foundational knowledge. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted to determine if the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. The result was not statistically significant ( $F = 0.00, p = .996$ ), meaning the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for foundational knowledge. For participants who received concentrated special education course work, the mean response for the foundational knowledge items was 3.09 with a standard deviation of 1.12. For participants who did not receive concentrated special education course work, the mean response for the foundational knowledge items was 2.52 with a standard deviation of 1.14. The researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA to analyze if there was a statistically significant difference between the groups.

Analysis of the means indicated there was a statistically significant difference in the area of foundational knowledge ( $F = 6.52$ ;  $p = .01$ ); therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Participants with special education course work rated their level of understanding with the LRE ( $M = 3.25$ ;  $SD = 1.21$ ) as high; whereas their understanding of related services ( $M = 2.85$ ;  $SD = 1.28$ ) was rated as low. Understanding the LRE ( $M = 2.74$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ) and the continuum of services ( $M = 2.61$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ) for participants ( $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) without concentrated special education course work was rated as high. Table 12 displays the descriptives for the foundational knowledge items by group, and Table 13 presents the frequencies and percentages for foundational knowledge items by group.

Table 12

*Descriptives for Foundational Knowledge Items by Group*

Item	With Concentrated Special Education Course Work				Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>max</i>
A-LRE	3.25	1.21	1	5	2.74	1.10	1	5
P-IEP	3.17	1.35	1	5	2.50	1.30	1	5
C-LRE	3.14	1.31	1	5	2.61	1.26	1	5
Place.	3.14	1.29	1	5	2.46	1.21	1	5
FBA	3.02	1.36	1	5	2.41	1.26	1	5
Rel. Svs	2.85	1.28	1	5	2.43	1.24	1	5

Table 13

*Frequencies and Percentages for Foundational Knowledge Items by Group*

Item	<u>With Concentrated Special Education Course Work</u>					<u>Without Concentrated Special Education Course Work</u>				
	L	M	A	G	E	L	M	A	G	E
A-LRE	6 (10.2%)	9 (15.3%)	18 (30.5%)	16 (27.1)	10 (16.9%)	7 (15.2%)	12 (26.1%)	15 (32.6%)	10 (21.7%)	2 (4.3%)
P-IEP	10 (16.9%)	8 (13.6%)	14 (23.7%)	16 (27.1%)	11 (18.6%)	13 (28.3%)	13 (28.3%)	7 (15.2%)	10 (21.7%)	3 (6.5%)
C-LRE	6 (10.2%)	16 (27.1%)	13 (22.0%)	12 (20.3%)	12 (20.3%)	11 (23.9%)	12 (26.1%)	10 (21.7%)	10 (21.7%)	3 (6.5%)
Place.	8 (13.6%)	11 (18.6%)	15 (25.4%)	15 (25.4%)	10 (16.9%)	13 (28.3%)	11 (23.9%)	12 (26.1%)	8 (17.4%)	2 (4.3%)
FBA	13 (22.0%)	7 (11.9%)	12 (20.3%)	20 (33.9%)	7 (11.9%)	16 (34.8%)	8 (17.4%)	10 (21.7%)	11 (23.9%)	1 (2.2%)
Rel. Svs	15 (25.4%)	4 (6.8%)	19 (32.2%)	17 (28.8%)	4 (6.8%)	15 (32.6%)	9 (19.6%)	10 (21.7%)	11 (23.9%)	1 (2.2%)

*Note.* L = limited, M = modest, A = average, G = good, and E = excellent.

