

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF
LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND TRAINING ON
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

by

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A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, especially my twin daughters, Chelsea and Cierra. You have been with me through this entire journey and never once waived in your support. You continued to encourage me even when I thought it was best to end my doctoral pursuit to attend to other things. Your patience and understanding have been appreciated since day one. My struggles became your strengths and made the two of you strong, intelligent and confident young women. Always know that you can achieve whatever your hearts' desire. Stay strong in your faith as I did, and you will take this world by storm. I love you, ladybugs.

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A Case Study Analysis: Assessing the Impact of Leadership Practices and Training on Student Achievement in Special Education Programs

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ABSTRACT

Special education has mystified and alarmed educators, parents, politicians and the government for decades. Mediocre special education programs, staggering test scores and limited progress towards meeting standards have caused the federal government to require states to implement several mandates. Despite the federal and state mandates the problem has not been resolved. If anything, the problem has been exacerbated. School leaders have been inundated with new responsibilities placing added pressure on themselves, educators and students. All while students with disabilities continue to struggle to meet reading and math standards. The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership style and formal training of special education school leaders to determine the impact on the academic achievement of students with special needs. A single case study from Denver, and two case studies from Florida were analyzed for this case study analysis. Results from the study showed an increasing need to improve administrative leadership certification programs to better prepare school leaders to evaluate and assess the needs of special education programs. The results also revealed that when school leaders have the education and training to lead effective inclusive schools, student achievement improves.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Special education continues to be a political debate despite initiatives to decrease the educational gap in mathematics and reading for students with disabilities and improve special education programs across the nation. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2010) reading and math data for students in grades 4, 8 and 12 showed a slight improvement in the achievement gap when compared to the 2004 and 2008 NAEP results. Further review of the Nation's Report Card for the 2013 NAEP Math and Reading Assessments "showed students performed at higher levels on the 4th and 8th grade assessments (compared to previous test results between 1990-2013)" (p. 1). One exception showed a decline in 4th grade reading results in 2011 (NAEP, 2013, p. 1). Recent NAEP results (2015) revealed students performed slightly lower in math across the 4th and 8th grades. On the other hand, students in grade 4 neither grew nor declined in reading, while 8th graders slightly declined (NAEP, 2015). These results suggest a growing number of students are proficient in basic reading and math skills; however, for students with disabilities, their scores indicate below proficiency in both reading and math despite some growth.

According to DiPaola & Walther-Thomas (2003), for more than a quarter of a century, schools have been challenged to meet both the regulations and the essence of federal laws regarding the education of students with disabilities (p. 3). In doing so, special education has progressed from predominantly segregated learning environments often characterized by low academic expectations, socially isolated students, and poorly aligned and in some cases, nonexistent curricula, to environments that support advanced student expectations, mainstreaming, and curricula that is more aligned to the general education curriculum.

Today, special education is viewed less as a specialized placement and more as an “integrated system of academic and social supports designed to help students with disabilities succeed within least restrictive environments (LRE)” (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 3). For most students with disabilities, this means that the vast majority of their learning takes place in general education classrooms (U. S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2001). To some degree, this presents problems for students who are unable to maintain success and require alternative programs or placements to meet their needs. On the other hand, school leaders and teachers are left with the daunting task of ensuring the students receive a free and appropriate public education as part of IDEA (2004). This study seeks to examine how leadership practices and training impact the academic achievement of students with disabilities.

1.1 Effects of Political and School-based Initiatives on Special Education Program

In addition to the legislative battle over who should have control of K-12 educational facilities, our nation has also embraced a comprehensive set of school-based reforms designed to improve the overall performance of special education programs. Virtually all states have adopted some form of comprehensive academic standards. As new federal mandates continue, states are implementing corresponding measures that “hold students and professionals accountable for higher performance” (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 3). These high-stakes measures are affecting critical dimensions of school life, such as “grade promotion, graduation, professional tenure, and school and district accreditation” (p. 5).

To ensure students with disabilities continued to receive a quality education commensurate with their peers, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) “required every state to have in effect policies and procedures to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001,

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, para. 1). At the same time, IDEA mandated that “all students with disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum and participate in assessments” (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 5).

As federal and state expectations escalate, not only are school districts faced with mounting pressure to improve student outcomes by ensuring “all students are college and career ready” (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 2). They are also faced with increased pressure to improve special education programs in order to facilitate student academic success in reading and math. Early research has focused on instruction as being the key factor to improving achievement for students with disabilities. However, recent studies have shown a correlation between leadership practices and student achievement. It is common knowledge that special education programs are measured by the academic achievement of their students, causing many programs to be considered mediocre. Additional factors must be considered as education leaders, legislators, and the federal government look to reform special education programs to improve the academic achievement for students with disabilities.

1.2 Leadership Practices and Student Achievement

Principal leadership in school reform has become increasingly more important to the overall success of school programs. A study steered by Waters, Marzano & Naulty (2003) concluded that an essential trait of successful schools is educational leadership. DiPaola & Walther-Thomas (2003) also recognized that “effective principals are capable instructional leaders and skilled site-based managers and that their leadership is pivotal for the improvement of educational opportunities for all students, especially those with learning disabilities” (p. 6). It was also noted in *Implementing IDEA: A Guide for Principals* that certain personal characteristics of principals such as “values, beliefs, and personal characteristics” motivate

employees to partake in achieving an organization's mission (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001, p. 25).

Researchers have long acknowledged that education leaders are working under strenuous conditions due to federal and state regulations. As a result, principals are left to respond to diversity in student characteristics, including cultural background, poverty, physical and mental disabilities, and variation in disability capacities. In addition, principals are being "held accountable for how well teachers teach and how much students learn" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 2). Substantial quantifiable studies of schools concluded that the impact of leadership on academic learning may be minimal, but educationally quite significant. Research conducted by Leithwood & Riehl (2003) established that leadership accounted for "three to five percent of the variation in student learning across schools" (p. 2). Although leadership is considered an indirect impact, the influence on student learning is achieved through promotion of school vision, goals and instruction.

1.3 Leadership Training and Student Achievement

Studies have shown that creating nurturing, comprehensive, learning environments for all students can be a perplexing undertaking. Educators have been unsuccessful in managing this task and thus have adversely affected the special needs population. In a report authorized by the Presidential Commission on the Excellence of Special Education, it was concluded that "increased leadership responsibilities and a renewed focus on accountability have significantly impacted school leaders' ability to effectively manage special education programs" (U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2002, p. 27). The report further concluded that school leaders were left with little time to assess and evaluate

special education programs and often relied on updates from others who had a direct link in the school.

Garrison-Wade, Sobel & Fulmer (2007) concluded that training programs did not adequately prepare school leaders to supervise special education programs. The study determined that the training consisted of providing basic knowledge of student disabilities, special education law and behavior management. In addition, the results showed the training lacked content on compliance and procedural issues as mandated by IDEA. The results also showed training was deficient in instructional strategies and other intervention tools required to facilitate student growth.

1.4 Background of the Problem

Previous education initiatives designed to help disadvantaged students and students with disabilities have made little impact on the achievement gap. According to Cooner, Tochtermann & Garrison-Wade (ND) “educational leadership is ranked the number one key variable associated with effective schools, but the principal of an effective school must be the leader for all programs within the school including special education services” (p. 1). Special education programs have lacked strong leadership and in the past, did not receive the same attention or funding as other programs.

In an era of school accountability and reformation, the roles of administrators, school leaders and teachers have significantly changed. There has been a renewed focus on teacher improvement and a more defined emphasis on improving student outcomes. Lynch (2012) stated that as “pressure mounts for school systems to raise students’ academic proficiency, principals face greater challenges and the role of the instructional leadership becomes more crucial,

especially for students with disabilities in rural settings” (Lynch, 2012, p. 41). For school systems that experience excessive rates of poverty and large populations of students with disabilities, these changes are more significant and can have a negative impact on student achievement.

According to Murphy & Datnow (2003), “school leaders play a significant role in shaping special education culture in addition to shaping school culture so teachers can teach and students can learn” (p. 86). Consequently, school leaders have vocalized how their knowledge, skills, and abilities have not adequately prepared them for the role of being a special education leader. In an article written by Garrison-Wade et al. (2007), “Inclusive Leadership: Preparing Principals for the Role that Awaits them”, research results concluded that school leaders lacked preparation for implementing programs for students with disabilities. Survey results showed administrators reported being “ill-prepared for the job and cited difficulties with role clarification and job specialization” (p. 118). This would indicate the need for additional training before and after the school leader assumes the role of being a special education leader.

As school leaders grapple with role identification, teachers are experiencing similar pressure to meet highly qualified status as mandated by NCLB (2001) as well as state accountability measures. According to Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler (2010):

For almost a decade, accountability measures for educators have been a recurring theme in national education policy conversations. Federal policy is now shifting attention to preservice preparation programs and encouraging strong connections among teacher education, teachers’ skills, and students’ learning. In particular, the effectiveness of teachers and principals is being linked to their preparation programs. (Smith et al., 2007, p. 30).

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership style and formal training of special education school leaders to determine the impact on the academic achievement of students with special needs.

1.6 Research Questions

The researcher will seek to answer the following questions:

- (1) What courses do school leaders receive in school to prepare them to supervise special education programs?
- (2) What training do school leaders bring with them to assess and evaluate special education program needs? and
- (3) How do school leader training and education impact student achievement?