Section III of the survey asked participants to rate their level of involvement based on the experience obtained during their educational leadership programs. Participants with concentrated special education course work indicated more involvement with conducting formal evaluations of special education teachers ( $M = 3.39$ ;  $SD = 1.31$ ), making informal classroom visits ( $M = 3.22$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ), and attending annual IEP meetings ( $M = 3.24$ ;  $SD = 1.18$ ). Conducting formal evaluations of teachers was rated higher for participants ( $M = 3.52$ ;  $SD = 1.31$ ) who did not receive concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. The process of hiring special education teachers ( $M = 3.17$ ;  $SD = 1.48$ ) and making informal visits to the special education classrooms ( $M = 3.17$ ;  $SD = 1.27$ ) were rated higher for participants who did not receive concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. Monitoring the alignment of IEPs to state standards ( $M = 2.69$ ;  $SD = 1.10$ ) and developing plans ( $M = 2.66$ ;  $SD = 1.11$ ) to improve the special education programs were rated lower in comparison to the items that focused on attending IEP

meetings and conducting formal evaluations for participants who received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. For those participants who did not receive concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs, their responses were also lower on monitoring the alignment of the IEPs to state standards ( $M = 2.61$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ) and improving special education through the development of programs ( $M = 2.63$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ).

The alignment of the responses from the participants who received concentrated course work in special education during their educational leadership programs versus participants who did not receive concentrated course work in special education during their educational leadership programs were similar. For those participants who did not receive concentrated special education course work, the results suggest a greater need of support for those participants compared to the participants who received concentrated special education course work. Specifically, with the research indicating that 66.7% of the participants indicated that they were within their first five years as a principal, and 59% of the participants indicated that they were working at the elementary level.

### Summary

Chapter IV allowed the researcher the opportunity to report on the findings of this study. The purpose of the study was to examine the differences in principals' attitudes and beliefs of their preparedness to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. More specifically, to address this broad topic, the researcher focused on three research questions to assess the special education knowledge that participants received during their educational leadership programs to prepare them for their new roles as principals. A series of one-way ANOVAs was conducted to answer the three research

questions using the data that were collected from a Qualtrics survey. The analysis of the group means indicated there were statistically significant differences in the areas of federal legislative knowledge ( $F = 5.909$ ;  $p = .02$ ), contextual knowledge, ( $F = 4.36$ ;  $p = .04$ ), and foundational knowledge ( $F = 6.52$ ;  $p = .01$ ) in participants' attitudes and beliefs regarding the concentrated course work in special education they received during their educational leadership programs. Therefore, the null hypotheses were rejected, and the alternative hypotheses were accepted. Chapter V will discuss these results and compare them with the current literature.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary of the Study

A problem exists with how educational leadership programs prepare aspiring principals as instructional leaders to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. As the principal's role made the significant transformation from manager to instructional leader with a focus on teacher pedagogical practices, an urgent examination and revamping of educational leadership programs took place across the nation (Barnett, 2004; Friend & Watson, 2014; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Pannell et al., 2015). The focus on accountability and student outcomes were solely placed on the general education population from the lens of the principal until the passage of the NCLB Act and IDEA 2004. Prior to the NCLB Act, students with disabilities could be excluded from standardized assessments by either their parents, teachers, or principals. The language in the NCLB Act focused on improved educational outcomes for all students in low performing subgroups and focused on access to the general education curriculum (Bland, 2014; Darrow, 2016; Koyama, 2011; Lynch, 2012; Macfarlane, 2012).

Principals are not prepared to support students with disabilities in the general education setting and, therefore, cannot provide support to their teachers (McHatton et al., 2010). Very few educational leadership programs contain course work pertaining to special education, and the majority of the programs do not offer any special education course work for principals. The researcher conducted a causal comparative quantitative

research study to examine the difference in the attitudes and beliefs of principals who participated in educational leadership programs with concentrated course work in special education and principals who participated in educational leadership program without concentrated special education course work.

#### Analysis of the Findings

A series of one-way ANOVAs was conducted to answer three research questions using data collected from a Qualtrics survey. Analysis of the group means indicated statistically significant differences in the attitudes and beliefs regarding federal legislative knowledge, contextual knowledge, and foundational knowledge of principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated special education course work compared to principals who participated in educational leadership programs without concentrated special education course work. Therefore, the null hypotheses were rejected, and the alternative hypotheses were accepted.