The findings will be beneficial to the fields of special education and general education programs, administration leadership programs and post-secondary institution education programs. In addition, it may help institutions to establish course requirements that will strengthen certification programs for school leaders. K-12 school districts will be able to utilize the information from the study to establish school leader and teacher training needs. Furthermore, post-secondary institutions will be able to use the information to determine needs for individuals seeking administrative certification for both general and special education leadership programs.

1.7 Need for the Study

Notwithstanding the abundance of available research to support how teacher instruction impacts achievement for students with disabilities, how certification programs for teachers and leaders contribute to effective instruction, and how effective leadership improves school

performance, there is minimal research available on how leadership practices and training affect special education programs and the academic achievement of students with disabilities.

According to the Rutgers University study on “What We Know About Successful School Leadership” (2003), it was determined that “amidst the seemingly certainty that leadership matters, there is much that we do not yet understand about effective leadership” (Leithwood & Reihl, 2003, p. 1). The information found in this study indicates there is a growing need to further examine what constitutes effective leadership and how leadership impacts student achievement, more specifically, special education student achievement. In recent years, education policies have changed the intended leadership role for school leaders without the follow-up of training. This factor is critical to leaders who are responsible for supervising special education programs. Cooner et al. (ND) cited its findings from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards affirming that principals often feel they lack the skills and/or knowledge to manage special education programs. Furthermore, their findings also revealed, “the leadership role of principals is crucial for improved education for students with disabilities” (Cooner et al., ND, p. 1).

Despite the emerging research on the lack of leadership preparation for managing special education programs, states have steered away from setting mandates for preparation programs to include extensive coursework on special education policy, procedures, laws and practices. This study will add to the body of literature in support of leadership practices and training as potential solutions to closing the achievement gap for students in special education programs.

1.8 Significance of the Study

Given the importance of closing the achievement gap for students with disabilities, educators must be knowledgeable in effective leadership and evidence-based practices that

contribute to running successful special education programs and that assist with improving the academic performance of students with disabilities. The success of such programs is often attributed to school leaders' ability to affect change (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, p. 87). The article "Preparing Principals for Leadership in Special Education: Applying ISLCC Standards" Cooner et al. (ND) reported "educational leadership is ranked as the number one key variable associated with effective schools, but the principal of an effective school must be the leader for all programs within the school-including special education services" (p. 1). The study predicted districts will likely replace more than 60% of all principals and, as a result, more schools will be led by inexperienced leaders with limited proficiency in special education (p. 1).

This study will benefit educational leaders whose schools have low standardized achievement scores for students with disabilities and for at-risk students not on the spectrum for special education identification. NAEP (2010) data show that, similar to students with disabilities, at-risk students performed below proficiency on reading and math assessments. According to The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a sample of students was tracked from 1971 to 1999 with regard to reading ability. Approximately 35-40 percent of students read at levels below their expected grade equivalency (US Department of Education, 2004, p. 1). Failure to identify and address the needs of at-risk students will most certainly lead to an increase in special education referrals. Additionally, it will open dialogue for school leaders to share practices that contribute to student achievement and establish potential professional development opportunities at the district and state levels. At the same time, this study will benefit the policy makers and education leaders that establish employment qualifications for future educators, and for teachers who provide instruction to special education students. In addition, it will benefit students with disabilities as instructional practices and school leader

involvement will be more influential to their academic success. Lastly, there is also the potential for post-secondary institutions to re-examine their leadership and education programs to ensure there is an underlying focus on improving student achievement through preparation and practice for school leaders and teachers.

1.9 Relevance to Educational Leadership

School leaders are an integral part of student success. If they lack the training and qualifications to be effective leaders all academic programs are likely to show decline. According to Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen (2007), “the quality of training principals receive before they assume their positions and the continuing professional development they get once they are hired and throughout their careers, has a lot to do with whether school leaders can meet the increasingly tough expectations of these jobs” (p. 3). Despite the data collected from numerous studies, Higher Education Leadership Programs continue to limit prospective leaders’ ability to fully assume the role of leader due to the lack of preparation. Darling-Hammond et al. shared results from a Public Agenda survey found an astounding 80 percent of superintendents and 69 percent of principals believe that leadership training in schools of education was out of touch with the realities of today’s districts (p. 3).

There has been growing attention to the central role of school leaders in improving the quality of education for all students. Researchers, policymakers, and educators have begun to recognize the relationship between the role of school leaders and developing high-performing schools. This relationship has ignited a national focus on raising achievement for all students; specifically, students with disabilities. “Between 1975 and 1990, the number of states with state-mandated principal evaluations increased from 9 to 40” (Darling Hammond et al., 2007, p. 126). During this period, “in-service training of principals increased at both the state and national

levels” (p. 126). In 1996, the Interstate Leadership Licensing Consortium (ISLLC) transformed newly established leadership expectations into standards for principal preparation and licensing. This was an effort “to guide pre-service programs and to assist with developing new assessments for principal licensing” (p. 126). Since 2005, at least 46 states have adopted or adapted these standards and developed performance assessments to evaluate candidates’ skills. Because of ISLLC standards, new leadership development programs have been launched by many states and school districts. However, specific preparation for leading special education programs remains unclear.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) reported the results of a state by state synopsis of leadership training compared to the nation. The state participants consisted of California, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and New York. The results denoted how well principals felt their preparation programs prepared them. The results showed principals felt adequately prepared to: “(1) understand how different students learn and how to teach them, (2) evaluate teachers and provide instructional feedback and (3) create a coherent educational program across the school. New York and Delaware reported not feeling as adequately prepared in “use of data to monitor school programs” (p. 120). Delaware also reported not feeling adequately prepared to “lead a well-informed change process for school” (p. 128).

This study will go beyond exploring traditional leadership development and training criteria. It is designed as a potential tool to encourage school leaders, legislators and federal government officials to begin to look at a common set of leadership practices that facilitate consistent growth for students with disabilities. The study will look to make recommendations to higher education institutions and to State Education Departments for redesigning school leader

preparation and training programs. These recommendations shall include more coursework related to special education programming as part of the licensure and certification requirements. Finally, this study will aim to outline effective leadership practices, to determine training that will enhance the knowledge and skills of school leaders and teachers and to establish a platform for building successful special education programs.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

“Leadership can be one of the most important processes that effects the level of greatness that an organization will reach” (Paynter, Phillips & Sianjina, 2014, p. 9). In an educational environment, leaders must be able to simultaneously balance a variety of tasks while carrying out the organization’s mission and vision. As federal, state, and local education agencies continue to examine student achievement, researchers have made a direct connection between school leadership, instruction and student achievement. Paynter et al. (2014) stated, “school leaders are crucial to improving instruction and raising student achievement” (p. 9). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) constructed a set of standards to represent the broad, high-priority themes that education leaders must address in order to promote the success of every student.

In scrutinizing its standards, ISLLC specifically examined their impact on special education leadership. With more than 6 million students currently enrolled in special education programs (Cooner et al., ND, p. 2), the role of special education leaders has drastically changed. With these changes, special education leaders have attempted to make the necessary adjustments to ensure adequate programs are available for students with disabilities. What has not occurred is the training special education leaders require to keep up with the trends (i.e., increased referrals,

identification of special education services, and implementation of IEPs). In their research, Cooner et al.(ND) found “almost no state requires any training in special education for an individual to become licensed as a principal” (p. 2).

Historically, higher education institutions have accommodated both teachers and administrators based on a “dual system of education” (Cooner et al., ND, p. 2). In previous years, general education students had access to teachers and administrators while students in special education had access to special education teachers and administrators. Institutions prepared teachers and administrators to “work within one of the separate programs” (p. 2). Table 1 (p. 16) depicts a comparison of two higher education program Administrative Certification Programs in the Mid-Atlantic Region. A review of course requirements showed some similarities in that both programs required a Master’s Degree and at least six additional courses, one of which consisted of a single law course to earn certification. It is unclear how much emphasis is placed on special education law. Consequently, the lack of prominence of special education could lead one to speculate that prospective leaders enrolled in these programs do not receive adequate training to effectively lead special education programs.

Table 1

Higher Education Administrative Certification Program Requirements

Higher Education Institution A School Leadership Administrative Certification Course Requirements	Higher Education Institution B Administration and Supervision Certification Course Requirements
Completion of a Master's Degree	Completion of a Masters of Education Degree required
Education, Ethics, and the Law	Curriculum Organization and Design
School and Community: Building a Shared Vision	Human Relations in Diverse Populations
Fiscal Operations and Resources	Supervision and Leadership in Elementary and Secondary Schools
School Leadership: Theory and Practice	Legal Issues, Ethical Conduct and Social Justice in Today's Schools
Supervisory Leadership: Staff Selection, Appraisal, and Renewal	Supporting A School Vision Through Effective Business and Finance Practices
Measurement, Accountability, and Student Learning	Supervision and Evaluation of Staff/Assessment of Instruction
The Principalship (PreK-8 or 9-12)	
Curriculum Leadership	
Practicum in School Leadership (includes Content Area Assessment)	
Administrative Internship (3-6 credits)	

Note: Information obtained from www.wilmu.edu (2015) and www.desu.edu (2013)

Further review of state and national student assessment data compelled the ISLLC to revise the 2007 standards to ensure leaders were prepared for current and future education movements. The most significant changes noted were the reorganization of Standard 2-*Instruction, Learning, Culture, Professional Learning*. The revised standard has been divided into four sub-standards; Standard 2-*Instructional Capacity*, Standard 3-*Instruction*, Standard 4-*Curriculum and Assessment* and Standard 6-*Professional Culture for Teachers and Staff*.