The results of this study aligned with the studies discussed in Chapter II. Cruzeiro and Morgan's (2006) and Loiacono and Palumbo's (2011) studies supported the researcher's results, which suggested principals who completed concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs have more knowledge to support students with disabilities. Over 80% of all participants were not former special education teachers nor did they have special education certification; however, the majority of the participants did work with the special education population as an assistant principal. Based on the demographic items, 43.8% of the participants did not receive any concentrated special education course work in their educational leadership programs. The literature has been clear on the need for educational leadership



programs to include special education course work to their programs of study (Christensen et al., 2013; Frost & Kersten, 2011; Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011; Lynch, 2016; McHatton et al., 2010; Praisner, 2003; Robert & Guerra 2017). In the Christensen et al. (2013) study, principals supported the need to add special education course work to the program of study for educational leadership programs. Lynch (2016) concluded in his study that states should include a certification criteria to require principal educational leadership programs to offer special education course work. Frost and Kersten's (2011) research recommended educational leadership programs include course work and field experiences in special education for principals.

Majority of the participants who completed the survey were elementary female principals from Georgia with a maximum of five years as a principal. Elementary school is typically the first-time students are identified as having a disability; therefore, principals should be prepared to provide support to teachers and students. Data from the responses in Section II and Section III indicated that although some educational leadership programs are offering concentrated course work in special education, the majority of the course work that the participants received was geared toward federal legislative knowledge instead of instructional designs to assist students with disabilities. Roberts and Guerra (2017) suggested educational leadership programs offer special educational course work in the area of legal knowledge. Loiacono and Palumbo (2011) found that principals who had previous training in special education related topics, more specifically applied behavior analysis, were more confident in their ability to support students with disabilities than their co-workers who did not have this previous training.

The shift to the role of instructional leader for students with disabilities with the passage of the NCLB Act and IDEA 2004 has put pressure on principals in terms of accountability. Educational leadership programs have revamped their programs of study for principals to change the focus from manager to instructional leader (Pannell et al., 2015). The state of Illinois included students with disabilities in their redesigning process (White et al., 2016). Seven participants were in an assistant principal role from 11 to 15 years, and 15 participants had been in their current role for 11 or more years, which suggests that participants might have been a part of a revamping process to change the role of the principal from manager to instructional leader. The focus for these participants could have been on becoming an instructional leader for students in the general population. These participants might not have completed educational leadership programs with concentrated special education course work and, therefore, would be unable to provide instructional support to teachers of students with disabilities. In terms of the principal's role shifting with the NCLB Act and IDEA 2004 and holding them accountable for the academic achievement of students with disabilities, this shift could have presented a challenge for these participants.

The conceptual framework presented in Chapter II discussed three broad areas: ELCC standards 2.0, 5.0, and 6.0, IDEA 2004, and educational leadership programs. The findings from this study aligned with these broad topics to bring a collective approach for preparing principals to become an instructional leader for all students. Of the 105 participants, 56.2% indicated that they received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs. Responses from the participants who received special education course work during their educational leadership program

indicated knowledge of federal legislation, more specifically IDEA 2004 ( $M = 3.64$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ), as higher compared to other topics within federal legislation knowledge compared to the overall mean ( $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ) of this area. Additionally, participants indicated that their knowledge about making accommodations according to the IEP ( $M = 3.25$ ;  $SD = 1.21$ ) and understanding the continuum of services ( $M = 3.14$ ;  $SD = 1.31$ ) as higher compared to the overall broad area of foundational knowledge ( $M = 3.09$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ). Participants indicated that they understood the state learning standards ( $M = 3.32$ ;  $SD = 1.04$ ) as the standards pertain to students with disabilities compared to their collective responses under the area of contextual knowledge ( $M = 2.93$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ).

The ELCC standards 2.0, 5.0, and 6.0 do not specifically outline student with disabilities; however, the language in the standards focuses on inclusiveness and the term “every student”, which would encompass students with disabilities. The ELCC standards are utilized as the application of the knowledge from IDEA 2004 that was obtained during educational leadership programs manifested into the school environment. The level of involvement with special education services reported by the participants aligned with standards 2.0, 5.0, and 6.0. Based on the responses, participants who attended educational leadership programs with concentrated special education course work were more involved with attending annual IEP meetings, conducting formal evaluations on special education teachers, and making informal classroom visits than participants who did not have the same concentrated special education course work. Standard 2.0 focuses on promoting student success by ensuring instructional programs are conducive for student learning through collaboration (NBEA, 2011, pp. 9-10). Attending the annual IEP meetings aligns with this standard as well as making informal classroom visits.

Standard 5.0 consists of principals promoting student success by ensuring a system of accountability for student's academic and social success (NBEA, 2011, p. 18). When principals conduct formal evaluations of special education teachers, they are monitoring and measuring the accountability for student academic and social successes. Advocating for students and families and being an active participant to decisions impacting student learning in the school environment are components of standard 6.0 (NBEA, 2011, p. 21). Principals who are involved in annual IEPs can advocate for students and families to impact student learning as well as making classroom visits to gauge the learning environment for students. The knowledge of IDEA 2004 from educational leadership programs allows principals the opportunity to be involved with instructional practices for students with disabilities and apply this knowledge to promote student success. When principals are able to access the special education knowledge gained during their educational leadership programs, the application of the ELCC standards 2.0, 5.0, and 6.0 will enable them to be an instructional leader for all students in their building. Hence, this conceptual framework is a synthesis of all three broad concepts interwoven together with the output as the instructional leader.

#### Limitations of the Study

The causal comparative design choice was a limitation of this study. This research design lacks random assignment and manipulation of the independent variable, which impacts the generalizability of the findings (Schenker & Rumrill, Jr., 2004). The researcher viewed the difference between the certification processes in Georgia and Illinois as a limitation. In the state of Georgia, the GaPSC oversees educator preparation instead of the Georgia Department of Education (GaPSC, 2018). In the state of Illinois,

the State Board of Education oversees educator preparation (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.). Another limitation was the small sample size from the state of Illinois ( $n = 14$ ). As a result of the small sample size, the researcher was not able to obtain a good representation of principals within that state. Utilizing only two states versus a variety of states was a limitation of the study. The addition of states from the northern, southern, mid-western, and western regions could increase the generalizability of the findings.

The demographic items, which excluded former principals and assistant principals, could limit the generalizability of the findings. The focus of this study was placed on current principals. Examining other experiences may have changed the results. Previous experience as a special education teacher was a limitation of the study. Of the 105 participants, 20% were previous special education teachers. The years of experience could be another limitation of the study because 66.7 % of the participants in the study had been in their current role for five years or less.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher was unable to obtain a big sample size in the state of Illinois; however, additional research should be conducted in the state to measure the outcome of the revamping process for educational leadership programs has had on aspiring principals to support students with disabilities. The focus of the research could measure the perceptions of principals and their effectiveness as an instructional leader for students with disabilities as a result of the educational leadership programs' intentional inclusion of special education course work. White et al. (2016) recommended in their study of Illinois legislative policy that additional research about principal preparation should

continue. This research could focus on the transition between the previous program and the new program and the impact on the university and the principal's day-to-day experiences.

Another study could focus on research at the educational leadership level to examine university and school district partnerships when preparing principals to support students with disabilities (Christensen et al., 2013; Frost & Kersten, 2011; Loiacono & Palumbo, 2011; Lynch, 2016; McHatton et al., 2010; Praisner, 2003; Robert & Guerra, 2017). The research could focus on the existing university and district partnerships and their success level as well as examining partnerships that have not been successful for the aspiring principal.

The researcher recommends additional information could be gained from adding a qualitative component to explore the principal's experiences within a classroom and school building. By utilizing a mixed method research study on this topic, the future research could focus the study on school district leaders (e.g., superintendents and assistant superintendents) and university leaders involved in the decision-making process for adding course work. Some research has already been conducted in this area, which further supports the importance of the university and district partnership. Brown-Ferrigno's (2011) research in Kentucky discussed the task force that was created to improve principal preparation programs by including the requirements of collaboration between the district and the university. This collaboration consisted of joint screening of candidates and co-delivering and co-developing of course work. The partnership included a signed agreement between both entities ensuring this collaboration (Brown-Ferrigno, 2011). Hernandez et al. (2012) also articulated the importance of the school

district and university partnership through their research of the collaboration between the University of Texas and the school districts.