In addition, ISLLC added two additional standards; Standard 5-*Community of Care for Students* and Standard 11-*Continuous School Improvement*. Like the 2007 standards, the new standards outline the specific functions of each section (GAPSC, 2015, pp. 1-6). Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of changes. The significance of these changes has yet to be

determined. Factors such as student performance and administrator evaluations will be influential in examining the success of these changes.

As educators look to strengthen special education programs to facilitate improved student academic performance, they must continue to visit the impact of preparation and training for school leaders and teacher appraisal programs. The framework of this study will examine several leadership theories that speak to the significance of how leadership directly impacts student achievement in general, in addition to the critical impact it has on the academic achievement of students with disabilities.

1.11 Leadership Theories

1.11.1 Instructional Leadership Theory. During the 80s, instructional leadership was a widely-used theory. In recent years, it has reemerged. As stated by Paynter et al. (2014), “instructional leadership style is defined as setting clear goals, allocation resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluation of teachers” (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 45). They further explained that this type of leadership “encourages principals and educators to stick to the standards and follow them as closely as possible” (Paynter et al., p. 67). With 46 of the 50 states adopting the Common Core Standards (Association for Curriculum Development, 2015, p. 1) this may be the reason for the resurgence of this theory in the education system. Specifically, in the State of Delaware, the focus on improving student achievement, particularly for the low performing cells (Special Education, African American Males, and English Language Learners), has brought about the change in teacher evaluations, student assessments, curriculum design and leadership development.

Paynter et al. (2014) further explained in their research that instructional leadership is demonstrated by setting goals to achieve improvement in “student growth”, by setting “high expectations”, and by achieving “excellence in academics” (p. 68). This leader accomplishes his/her goals by centering on “curriculum development and alignment, monitoring and evaluation teachers, and on the resource allocation for maximizing instruction” (p. 68).

1.11.2 Participative Leadership Theory. Participative leadership, also known democratic leadership, is one of the four participative decision-making styles where employers invite employees to take a part in organizational decision-making. While this leadership style is not as common in the corporate world, some professions (e.g., social workers, arbitrators, group therapists, and facilitators) require this type of attitude. With participative leadership, there is a common pattern that is present in most of these types: 1) the leader facilitates the conversation, 2) the leader openly shares information and knowledge necessary for decision-making; 3) the leader encourages people to share their ideas, 4) the leader synthesizes all the available information and solutions suggested by the team, and 5) the leader comes up with the best possible solution and communicates it back to the group (Psychologia, ND, p. 3).

There are pros and cons to using participative leadership. Table 2 below outlines them.

Table 2
Pros and Cons of Participative Leadership

Pros	Cons
People feel valued	Social pressure to conform to group domination
People feel valued even the leader is absent	Decision-making may take a lot of time
People are more committed to achieving the goals and objectives of the organization	High costs
	Inefficiency
	Incompetence
	Indecisiveness

Note: Adapted from Psychologia.co (ND).

1.11.3 Situational Leadership Theory. Also grounded in this study is Hershey's Situational Leadership Model (1960), now referred to as Situational Leadership Theory (SLT). This theory departs from the previous theory discussed by hypothesizing that different situations call for various kinds of leadership. Notwithstanding the limited empirical data to support the theory, it implies an effective leader changes his or her style to meet the needs of different situations. SLT "proposes that effective leadership requires a rational understanding of the situation and an appropriate response, rather than a charismatic leader with a large group of dedicated followers" (McLeskey, 2014, p. 118). McLeskey stated that Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) in particular evolved from a task-oriented versus people- "Situational Leadership in general and oriented leadership continuum as reported by earlier studies" (McLeskey, 2014, p. 118).

The key variables in situational leadership are "*task behavior*, the amount of guidance and direction the leader provides and *relationship behavior*, the amount of social and emotional support the leader provides" (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 1). In addition, Hershey and Blanchard also contended that "follower *readiness*, the followers' ability to perform a specific task or function or accomplish a specific objective; and *follower development*, followers' maturity and ability to manage themselves in an organizational environment" (p. 2) was significant to the leader's ability to effectively manage. They also concluded that "the variables of situational leadership are interdependent and do not operate independently of each other or in isolation" (p. 3).

Situational leadership uses a "Bell Curve" quadrant behavior model to determine leadership styles:

- (1) high risk/low-relationship - leader behavior style S1; provide specific instructions and closely supervise performance,
- (2) high-task/high-relationship behavior -leader behavioral style S2; explain your decision and provide opportunity for clarification,
- (3) high-relationship/low-task behavior-leader behavior style S3; share ideas and facilitate in making decisions and
- (4) low-relationship/low-task-leader behavior style R4; turn over responsibility for decisions and implementation (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, pp. 3-4).

Although limited empirical data are available for Situational Leadership Theory, results from studies were mixed. For example, Vecchio (1987) reported that in a study involving 303 teachers representing 14 high schools, key variables: “supervisory style, follower maturity, performance, satisfaction with supervision, and quality of leader” (p. 1), were utilized to test the variables for effective supervision contained in the theory. Results from the study suggested that the theory may apply to certain types of employees only; specifically, newly hired employees may require and appreciate greater task structuring from their superior.

In a study conducted by Ohio State University, as cited by Hershey & Blanchard (2001), the results showed:

The behavior of some leaders was characterized mainly by structuring activities for their followers in terms of task accomplishment, while other leaders concentrated on providing socioemotional support in terms of personal relationships between themselves and their followers. Other leaders had styles characterized by both high-task and high-relationship behavior while some leaders’ behavior tended to provide little task or relationship for their followers (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 2).

Furthermore, the results showed “no dominant style of leadership practices emerged across a wide range of leaders working in many different work settings” (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 2).

1.11.4 Transactional Leadership Style. “Transactional leaders exchange rewards contingent upon performance and use positional resources in order to encourage desired behaviors” (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 56). As cited by Paynter et al. (2014), Weber’s Transactional Leadership Theory (1947) consisted of three leader types: “(1) bureaucratic-transactional leader, (2) traditional leaders and (3) charismatic leaders. He further defined transactional leadership as “one who earns leadership through normative rules and regulations strict discipline, and systematic control” (p. 55).

Weber’s theory was elaborated on in 1981 by Bass. Paynter et al. (2014) discussed Bass’ transformational leadership characteristics, “contingent reward, management by exception (active), management by exception (passive) and laissez-faire leadership” (p. 55).

According to Bass’ theory (1981): The first characteristic of a transactional leader is contingent reward. Contingent reward is contract exchange of rewards for effort, promises rewards for good performance, (and) recognizes accomplishments. The second characteristic is management exception (active) which is when a leader watches and searches for deviations from rules and standards, (and) takes corrective action. The third characteristic, management by exception (passive) is when a leader intervenes only if standards are not met. The final transactional characteristic is laissez-faire leadership when a leader abdicates responsibility (and) avoids making decisions. (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 55)

To examine Bass’ theory, Sahin (2004) examined the relationship between the leadership styles of principals and the school culture in relationship to the perceptions of primary school principals and teachers. The study explored the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles of school principals and school culture in Izmir, Turkey. The research was conducted using principals and teachers employed in primary schools (Paynter et

al., 2014). A summation of the findings showed:

Both school principals and teachers perceived that school principals exhibited more transformational style than transactional style. The school principals considered the school culture more positive than the teachers. According to the school principals, a positive relationship existed between transformational leadership and the dimensions of co-operative culture; educational development and the social-educational culture aspects of the school culture; and the transactional leadership style and the educational development dimension of the school culture (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 56).

Like the school principals, teachers also found a positive relationship existed between transformational leadership and the overall concept and dimensions of the school culture, the transactional leadership with the overall concept, co-operative culture, educational development culture and the dimensions of the social-educational culture (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 56).

1.11.5 Transformational Leadership. Grounded in this study is Burns' transformational leadership theory in which he termed it "not as a set of specific behaviors, but rather an ongoing process by which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (Burns, J., 1978, p. 20). Burns asserted that "true leadership not only creates change and achieves goals within the environment, but changes the people involved in the necessary actions for the better as well: both followers and leaders are ennobled" (Covey, S. "Transformational Leadership Report", 2007, p. 4). Following Burn's theory, Bernard Bass, a known follower of Burns, "defined transformational leadership in terms of how the leader affects followers, who are intended to trust, admire and respect the transformational leader" (Covey, 2007, p. 4). Bass "identified three ways in which leaders transform followers: "(1) Increasing their awareness of task importance and value, (2) Getting them to focus first on team or organizational goals, rather than their own interests and (3) Activating their higher-order needs" (p. 4). This leadership approach eliminates the need for "competition between individuals,

teams or nations, to a connection with the whole of a situation, and leadership for the good of all” (p. 10).

According to Bower (2008), “transformational leaders define the need for change, develop a vision for the future, and mobilize follower commitment to achieve results beyond what would normally be expected” (p. 55). Transformational leadership has been consistently linked to organizational and leadership effectiveness. For more than two decades, this theory has gained academic attention as a model for understanding leadership and has been used in well over 100 empirical studies.

1.12 Limitations

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of school leadership practices and study will focus on the analysis of case studies involving one district in the Southwestern United States, “Creekside Elementary” located in Georgia, and a final study conducted in Denver, Colorado. In case study analyses, findings of the study are not intended to be generalizable to all leadership programs. This study will seek to gain a greater understanding of this growing phenomenon (Creswell, 2013 and Yin, 1992).

1.13 Delimitations

This case study analysis will focus on three states in the U.S. that have reviewed the leadership preparation and the impact on special education programs. The case studies will be compared and contrasted to determine similarities in leadership practices, training and the impact on academic achievement for students with disabilities.