Research at the school district level on the preparedness of principals to support students with disabilities could be an additional recommendation for future studies. Some school districts offer leadership development programs for aspiring assistant principals and aspiring principals. The research could examine if school district's professional development programs include a component for special education and determine the effectiveness of providing this training to potential and existing leaders if the component was included. This information could be beneficial for program improvement for aspiring assistant principals and aspiring principals.

#### Implications of the Study

Throughout this research study, the literature has been consistent; the majority of educational leadership programs are not preparing principals to support students with disabilities in the general education setting. Principals who are participating in educational leadership programs with special education course work in their programs of study are more prepared to begin their new roles as instructional leaders for all students. This study found a statistically significant difference in attitudes and beliefs of principals who received course work to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom during their educational leadership programs. Implications from this study suggest that educational leadership programs need to partner with school district leaders to brainstorm the essential real-world experiences that are vital in preparing aspiring principals to support students with disabilities in the general education setting.

Discussions could take place at the state level between the state superintendent and university leaders to take a global look at the preparation of principals and determine if it is applicable to today's real-world experience for the school principal, including how to understand the compliance portion of IDEA 2004 and how to support students with disabilities in the general education curriculum. Principals are entering their new roles with little to no support from their educational leadership programs on the topic of instructional practices for students with disabilities. The findings of this study indicated 64.8% of participants were in their roles as assistant principals for five years or less and 66.7% of participants had been in their current principal roles for five years or less. These findings suggest that principals are entering into their new roles very quickly with minimal experience. The evolution of the school principal has changed over the years, and educational leadership programs have not kept pace with this evolutionary process. In order to ensure principals are able to support their special education teachers, they need additional courses offered on the topic of students with disabilities during their educational leadership programs. Additional course work that is not solely focused on the legal issues pertaining to IDEA 2004, but also encompassing instructional support, could be helpful for the aspiring principal.

### Conclusion

This research process began with a focus on support for students with disabilities. Specifically, how will principals who are now known as the instructional leader provide support for this population of students whom they have not had the training to support? The NCLB Act and IDEA 2004 outlined accountability measures and ensured equal access is being provided to students with disabilities. The majority of educational



leadership programs revamped their programs of study to shift from managerial to instructional leader; however, the focus has been on the general education population. A few educational leadership programs might offer either one or two courses related to special education. The findings of this study revealed that there was a difference in the attitudes and beliefs of principals who received concentrated special education course work during their educational leadership programs in the broad areas of federal legislative, contextual knowledge, and foundational knowledge. The literature supported these findings in addition to the need for educational leadership programs to offer special education course work in their programs of study for aspiring principals. Until educational leadership programs are able to provide this level of support, school districts that are able to provide more flexibility could develop their own special education program for assistant principals who are aspiring to become principals. School districts ultimately have the responsibility to prepare their staff if they believe a weakness or deficit exists. A school district could reach out to the nearest university to partner with them to provide a series of professional learning opportunities for principals and aspiring principals. When educators collaborate, a solution can be found because, in the end, the purpose should be to provide support for all students.

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APPENDICES



## Appendix A

## Frost (2010) Survey Items

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
State learning standards for students with disabilities

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
The most effective instructional practices for students with disabilities

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Academic assessments for students with disabilities

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
How to accommodate for the academic need for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
How to design curriculum for students with disabilities

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
How to develop a plan for program improvement in special education

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
How student IEPs are evaluated by staff in your school

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Parent's role in developing the IEP

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Special education provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Components of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) that effect public schools

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good

Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Components of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that effect public schools

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Special education rules and regulations contained in the Illinois Administrative Code  
*(this question is only displayed if the participant selected "Illinois" as the state of current employment)*

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Special education rules and regulations contained at the Georgia Department of Education  
*(this question is only displayed if the participant selected "Georgia" as the state of current employment)*

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Your district's special education continuum from least to most restrictive

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Your district's Response to Intervention (RtI) plan

Limited  
Modest  
Average  
Good  
Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Your district's educational placement procedure for special education

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Your district's disciplinary interventions and supports for students with disabilities, such as functional behavior assessments, behavior intervention plans, and manifestation determinations

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Please rate your knowledge from your educational leadership program on:  
Your district's related services delivery model (social work, speech, occupational therapy, etc)

- Limited
- Modest
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Hiring special education teachers

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Monitoring student IEPs

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Attending annual IEP meetings for individual students

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Reviewing annually special education workload assignments to ensure an adequate amount of staff is retained

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Monitoring the implementation of federal and state special education requirements

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Attending annually professional development related to legal issues in special education

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Attending pre-referral meetings of the school-based service team

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Encouraging parents of students with disabilities to participate in school functions

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Conducting formal evaluations of special education teachers

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Arranging monthly activities that build collegiality between special and general education staff

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Monitoring alignment of IEPs to state learning standards

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Planning program improvement for special education programs and services

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Making weekly informal visits to special education classrooms

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Attending team meetings with special education staff to discuss concerns

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Indicate your level of involvement based on your experience from your educational leadership program in:

Monitoring special education curriculum to ensure that it is research or evidence based

- Never
- Seldom
- Often
- Frequently
- Always

Please type your name and email address if you would like to be entered into a random drawing for a \$50 Starbucks or Macy's gift card.

## Appendix B

## Demographic Items

1. Are you a current principal?

Yes

No

*Condition: If "No" is selected, participant will be skipped to the end of the survey.*

2. What state are you currently employed in as a principal?

Georgia

Illinois

3. Where did you receive your educational leadership degree or leadership certificate?

Georgia

Illinois

Other

4. If you are currently employed in the state of Illinois, when did you receive your educational leadership degree or leadership certificate?

Add your year

5. What is your gender?

Male

Female

6. What is your highest educational level?

Leadership certificate

Master's Degree

Educational Specialist

Doctorate

7. What school level are you currently working in?

Elementary

Middle

High

Alternative Education

Other (Blended or virtual)

8. How many years of experience do you have in education?

0-5

6-10



11-15  
16-up

9. How many years were you an assistant principal?

0-5  
6-10  
11-15  
16-up

10. As an assistant principal, were you responsible for supporting special education related issues?

Yes  
No

11. How many years of experience do you have as a principal?

0-5  
6-10  
11-15  
16-up

12. Have you ever been a special education teacher?

Yes  
No

13. Do you have special education certification?

Yes  
No

14. Did your educational leadership program include specific concentrated course work in special education (e.g. special education law and understanding the special education child)?

Yes  
No

15. Did your educational leadership program include an internship integrated specifically for special education?

Yes  
No

16. Did your educational leadership program include integrated special education content across the curriculum (e.g. school law with a reference to special education law versus a designated course such as special education law)?

Yes  
No

## Appendix C

## Written Approval to Use Survey from Dr. Frost

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**From:** Lea Anne Frost  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 5, 2019 2:51 AM  
**To:** Debra23  
**Cc:** Jennifer L. Brown, PhD  
**Subject:** Re: Request permission to use your survey

Greetings Debra,  
Of course you have my permission! It is an honor for me to be asked! Please let me know if there is anything further that you need!  
Best wishes on your studies!

*Lea Anne Frost, Ed. D.  
Park Ridge-Niles School District 64  
Director of Student Services  
164 S. Prospect Ave  
Park Ridge, IL 60068*

On Tue, Jun 4, 2019 at 10:41 PM Debra23 <delaine\_debra@columbusstate.edu> wrote:  
Dr. Frost,

My name is Debra Delaine and I am currently the Director of Exceptional Student Education in Henry County Schools, in McDonough, Georgia. I am also a doctoral student at Columbus State University under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer L. Brown. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for verbally granting me permission to utilize your survey in my dissertation. As I stated to you on the phone earlier, I would email you to formally ask your permission to utilize your survey in my study.

I briefly shared with you the purpose of my study, which is to examine the difference in the attitudes and beliefs of principals who participated in an educational leadership program with an embedded special education component integrated throughout the curriculum and principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated special education courses in their program of study in addition to a special education internship.