1.14 Definition of Terms

The definition of key terms is a subsection which includes a brief definition of significant terminology.

1. Academic Achievement- “the level of schooling you have successfully completed and the ability to attain success in your studies” (Merriam-Webster.com).
2. Accountability- “the quality or state of being accountable; especially: an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one’s actions” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).
3. Achievement Gap- “the difference in academic performance between different ethnic groups” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).
4. Administrative Leader-for the purpose of this investigation, administrative leader will refer to an individual who is employed at the School District Level.
5. IDEA- (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) “the nation’s federal special education law that ensures public schools serves the educational needs of students with disabilities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).
6. Leadership Practices-for the purposes of this study, leadership practices will refer to specific skills utilized to manage an educational organization.
7. No Child Left Behind- “NCLB” is a US federal law that was originally proposed by President George W. Bush in 2001, that funds a number of federal programs aimed at improving the performance of U.S. schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and schools, as well as providing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend (US Department of Education, 2010).
8. Race to the Top (RttT) – “federal competitive grants offered to schools that were willing to develop rigorous academic programs to prepare students for future collegiate experiences or employment” (White House Press Office, 2009).

9. School Culture- refers to the personalities, values, morals and beliefs that make up a school environment (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, p. 87).
10. School Leader-for the purpose of this investigation, school leader will refer to the building level principal.
11. Special Education Culture- refers to the personalities, values, morals, and beliefs of special education leaders, educators, and students (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, p. 87).
12. Special Education Programs-for the purpose of this study, *special* education programs are education programs that provide supports and services to students who have been identified as having a specific disability and are receiving special education and/or related services.
13. Students with Disabilities: for the purpose of this investigation, students with disabilities will be defined as a student who has been identified through an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
14. Training-for the purpose of this study, training will consist of certification, professional development, experience and education.

1.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study including an introduction, background, purpose, significance, and the methodology for the research approach. An assemblage of empirical literature, state and government mandates support the importance of leadership practices and training and on the academic achievement of students with disabilities. Even though the NCLB helps to guarantee that all children receive a free and appropriate public education and holds schools accountable for making sure that students are achieving academically, there is diminutive evidence that leadership practices and training have a direct

impact on student achievement. In order to better comprehend how leadership practices, influence academic achievement for students with disabilities this study will utilize Instructional Leadership, Burns' Transformational Leadership Theory, Hershey's Situational Leadership Theory and Weber's Transactional Leadership to guide the research. The subsequent chapter presents the content for this discussion.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The education of students with disabilities has been a subject of debate for decades. Numerous questions have been raised regarding the failure of this group to progress at the same rate as their peers. Few answers have been offered for the lack of significant and consistent growth. As a result, several education initiatives have been created to ensure these students receive the same quality of education and access to the general education curriculum as their peers (No Child Left Behind, 2001). These initiatives have specified expectations for student outcomes and teacher accountability; however, expectations for school leaders' accountability have not been specifically defined. Recent literature has indicated that leadership practices greatly impact the success of a school, despite the lack of evidence to fully support the theory.

Research study results have shown a positive link between teacher instruction and student achievement. Studies have also shown some significance between leadership practices and teacher effectiveness. What has not been connected through research is the direct impact leadership practices and training have on student achievement. More recent studies have explored the concept of leadership practices and training as potential solutions to improving academic achievement for students with disabilities. Existing literature has indicated special education leadership is not a simple task. Due to widespread achievement gaps, school administrators are left speculating about potential causes and searching for solutions. Researchers have concluded that several factors must be taken into consideration before a solution to closing the achievement gap for students with disabilities is discovered. Three of these factors are history of education, cultural reform and special education reform. History has shown these to be daunting tasks for education programs; however, due to legal restrictions, special education reform is twice as difficult. This form of change impacts all levels; district,

building and classroom. According to the literature, reform is particularly difficult for special education leaders due to the variety of opinions and beliefs regarding the education of students with disabilities. Lasky & Karge (2006) reported findings from Center, Ward, Parmenter & Nash, (1985) who found certain principal attitudes toward mainstreaming “can be directly linked to individual characteristics” (p. 21). Furthermore, their study indicated “principals with less than 7 years of on-the-job experience who had special education qualifications expressed more positive attitudes toward integration than principals with more years of experience and no special education qualifications” (p. 21). In order for special education reform to be successful change must occur at all levels.

From a historical perspective, it is important to view the history and evolution of education. Beginning with the 1600s-1800s, the significance of special education priorities was not as prominent as that of regular education. McHatton, Glenn, S., Glenn, T. & Gordon (2012) asserted, “the historical structure of privilege, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and other social divisions in which education is so heavily situated impact the daily practice of critically conscious special education leaders” (p. 38). McHatton et al. further elaborated that “in special education that history consists of segregation, exclusion, and marginalization, often supported by legislation” (McHatton et al., 2012, p. 39). These factors contributed to how special education students were identified, placed and educated. This literature review will provide an extensive overview to support leadership practices and training, and teacher effectiveness as critical factors necessary to foster authentic special education reform and improve academic achievement for students with disabilities.

2.1 History of Education in America

Education policies have been in development since the early 1600s. During this period,

multiple education initiatives were created in an effort to improve opportunities for children to receive a quality education. For example, “The Permissive Era” (1642-1821) called for the initiation of public schools with the approval of local voters (Ornstein & Levine, 1984, p. 159). Prior to this era, private schools were the main source of education for those who could afford the costs. The “Encouragement Era” (1826-1851) was a government initiated period. Although the government did not require the “establishment of schools” (p. 159), it did, however, unequivocally encourage “the establishment of school districts and the raising of tax revenues to support them” (p. 159). This period did not mandate children to attend public school; it was still the parents’/guardians’ authority to make this decision.

1857 to 1980 was referred to as the “Compulsory Era” (Orstein & Levine, 1984, p. 160). Throughout this time period, the government obligated states to “establish school districts, taxation for government schools, curriculum and structure, and children’s school attendance” (Orstein & Levine, 1984, p. 160). Despite parental/guardian authority, the Compulsory Era mandated children of certain ages to attend school. This era also established key government education acts and laws. In 1917, the National Education Association’s (NEA) Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education proposed “the restructure of high schools to offer curricular patterns for students: “(1) college preparatory or academic program, (2) commercial or business program, (3) industrial, vocational, home economics, and agricultural program and (4) a modified academic program for terminal students” (Orstein & Levine, 1984, pp. 169-170). In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, that racial segregation was illegal in government schools. This ruling opened education opportunities for minority students (p. 178). In 1965, Congress sanctioned the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act, which “provided federal funds for local public schools” (Orstein & Levine, 1984, p. 181).

The final and present day era began in the early 1980s. “Freedom or School Choice” brought about schooling options for children. Parents were provided with education choices beyond the public school and private sector options. “Homeschooling, voucher tuition tax credits, education deductions and charter schools were the new choices for parents” (Coulson, 1999, pp. 120-121). Today, charter schools and home schooling are the most widely used school choice options. The key law mandated during this time was No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001). NCLB required schools to permit children in low-performing public schools’ options to choose better public schools. It also meant that schools were required to provide more programs and services to students with disabilities. For school leaders, this set into motion a reorganization of programming and a reallocation of funds. In an article published by Freire (1970) and cited by McHatton et al. (2012), Freire discussed the impact of how past configurations of “privilege, class, race, ethnicity, gender and other social divisions” in education affect the management style of special education leaders (p. 38). According to Freire, as noted by McHatton et al. there was evidence to support a conflict between the special education leaders’ personal beliefs and the expectations of the work environment. McHatton et al. further examined this relationship and found that special education leaders as well as special education teachers struggle with the “implementation of federal, state, and local education agencies mandates and their own internal morals and values” (McHatton et al., 2012, pp. 38-39).

McHatton et al. (2012) also cited Holland & Lave’s (2001) history-in-person framework. This concept consists of three components: “(1) historical struggles in person; (2) historically institutionalized struggles; and (3) local contentious practice. This framework theorizes that “the

individual struggles people experience in their daily lives is often conflicted with the environmental conflicts individuals experience with practices and policies compounded by past educational historical struggles that dictated such practices and policies” (p. 39). As a result, the special education leaders’ efforts to improve the academic and social outcomes of students through the implementation of education mandates are at times compromised. McHatton et al. (2012) also cited Artiles, “if we are to understand the education of culturally diverse students, we must first understand the role of history in their educational experiences” (McHatton et al., 2012, p. 41). They further cited the viewpoints of Artiles and Trent (1994) and others (McLaughlin, 2010; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Skiba et al., 2008). McHatton et al. (2012) expanded on this notion, by asserting that the “failure to examine problems from sociohistorical and political contexts has resulted in an inability to identify improved policies and practices” (p. 42). They also attributed this lack of understanding and awareness of the sociohistorical context to certain difficulties special education leaders have with affecting change for students with disabilities.

2.2 School Reform and Leadership Effects

A renewed sense of urgency to reform schools across the nation has brought about a change in the way school leadership is viewed. According to Paynter, Phillips & Sianjina (2014):

The early 1980’s witnessed the advent of a period of educational reform in the United States that has demonstrated surprisingly long staying power. Among the educational trends that emerge during the era, few have been more significant or widespread than the continuing focus on principal effectiveness (p. 10).

The significance of leadership in shaping school culture is dependent upon school leaders’ abilities to initiate and maintain change. The responsibilities of today’s school leaders are far more complex and necessitate the support of others to be effective. While it is impractical

to think a single leader can successfully reform a school, that is the unspoken expectation. Leaders are responsible for creating climates that permit all to do their jobs and recognize the importance of operating within an established school culture; therefore, making interactions between leadership and culture critical components to achieving school reform (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, pp. 86-87).

2.3 Culture and Cultural Change

Culture provides meaning, while restricting objectivity and shaping preferences. According to a report published by Evans (1996) and McQuillen (1998) as cited by Murphy & Datnow (2003), six characteristics exist that constitute cultural reform:

First, “While culture provides meaning, it also restricts our objectivity and shapes our preferences” (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, p. 85). It is the culture within the school that determines student learning outcome, discipline measures, curriculum and instructional needs and collaboration and information flow.

Second, all educators “must recognize that culture is both conservative and ever-changing” (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, p. 85). Culture can provide a middle-of-the-road safeguard against the unknown, but it can also make essential adjustments “to influences from other cultures and from changes in the physical, social, and political environment” (p. 85). Historically, schools were viewed as being resistant to reform; however, changes occurred often by way of student population, curriculum changes, education policies, and instructional innovations. In addition, they were also viewed as more receptive to reform when change was less invasive and founded on current principles.

Third, “boundaries between cultures are permeable allowing multiple cultures to interact and allowing individuals to be members of multicultural groups” (Murphy & Datnow, 2003,

p.85). Teachers, administrators, parents and students bring individual cultural expectations that influence one another, but can be stifled by the cultural beliefs of the administration. However, within the boundaries of the classroom, these expectations become less influential because of the teacher's role and level of authority.

Fourth, "culture is experienced through one's role or position" (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, p. 85). Educators and students experience different assumptions and expectations. "Overlap in expectations and assumptions occur, but the school becomes a social system and has a culture through an orchestration of differences and similarities of individuals with distinct roles and different levels and degrees of authority" (p. 85).

Fifth, "culture is transmitted, shaped, and maintained through language and dialogue" (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, p. 85). Because of the multi-cultures that exist within a school environment, "cultures are created and maintained by what is talked about and what topics are avoided, by how language is used, by whose language is encouraged, and by who has control of the discourse" (p. 85).

Sixth, "culture functions primarily through shared assumptions, beliefs, and values that shape the actions people within a culture take" (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, p. 85). The school culture is shaped by the assumptions students, teachers, parents, community constituents and administrators hold for one another.

2.4 Leaders and Leadership

The importance of leadership in shaping school culture is dependent upon the school leader and his or her ability to initiate and maintain change. The responsibilities of a school leader are more complex and require the support from other personnel to be effective. Subsequently, leaders must ensure teachers can instruct and students can learn while managing

the day to day functions while leading for change. Although it is unrealistic to think a single leader can effectively reform a school, the unstated expectation is present and significant. According to Murphy & Datnow (2003), leaders are responsible “for creating climates that permit all to do their jobs and recognize the importance of operating within the established school culture (p. 87). Interactions between leadership and culture become critical components to achieving school reform.

A study conducted by Gersten and colleagues (2001) as cited by DiPaola et al. (2003) “found that building-level support from principals and general educators had strong effects on virtually all critical aspects of special education teachers’ working conditions” (p. 9).

2.5 Leadership Practices and Student Achievement

Previous literature reviews have suggested that effective leadership can play a significant role in improving student learning. Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004) contended that high-quality leaders achieve this impact by:

- (1) setting directions – charting a clear course that everyone understands, establishing high expectations and using data to track progress and performance;
- (2) developing people – providing teachers and others in the system with the necessary support and training to succeed; and
- (3) making the organization work – ensuring that the entire range of conditions and incentives in districts and schools fully supports rather than inhibits teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 3).

Based on results from studies conducted at schools rated effective, DiPaola & Walther-Thomas (2003) were able to identify five components of effective leaders: “(a) defining and communicating the school’s education mission, (b) managing curriculum and instruction, (c) supporting and supervising teaching, (d) monitoring student progress, and (e) promoting a learning climate” (p. 8). Results from the findings found these components allowed school

leaders to maintain a specific focus on student achievement and professional development. With these components, DiPaola & Walther-Thomas (2003) contended effective leaders are “more familiar with current research, find necessary resources, make well-reasoned judgements regarding students’ programs, mentor new teachers, provide professional opportunities for all staff members and evaluate teacher performance” (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 8).

In addition, DiPaola & Walther-Thomas (2003) cited Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff (2000); Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff & Harniss (2001); Kearns, Kleineri & Clayton (1998); and Klingner et al. (2001) who provided evidence to show that “principals who focus on instructional issues demonstrate administrative support for special education, and provide high-quality professional development for teachers, produce enhanced concerns for students with disabilities and for others at risk for school failure” (p. 9).

To support the importance of the school leader’s role and their impact on student achievement, Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) conducted a qualitative case study at a Florida Elementary School. The study focused on the principal’s contribution to the success of the school. During the 2009-2010 school year, the investigators (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011) interviewed teachers and administrators, conducted classroom observations and analyzed school documents to gauge how the principal supported the school.

Results from the data collected found five themes regarding the principal’s role: “(1) setting directions, (2) redesigning the school organization, (3) improving working conditions for school staff, (4) providing high-quality instruction in all settings and (5) ensuring that data were used to drive decision making” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 54). The investigation also showed student placement in inclusive classrooms increased from previous years and improvement in assessment scores in reading and math. Data from this study support the

research suggesting that school leaders play a significant role in facilitating student achievement for students with disabilities.

Despite existing literature and research supporting leadership practices as a significant key to student achievement, there are data to dispute this same theory. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, (2006) report, the way to improve student achievement is through effective teacher instruction. NCTAF contended that "the capability of the teacher has the strongest effect on student learning and that recruiting, preparing, and retaining quality teachers is the most important way to improve education" (NCTAF, 2006, p.1). They further stated that student performance is compromised when there is "limited access to quality teachers, poor teacher recruitment strategies, standards for teachers that are not enforced, and inadequate teacher preparation" (p. 1). Finally, they suggested that the way to promote the success of students and teachers was to "invest in teaching salaries and selecting principals that understand teaching and can lead high performing schools" (p. 1).

2.6 Leadership Training and Student Achievement

According to Pazey & Cole's (2013) article "The Role of Special Education Training in the Development of Socially Just Leaders: Building an Equity Consciousness in Educational Leadership Programs", "colleges of education along with a number of national organizations and specialized professional associations have sought to improve educational administration programs through the incorporation of a broad policy framework designed to develop socially just leaders" (Pazey & Cole, 2013, p. 243). As the assessment of education equality evolves, advocates for students with disabilities have been pushing back against persistent inequities within schools. Special education has emerged as one of the most controversial subjects facing school leaders today. Pazey & Cole (2013) stated "content related to special education and

special education law has been a long-neglected area within university-based administrator preparation programs and has been strangely absent in conversations relevant to the creation of administrator preparation programs that embrace a social justice model of leadership” (p. 243).

Pazey & Cole (2013) also noted that federal requirements under IDEA (2004) and No Child Left Behind (2002) have significant implications for school administrators with regards to special education. Administrators are obligated to ensure “accountability for all students within an environment of limited resources and competing priorities” (p. 243) making their jobs more difficult to manage. As a result, “it is essential that knowledge of special education, special education law, and legislative requirements pertaining to children with disabilities be incorporated into the preservice training of every teacher and administrator, not just individuals within the field of special education” (p. 246). This training should consist of administrators learning “student and parental rights as well as the responsibilities of school personnel to appropriately serve students with disabilities” (p. 246). Pazey & Cole (2013) affirmed, “despite the increase in course curriculum that has occurred between 1992 and 2006, a substantial percentage of administrator preparation programs have not increased their curriculum offerings devoted to special education or special education law” (Pazey & Cole, 2013, p. 249). To demonstrate the lack of preparation administrators have in special education, they also cited the 12 training components recommended in a study conducted by Cusson (2010): “(a) relationship and communication; (b) leadership and vision; (c) budget and capital; (d) special education laws and policies; (e) curriculum and instruction; (f) personnel; (g) evaluation of data, programs, students, and teachers; (h) collaboration and consultation; (i) special education programming; (j) organization; (k) professional development; and (l) advocacy” (p. 249).

The article, “Inclusive Leadership: Preparing Principals for the Role that Awaits Them” (Garrison-Wade, Sobel & Fulmer, 2007) cited results from an investigation conducted by Garrison-Wade (2005) and Goor, Schwenn & Boyer (1997). Results from the investigation revealed “a lack of special preparation for school principals’ challenges and their ability to meaningfully serve all students” (p. 118). Furthermore, Garrison-Wade’s (2005) investigation found that when “in the role of instructional leaders, principals need requisite knowledge in assessing the impact of disabilities on students, performance, monitoring referral-to-placement procedures, providing various service delivery models, and facilitating student support teams” (p.118).

Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) cited the results from Praisner’s (2003) study where she reported “administrator preparation programs provided principals with a minimum amount of knowledge deemed by special education experts to be relevant in the implementation of inclusion” (p. 119). Praisner also stated that “characteristics of disabilities, special education law, and behavior management may be adequately covered in preparation programs, but specific topics that present authentic strategies and processes to support inclusion appear to be lacking” (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007, p. 119).

In a study steered by the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Colorado, 124 participants enrolled in the Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies program (ALPS) partook in two focus groups and completed a survey pertaining to their perceptions on the education preparation program. More specifically, the University was interested in determining whether it was proficient in “meeting the needs of professionals striving to become the next generation of inclusive school leaders” (Garrison-Wade et al., p. 120).