After reading your article with Mr. Kersten, "The Role of the Elementary Principal in the Instructional Leadership of Special Education" and looking at the survey you utilized in your study, I feel confident your survey will assist me in my research. Therefore, may I use your survey in my study?

Thank you again for your consideration,  
Debra Delaine

## Appendix D

## Initial Recruitment Email

Dear Principal,

My name is Debra Delaine, and I am currently the Director of Student Services and previously the Director of Exceptional Student Education. I am also a current doctoral candidate at Columbus State University. The purpose of my dissertation is to examine the difference in the attitudes and beliefs between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with an embedded special education component integrated throughout the curriculum and principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated special education courses in the program of study in addition to a special education internship.

I am emailing to ask your permission to complete an electronic web-based survey to provide information about your educational leadership programs as it relates to your preparation to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. If you choose to participate in the survey, your answers will remain confidential, and your identity anonymous. Your identity will not be attached to the survey. The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions or comments about this survey, please feel free to contact me at [debra\\_delaine@columbusstate.edu](mailto:debra_delaine@columbusstate.edu) or my chairperson, Dr. Jennifer Brown, at [brown\\_jennifer2@columbusstate.edu](mailto:brown_jennifer2@columbusstate.edu). Once I receive your completed survey, there will be an opportunity for you to be entered into a random drawing. Complete the last item on the survey to be entered to win a \$50 gift card for Macy's or Starbucks, whichever the participant selects. I will randomly select 10 winners. Thank you in advance for your participation. The survey link is below.

Debra Delaine  
Doctoral Candidate  
Columbus State University

## Appendix E

## IRB Approval Email

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**From:** CSU IRB  
**Sent:** Monday, September 30, 2019 10:34 AM  
**To:** Debra23; Jennifer L. Brown  
**Cc:** Institutional Review Board; CSU IRB  
**Subject:** Protocol 20-012 Exempt Approval

Institutional Review Board  
Columbus State University

Date: 09/30/2019  
Protocol Number: 20-012'  
Protocol Title: Difference Between Principals' Attitudes and Beliefs of their  
Preparedness to Support Students with Disabilities in the General Education Setting  
Principal Investigator: Debra Delaine  
Co-Principal Investigator: Jennifer Brown

Dear Debra Delaine:

The Columbus State University Institutional Review Board or representative(s) has reviewed your research proposal identified above. It has been determined that the project is classified as exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations and has been approved. You may begin your research project immediately.

Please note any changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu) or (706) 507-8634.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,

Manasa Mamidi, Graduate Assistant

Institutional Review Board  
Columbus State University

## Appendix F

## IRB Modification Approval Email

---

**From:** CSU IRB  
**Sent:** Friday, October 4, 2019 12:19 PM  
**To:** Jennifer L. Brown  
**Cc:** Debra23  
**Subject:** Re: IRB modification form for 20-012

The submitted modification requests for Protocol 20-012 have been approved by the IRB. Please note any further changes to the protocol must be submitted in writing to the IRB before implementing the change(s). Any adverse events, unexpected problems, and/or incidents that involve risks to participants and/or others must be reported to the Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu) or (706) 507-8634.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the IRB.

Sincerely,

Manasa Mamidi, Graduate Assistant

Institutional Review Board  
Columbus State University

## Appendix G

### Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Debra Delaine, a student in the Curriculum and Leadership at Columbus State University. I am under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer L. Brown, Director of Doctoral Program in Education.

#### **I. Purpose:**

The purpose of this project is to examine the difference in the attitudes and beliefs between principals who participated in an educational leadership program with an embedded special education component integrated throughout the curriculum and principals who participated in an educational leadership program with concentrated special education courses in the program of study in addition to a special education internship.

#### **II. Procedures:**

In the state of Georgia, the researchers will utilize a database available through the Georgia Professional Standards Commission to access the email addresses of all educators who possess educational leadership Tier 2 certification. In the state of Illinois, email addresses of all educators with a professional educator license with administrative endorsement will be obtained using a Freedom of Information Act request through the Illinois Department of Education. All participants will receive a recruitment email requesting their participation in the study. Embedded in the recruitment email will be an anonymous link to the web-based survey using Qualtrics. After 1 week, the researchers will send a follow-up email thanking participants for their time and asking them to complete the survey. An additional follow-up email will be sent 1 week later to again thank participants for their time and ask again for their participation. Participants will have 3 weeks to complete the survey, which will take less than 20 minutes in duration to complete. There is a possibility the researchers will utilize these data for future research projects.