Results from the study revealed the top areas of competencies self-reported by participants regarding inclusive practices: “(1) making and implementing differentiated learning recommendations for learners with diverse needs (90%); (2) facilitating effective collaborative relationships between special and general education personnel (87%); (3) creating a diverse learning environment (86%); (4) offering and implementing recommendations for differentiated instruction (86%); and (5) fostering collegial relationships between special and general educators (86%)” (Garrison-Wade et al., p. 123).

Despite the highly-ranked competencies, several red flags were raised in the competency levels participants ranked below proficiency toward inclusive practices. “40% identified a lack of understanding regarding legal issues related to special education; 28% self-reported a lack of skills in their ability to provide constructive feedback and mentoring of special educators and support staff; and 28% reported a lack in their ability to generate options and solutions in resource management (i.e. planning time, paperwork demands, and alternative scheduling)” (Garrison-Wade, Sobel & Fulmer, 2007, p. 123).

Crooner, Tochtermann and Garrison-Wade (ND) cited Goor & Schwenn (1995), “principals, often feel unprepared for their roles in the administration of special programs” (p. 1). They further stated in their study that “the leadership role of principals is crucial for improved education for students with disabilities, yet in recent years, states have moved away from mandating preparation programs to include coursework on special education policy, procedures, laws and practice” (p. 1). For additional confirmation of their findings, Cooner et al. (ND) cited Bateman & Bateman (2001), who projected that “with increasing enrollment of students in special education, the role of the principal has drastically changed... although the responsibility

of the principal has increased, almost no state requires any training in special education for an individual to become licensed as a principal” (p. 2).

Crockett, Mallory, Becker & Quinn (2009) cited research conducted by Wakerman, Browder, Flowers & Ahlgrim-Dezell, (2006) where they found:

More than 20,000 administrators are primarily responsible for leading and administering special education and related services in public schools and agencies across the United States. This responsibility is shared increasingly with building principals and other leaders in the nation’s more than 15,000 school districts, many of whom learn about their roles from personal or professional experiences. (Crockett et al., 2009, p. 55)

Moreover, Crockett et al. (2009) cited Bateman’s (2007) theory that the “practice of providing administrative leadership for special education has long been governed by law and guided by education research suggesting that those who lead might also turn to public policies and professional journals in education to inform their actions” (p. 55). The researchers hypothesized that “an increase in the demand for knowledge in this area, pointing out the persistent lack of literature and cautioning that those who administered special education often struggled to define their roles and were unprepared for their responsibilities” (p. 55).

To support the need for school leaders to be adequately prepared for special needs programs, DiPaola et al. (2003) concluded that “principals do not need to be disability experts, but they must have fundamental knowledge and skills that will enable them to perform essential special education leadership tasks” (DiPaola et al., 2003, p. 11). Similarly, results from DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran’s study (2003) as cited by DiPaola et al. affirmed that most principals lack the coursework and field experience needed to lead local efforts to create learning environments that emphasize academic success for students with disabilities.

To emphasize the importance of leadership training for school leaders, DiPaola & Walther-Thomas (2003) reported:

Principals who understand effective practices and recognize the instructional demands that classroom teachers and building specialists face can provide more appropriate support to these professionals. Without a clear understanding of professional support needs principals may unintentionally thwart teacher efforts to provide quality support services for students with disabilities. (p. 11)

All things considered, Lasky & Karge (2006) contended, “as instructional leaders and agents of change, principals should possess several important competencies” (p. 1):

- (1) Display knowledge and skills in effective instruction, assessment, and discipline to provide support and feedback to teachers when working with all children, especially children with identified special needs;
- (2) Acquire skills in establishing and supporting instructional teams;
- (3) Possess the willingness to support collaborative group interactions; and
- (4) Possess a clear vision that results in a commitment from the school and community (Lasky & Karge, 2006, p. 1).

Consequently, despite the competency recommendations, Lasky & Karge (2006) acknowledged that the competencies may appear simple, but may not be easily achieved; especially when trying to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Minimal research that specifically examines “the formal special education training or basic knowledge of special education laws and practices of school principals” exists (p. 1). However, two early studies conducted by Cline (1981) and Davis (1980) examined principals' attitudes toward mainstreaming. Results from Davis' study evaluated principals' judgments of how students with various disabilities acquired success in their schools. The results indicated when the student was labeled mentally retarded, the perception by principals was that they would have minimal success with mainstreaming. The study further concluded that successful mainstreaming programs were unlikely to be available in schools where principals did not have expectations of

success and an understanding of children with disabilities. Similarly, Davis (1980) found that the majority of the principals surveyed 51.9% had never taken a single course in special education, and 32.8% had no exposure to the education of children with disabilities in their formal training (Lasky & Karge, 2006, pp 1-2).

Cline (1981) examined principals' attitudes toward and knowledge of mainstreaming. The results from this study revealed principals' lack of knowledge was displayed when they were requested to select the most appropriate placement from descriptions of students with disabilities. The report further revealed that such tasks were perceived as challenging, and the end result only demonstrated the principals' lack of knowledge regarding children with special needs. Cline (1981) also suggested that to enhance successful mainstreaming efforts, training and in-service about students with special needs were needed for principals (Lasky & Karge, 2006, pp 1-2). Lasky & Karge (2006) directed a study that examined the formal training and experience of 205 principals from 28 Southern California School Districts. The study sought to answer the following questions:

(1) What information do principals receive in university programs to prepare school administrators? (2) What experience do principals bring with them as they train and support teachers? and (3) How confident do principals feel in their own ability to support and train teachers with regards to children disabilities? (p. 2).

Results showed the bulk of participants served 0-5 years in an administrative role, while only two had spent 35 years in the position of principal. The participants reported limited ability and knowledge related to children with special needs regardless of how long they had worked as an administrator (Lasky & Karge, 2006, p.26). Participants were asked, "how much direct experience did you have with children with disabilities during your formal administration

credential course work?" (p. 25). 73 of the principals had no experience, 72 indicated some experience, and only 29 reported moderate experience, with 27 stating they had lots of experience. Most of the respondents reported learning the key essentials on the job.

Another question asked of the participants was, "how important do you feel formal training in special education and mainstreaming is in courses for school administrators?" (Lasky & Karge, 2006, p. 26). 119 principals felt course work was very critical to their development. Many of the principals indicated that nothing can replace overall experience.

The next question asked of the participants was, "who do you turn to when a question regarding students with special needs arises?" (Lasky & Karge, 2006, p. 26). The results showed most the principals seek assistance from the District Personnel Office and Special Education Teachers.

Finally, when asked if they attend IEP meetings, 160 responded yes, 28 stated no, and 17 stated sometimes. The responses indicated participants shared a variety of roles for their participation in the IEP process. In summary, Lasky & Karge (2006) identified a need for "increased training of principals in the area of special education during enrollment in preservice administration programs and while on the job" (p. 30). The study also concluded that most of the training principals receive pertaining to special education is hands on. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn that higher education facilities are not adequately preparing administrators to assume responsibility for special education programs. Consequently, it appears school leaders are learning on the job, which can have an adverse effect on special education programs, especially if there is limited knowledge and a lack of support.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Leadership is about influence, which can have a positive or negative impact on the individuals and or the organization being managed. In education, growing evidence supports that school leaders influence achievement through the support and development of effective teachers and the implementation of effective organizational practices. With increased roles, responsibilities, and education reform, the way in which school leaders react significantly impacts their failure or success. Existing literature shows leaders influence people through definitive leadership styles and practices.

2.8 Leadership Influences

As reported by Biggs (2001), “there are seven influences exhibited by leaders: negative influences-coercion, intimidation, manipulation, and negotiation; positive influences-persuasion, education and inspirational” (p. 1). Table 2-3 gives an overview of each type of influence and how each impacts people or situations. When examining influences, one must take into consideration the actual development of the leadership style. The leadership style of a principal/leader depends on his/her “assumptions about human beings, human nature and human learning” (Yusuf, 2012, p. 114). It is these assumptions, both “consciously and unconsciously” that are the infrastructure for “decision making and choosing a leadership style” (p. 114).

Table 3
Influences and Their Impacts on People

Type of Influences	Form	Approach	Impact
Negative Influences	Coercion	The “gun to your head” style of leadership	Achieves short-term results; produces long drops in employee morale and high turnover.
	Intimidation	Dictatorship: “You will do this or your job's on the line”	Appeals to weak and insecure people; There is no respect for the leader and the people are resentful.
	Manipulation	Controller: one-sided style	Distrust and suspicion.
	Negotiation	"Give and take": the most common form of influence. In short, it's the "keeping score" approach of the politician.	Can be reasonable, effective when the result is "win-win."; often strains relationships and causes needless stress when the result is "win-lose."
Positive Influence	Persuasion	The orator knows how to stir hearts by appealing to emotions.	The leader's wishes get carried out by the employees because they believe it's in their best interests.
	Education	The practitioner influences people with logic.	People do what the leader wants because it simply makes sense.
	Inspiration	This is the highest form of influence because the leader is a master of both emotional and logical techniques.	The greater the quality of inspiration provided by the leader, the greater the quantity of self-motivation that's displayed by the followers. The encourager understands that words (eloquence) and ways (example) must be congruent.

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Yusuf (2012) cited the results from Mumbe (1995). The study examined “principal leadership styles and influence on academic achievement in secondary schools” (p. 115). In his conclusion, Mumbe ascertained that “democratic leadership style affected student and general

school performance positively and motivated teachers to work with principals towards the achievement of school objectives” (p. 115).