#### **III. Possible Risks or Discomforts:**

There are not any known level of risks or discomforts with this study.

#### **IV. Potential Benefits:**

There are not any potential benefits to the participants of the study; however, a potential contribution of the study is to bring awareness and change to educational leadership programs and their concentration of students with special needs.

#### **V. Costs and Compensation:**

The last item on the survey will ask each participant to provide his or her name and email address if he or she is interested in being entered into a random drawing for a \$50 Macy's or Starbuck's gift card for completing the survey.

**VI. Confidentiality:**

The survey will be created using a web-based survey application, Qualtrics. The Qualtrics software creates a Response ID, which is randomly generated for each participant. The IP address, which derives from the user's computer or network, will be recorded, but the email address will not be recorded because the recruitment emails to participate will include an anonymous link. Once the raw data are downloaded from Qualtrics, the IP addresses will be deleted from the dataset. After the random drawing for the survey incentives, the participants' names and email addresses will be deleted from the dataset. The researcher will ensure that the participants' confidentiality are maintained by using a password-protected laptop at the Principal Investigator's home to store the electronic files. The data will be stored for 1 year after the dissertation publication, then it will be permanently deleted from the Principal Investigator's laptop and Qualtrics storage. The data will be accessed by the Principal Investigator and the Co-Principal Investigator only.

**VII. Withdrawal:**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and your withdrawal will not involve penalty or loss of benefits.

For additional information about this research project, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Debra Delaine at [REDACTED] or [delaine\\_debra@columbusstate.edu](mailto:delaine_debra@columbusstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Columbus State University Institutional Review Board at [irb@columbusstate.edu](mailto:irb@columbusstate.edu).

I have read this informed consent form. If I had any questions, they have been answered. By selecting the *I agree* radial and *Submit*, I agree to participate in this research project.

- I agree.
- I do not agree.

**Submit**

## Appendix H

## Second Recruitment Email

Dear Principal,

My name is Debra Delaine, and I am currently the Director of Student Services, previously the Director of Exceptional Student Education. I am also a current doctoral candidate at Columbus State University. Approximately a week ago, I emailed you requesting your participation in a web-based survey seeking information about your educational leadership programs on their preparation of principals to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

If you have already completed the web-based survey, please accept my sincere thanks. If not, I encourage you to consider completing it today. Your information is valuable in allowing me to examine the difference between educational leadership programs and the embedded special education program of study versus the concentrated special education course work and internship. I am very grateful for your help.

Thank you in advance for your participation, if you have any questions you can contact me at [delaine\\_debra@columbusstate.edu](mailto:delaine_debra@columbusstate.edu). As a reminder, all completed surveys can be entered into a random survey to win a \$50 gift card to Macy's or Starbuck's. The survey link is provided again for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Debra Delaine  
Doctoral Candidate  
Columbus State University



## Appendix I

## Third Recruitment Email

Dear Principal,

My name is Debra Delaine, and I am currently the Director of Student Services, previously the Director of Exceptional Student Education. I am also a current doctoral candidate at Columbus State University. Two weeks ago, I sent you an email requesting your participation in a web-based survey seeking information about your educational leadership programs on their preparation of principals to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

If you have already completed the web-based survey, please accept my sincere thanks. If not, I encourage you to consider completing it as soon as you can. The survey will only be available until October 21, 2019. The survey should take less than 20 minutes to complete.

Thank you in advance for your participation, if you have any questions you can contact me at [delaine\\_debra@columbusstate.edu](mailto:delaine_debra@columbusstate.edu). As a reminder, all completed surveys can be entered into a random survey to win a \$50 gift card to Macy's or Starbuck's. The survey link is provided again for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Debra Delaine  
Doctoral Student  
Columbus Georgia