2.9 Leadership Styles and Practices

2.9.1 Instructional Leadership. Several studies exploring how student learning and achievement may be related to school and leadership factors as well as classroom and teacher actors have been conducted. According to Ng, Nguyen, Wong & Choy (2015), there are two general concepts of instructional leadership:

(1) The narrow concept defines instructional leadership as actions that are directly related to teaching and learning, such as conducting classroom observations. This was the conceptualization of instructional leadership used in the 1980s and was normally applied within the context of small, poor urban elementary schools (p. 393).

(2) The broad view of instructional leadership includes all leadership activities that indirectly affect student learning such as school culture and timetabling procedures. These might be considered aspects of leadership that have an impact on the quality of curriculum and instruction delivered to students. This conceptualization acknowledges that principals as instructional leaders have a positive impact on students’ learning (Ng et al., 2015, p. 393).

Ng et al. (2015) further referenced two empirical quantitative studies in their examination. The first study revealed that principal instructional leadership practices can be differentiated by school levels. Citing results from Ho & Chen’s study (2009):

120 principals (66 primary school principals and 54 secondary school principals) were surveyed in Singapore. It was reported that the mean scores in terms of instructional leadership for principals of primary schools were higher than those for secondary school principals. The obvious differences reside in the domains such as supervision and evaluation of ICT-based instruction (Integrated Co-Teaching), curriculum coordination and promotion of professional development, though not much difference can be seen in terms of framing ICT goals (Ng et al., 2015, p. 389).

Another study conducted by Nguyen & Ng (2014) involved 114 primary schools and 100 secondary schools on instructional leadership. This study revealed that teachers' perception of the role of the principal was higher for primary school leaders in relation to three investigated dimensions of instructional leadership, namely aligning teaching practices to school vision, leading teaching and learning, and professional development. These findings indicate that Singapore principals in primary schools assume instructional leadership roles more often than their secondary school counterparts (p. 393). Despite the apparent successes of the Singapore education system, the available literature remains limited. Few studies exist on how Singapore principals perceive and enact their roles as instructional leaders and the relationship it has on student achievement.

Paynter et al. (2014) cited Hoy & Hoy (2003) "instructional leaders who work with cooperation, collegiality, expertise, and teamwork are hallmarks of successful improvement" (p. 67). In other words, an instructional leader who unites with subordinates, incorporates educational background, and is a team player has more successful educational outcomes. In a meta-analysis study that was conducted by Viviane M.J. Robinson (ND) and her colleagues, it was determined that instructional leadership had a "three to four effect on student outcome than transformational leadership" (p. 67).

In summary, Paynter et al. (2014) discussed the influences of leadership style on education:

Leadership style is not always constant. It changes from person to person or from situation to situation. Many of the leadership style changes occur because of the different leadership phenomenon that these educational leaders have applied in an attempt to improve the nation's educational system. With the many demands of educational reforms, educational leaders have either supported or criticized certain leadership styles. As such,

which style suits and works best is subjected to a matter of opinion (Paynter et al., 2014 p. 68).

2.9.2 Participative Leadership. Somech (2003) defined participative leadership as having joint decision making or an influence in decision-making by a superior and his employees. According to Paynter et al. (2014), He stated that the participative leadership style “likely increases the quality of the decision, contributes to the quality of employee’s work life, commitment, and satisfaction” (p. 72).

Jani (2008) describes participative leadership as a theory that adopts the conclusion of numerous minds making better decisions than the ruling of a solitary mind. Consequently, the leader invites participation from the individuals responsible for carrying out the work, making it less of a competitive nature and more of a collaborative effort. Jani felt this increased the level of commitment on behalf of the workers. Jani further described the participants as “subordinates, peers, superiors, or stakeholders” (Paynter et al., p. 72). He also found that the degree of participation may vary amongst the individuals. For example, when carrying out the mission:

The leader may outline the objectives or goals and allow the team to decide how it can be achieved or the leader may allow a joint decision to be taken with respect to objectives and its method of achievement or the team may propose but the final decision is always of the leader” (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 72).

Jani (2008) further quantified that this style of leadership comes in several forms such as “consultation, democratic leadership, Management by Objectives (MBO), power-sharing, empowerment, and joint decision-making” (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 73).

Despite the positive aspects of participative leadership, Jani (2008) cited that a negative side of the theory exists. When a leader solicits opinions and does not find them appropriate, it

leads to disparagement, feelings of dis loyalty, and a decrease in motivation and commitment to the organization.

Jani (2008) elaborated on Kurt Lewin and others experiments (1939) which resulted in the categorizing of three styles of participative leaderships: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire.

2.9.2.1 Autocratic Style. The leader makes all decisions without collaborating with others. According to Lewin et al., the autocratic style led to revolution (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 73)

2.9.2.2 Democratic Style. The leader makes the decisions after consulting others or allows the majority to decide on what is to be done. Lewin et al., found this style to be most effective (p. 73).

2.9.2.3 Laissez-Faire Style. The leader lets others decide on the decisions to be taken. Lewin et al. found this style of leadership lacked enthusiasm and coordination (Paynter et al., 2014. p. 73).

Jani's (2008) theory notated these experiments were conducted on children, therefore, further research and studies were necessary to expand the body of literature.

McCaffrey, Freeman, and Hart (1995) elaborated on the "growing movement" in the United States towards participative methods of decision making. They stated that:

There is an unmistakable and important change taking place in the way many major U.S. Corporations are being managed. They are changing their management practices and systems to encourage employees to become more involved in the management of their organizations. Organization after organization in the United States is concluding, that unless they utilize their people more fully, they cannot compete in world markets. Participative management is being recognized as a way to do this (Paynter et al., 2014, p. 73).

McCaffrey et al. (1995) further clarified leaders adopt participative systems because it appears to offer solutions to real problems. Advanced leadership positions "are

drawn to the idea of using information from all points of the organization and tapping the energy that comes from aligning individuals' comments with organizational tasks"

(Paynter et al., p. 73). From the research it is clear that organizations are now seeing improved achievement outcomes from their employees because they are involving their input in the tasks that they are asking them to accomplish.

McCaffrey, Freeman, and Hart (1995) also cited some downsides to the theory. They maintained that:

Participative systems have barriers that are deeply embedded in social economic and political issues... Structures and attitudes impeding participative systems are usually valued more highly than the prospective gains from the systems and that in the future these systems will have difficulty sustaining themselves in an organizational landscape that favors centralized control Paynter et al., 2014, p. 73).

Paynter et al. (2014) summarized participative leadership style as a more democratic leadership style. They further explained that this leadership style values team input, but that the responsibility of making the final decision rested with the leader. Participative leadership boosts employee morale because they make contributions to the decision-making process, thereby making them feel their opinions matter. When change is necessary within the organization, the participative leadership style helps employees accept changes without reluctance because of their role in the process.

2.9.3 Situational Leadership. Hershey & Blanchard defined situational leadership as the "interaction among the dimensions of task behavior and relationship behavior, as well as follower readiness/maturity for performing a certain task" (Hershey & Blanchard, 1996, p.7). This model focuses on the amount of "direction (task behavior) and socioemotional support give

to a situation and the “level of ‘readiness’ of the follower or group” (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 1).

2.9.3.1 Task Behavior and Relationship Behavior. Situational leadership has been recognized for decades as an integral part of management. Prior research shows Task Behavior and Relationship Behavior have often been referred to or compared to “autocratic and democratic leadership, employee oriented and productive oriented leadership” (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 1). It was believed that these styles of leadership could be “represented by a single continuum, moving from very authoritarian leader behavior (task) at one end to very participative leader behavior (relationship) at the other end” (p. 1).

Ohio State University educational research staff conducted several exhaustive studies (2000-2001) questioning whether task and relationship behaviors were actual leadership styles. Through observations of leaders’ activities, staff linked the behaviors to different categories; “Initiating Structure (task behavior) and Consideration (relationship behavior)” (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 1). The categories were defined as:

2.9.3.2 Task Behavior. “The extent to which leader engages in one-way communication by explaining what each follower is to do as well as when, where, and how tasks are to be completed” (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 1).

2.9.3.3 Relationship Behavior. “The extent to which a leader engages in two-way communication by providing socioemotional support, ‘psychological strokes’ and facilitating behaviors” (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 1).

2.9.3.4 Level of Readiness. Defined as “level of readiness as the capability and disposition of a person to take responsibility for guiding their own behavior” (Hershey & Blanchard, 2001, p. 3).

The levels of readiness are determined by the actual task to be accomplished. According to Hershey & Blanchard. (2001), people are “not at a level of readiness in any total sense” (p. 3). In other words, the specific task to be accomplished dictates an individual’s level of readiness. The leader must be willing to guide the individual through the levels in order to accomplish the task. They further explained that Situational Leaders must be careful not to provide too much “socioeconomic support” to individuals who are not demonstrating a sufficient level of readiness as this may jeopardize the individual’s perception of the leader’s ability (p. 8).

Paynter et al. (2014) affirmed that it “is the belief of the authors/researchers that the strength of the situational leadership style lies on the fact that it is an overarching style of many others” (p. 49). More specifically, when a leader encounters a situation, he/she potentially employs any one of the leadership styles to resolve that particular situation.

2.9.4 Transactional Leadership. Max Weber developed the transactional leader theory in 1947. His leadership model described three different kinds of leaders: bureaucratic-transactional leaders, traditional leaders, and charismatic leaders. According to Paynter et al. (2014), Weber describes a transactional leader as “one who earns leadership through normative rules and regulations, strict discipline, and systematic control. Obedience of followers is based on rational values and rules, and also on established agreements. Follower is limited to the obligations and controls which are set before him. Wages are fixed and ranked in a hierarchy. Coercive measures are clearly defined and their use is subject to certain conditions that are already established. The technical side of follower has big importance and forms the basis for the selection of administrative staff. There is no right of appeal. Capitalism, according to Weber,

encourages the development of bureaucracy, even bureaucracy exists in socialist systems” (p. 55). After an extensive examination of both theories, Paynter et al. (2014) concluded:

Max Weber and Bernard Bass based their theories on transactions. Their theories suggested that transactional leadership is simplistic and easy to administer and minimal training is required. In this theory, either people behave or else. If time is of the essence, the transactional method can be very expeditious. On the other hand, the theory disregards emotions and social values. It assumes everyone is rational. In stressful situations, it has not been proven to be the most effective leadership method. People can be exploited and when the demand for workers exceeds the supply, the leader does not have as much control, being that the subordinate has the ability to walk away from the situation. The theory also can impair an organization because it encourages destructive competition. The organization can become dependent upon one or a few leaders and then, if the leadership disappears, it is very difficult to replace it (Paynter et al., 2012, p. 55).

Additionally, Paynter et al. (2014) cited the findings of a study conducted by

Pepper (2010). Pepper’s study examined school leadership and student achievement.

Pepper affirmed:

In addition to effective practices for improving student achievement, a school environment to learning is an important element related to student academic success. This aspect of leadership is best accomplished through the transactional leadership style which provides for the effective oversight of the daily management and organizational needs of the school (p.56).

2.9.5 Transformational Leadership. Northhouse (2010) defined transformation leadership as the “ability to get people to want to change, improve, and be led” (Balyer, 2012, p. 581). Northhouse contended that this form of leadership entails “assessing associates’ motives, satisfying their needs, and valuing them” (p. 581). Other researchers have defined transformational leadership as “the leader’s ability to increase organizational members’

commitment, capacity, and engagement in meeting goals” (p. 581). On the other hand, Hallinger (1999) stated transformational leadership “conceptualizes leadership as an organizational entity rather than the task of a single individual” (p. 582). Researchers have hypothesized that the impact of a transformational leader directly and indirectly influences peoples’ actions. More so, it influences teachers’ commitment “to change in building vision, performance expectations, communication, goal setting, leadership collaboration and personal gratification” (p. 582).

Balyer (2012) further ascertained that transformational leadership has three functions. First, leaders “sincerely serve the needs of, empower and inspire others to achieve great success” (p. 582). Second, they lead with “a degree of persuasion, set a vision, instill trust, confidence, and pride in working with them” (p. 582). Lastly, “with intellectual stimulation, they offer followers of the same caliber as the leader” (p. 582). As a result, a school is able to function as a mutual unit where all individuals are empowered to achieve the same goals.

Despite Bass and Avolio’s (1990) assertion that transformational leaders focus on “capacity building for the purpose of organizational change”, Bennis & Nanus (1985) established that they sharpen their subordinates’ skills and enhance their knowledge from their own experiences (Balyer, 2012, p. 582). To further examine the effects of transformational leadership on teachers’ commitment to change and their performance, Balyer conducted a qualitative study involving 30 teachers from Istanbul, Turkey to ascertain the level of transformational leadership behaviors that school principals demonstrate during their administrative practices on a daily basis. A set of interview questions was presented to each individual:

- Does your school principal consider your needs before his own needs?
- Does s/he use power for personal gains?
- Does s/he demonstrate high moral standards?

- Does s/he set challenging goals for her/his followers?
- Does s/he display enthusiasm and optimism?
- Does s/he involve the followers in envisioning attractive future states?
- Does s/he communicate high expectations?
- Does s/he demonstrate commitment to goals?
- Does s/he behave individuals as if they are special people?
- Does s/he act as a coach or mentor to develop her/his follower's potential? and
- Does s/he stimulate followers to be innovative and creative? (Balyer, 2012, p. 584).

The study concluded that “principals of this sample demonstrate high level of characteristics of transformational leadership like idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation”. The results further revealed, “teachers’ opinions concerning their principals’ transformational leadership behaviors are positive in general”. Finally, based on the responses, it can be “inferred, that female principals’ behaviors are perceived as politer than male colleagues” (Balyer, 2012, p. 588). The following recommendations were reached through the study:

- Principals have important influences on student and teachers’ performance, so principal candidates should be trained as transformational leaders during college trainings;
- Principals have to deal with heavy official procedures which take too much time. This could be reduced by empowering school managements with co-principalship;
- Current principals should be supported to be transformational leaders with in-service trainings prepared by university-ministry cooperation;
- Principals should be asked to have a degree from educational administration field to be eligible for that post in the future; and
- Principals should be chosen and appointed to their posts based on their qualities and qualifications without any political manipulations (Balyer, 2012, p. 588).

In a study conducted by Nash (2010) as cited by Paynter et al. (2014), Nash looked at transformational school leadership and student achievement. The findings stated that transformational leadership has been shown to be an important dimension of school

improvement. The study hypothesized that a positive relationship exists between transformational leadership and overall student achievement. Multiple linear regression was used to analyze the relationship between five dimensions of transformational leadership and students' reading and math scores on standardized tests. Findings of the research demonstrated some support for the hypothesis relative to three dimensions of transformational leadership and students' reading and math achievement at third and fifth grade levels. This research also suggests that "where transformational leadership existed among principals in the sample, it was significantly correlated with students' achievement in certain areas" (p. 61).

2.10 Case Studies Methodology

This study will expand on the qualitative case study design. According to Creswell (2013), case study methodology allows the researcher to ascertain a greater depth of understanding with regard to a particular topic or phenomenon. The focus of this particular study is to assess the impact leadership practices and training on the academic achievement for students with disabilities. As such, the boundaries of this study are defined and confined specifically to special education programs in a K-12 environment.

Case study methodology allows the researcher to explore this phenomenon in great depth (Yin, 1992). This in-depth analysis will yield a greater understanding of the importance of preparing K-12 education leaders to take on the responsibilities of managing special education programs in order to facilitate and sustain improved academic achievement. Thus, this research will afford post-secondary education institutions, state departments of education, current and future education leaders a greater understanding of the preparation required to ensure leaders are

equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to increase the academic performance of students with disabilities.

2.11 Case Study Analysis

Case study analysis design is enhanced when neither qualitative nor quantitative methodologies if used individually would yield the desired information (Creswell, 2013). Case study analysis is well suited for conducting a study to gain a better understanding of the impact leadership practices, and training have on the academic achievement of students with disabilities. Yin (1992) reported that case studies permit researchers to perform in-depth investigations of a circumstance or trend. Case study analysis allow multiple aspects of that circumstance or trend to be explored from varying perspectives. More recently, Yin (2013) reported that comparing and contrasting several case studies, guided by a theoretical framework, aids in increasing the validity of correlative findings. Likewise, Small (2009) reported that qualitative studies, including case studies, can be made more vigorous by examining multiple case studies in a particular subject area. Doing so allows for varied perspectives from each individual case in both space and time. Gaining insight from multiple case studies increases the validity of qualitative works of this nature. It is important to note that Creswell (2013) reports that findings, even when gathered from multiple, similar case studies may not be generalizable. Concurrently, Creswell states that generalizability is not necessarily the intended goal of case study analysis. Rather, the goal is to gain a greater, in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon.

Creswell (2013) states that case study analysis should be limited to a maximum of five cases to achieve the best results. For this reason, this study will examine three case studies involving school administrators' role in special education programs and their leadership

knowledge, skills, and abilities. These three case studies will be introduced and discussed in the following chapter.

2.12 Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 presented a review of literature on the impact of leadership practices and training on the academic achievement of students with disabilities. The literature review provided an overview of the relationship between leadership practices and the academic achievement of students with disabilities. The literature showed that despite limited studies, there appeared to be a positive connection between the two. In contrast, the literature review also demonstrated that some researchers believe no relationship exists between leadership practices and student achievement as the data continued to show a gap in reading and math scores for students with disabilities.

The literature review examined the impact school leader training has on leading special education programs. Study results showed most school leaders felt unprepared to supervise such programs; therefore, they relied very heavily on other personnel with more knowledge and experience in special education. Upon further examination of the literature, school leaders that felt adequately prepared to supervise special education programs were more involved in the process and saw higher achievement results for students with disabilities.

Additionally, reviews were provided on four conceptual frameworks that reviewed specific leadership styles typically associated with school leadership and academic achievement: instructional leadership, situational leadership, transactional leadership, and transformation leadership. Lastly, a review of case study methodology and analysis were provided. The following chapter addresses the methodology and research design that will be utilized for the study.

Chapter III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the methodology used for this current study and will introduce the specific cases studies in Florida, Denver, and the Southwestern part of the US that will be analyzed. According to Creswell (2013), case study methodology allows the researcher to ascertain a greater depth of understanding with regard to a particular topic or phenomenon. The focus of this particular study is to assess the impact leadership practices and training have on the academic achievement for students with disabilities.

3.1 Case Study Analysis

According to Yin (2009), a case study is defined as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context-especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Yin explained case studies assume that probing the framework and other intricate circumstances related to the case(s) being studied are primary to understanding the case(s).

Robert Stake (1995) and Robert Yin (2003) contended that two fundamental devices guide case study methodology. These devices seek “to ensure that the topic of interest is well explored, and that the essence of the phenomenon is revealed, but the methods that they each employ are quite different” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). Their approach to case study is based on a “constructivist paradigm” which claims that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective”. This paradigm “recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn’t reject outright some notion of objectivity” (p. 545).

Yin (2003) stated:

A case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in

the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545).

Despite questions regarding the validity of case study research, Patton & Yin (1990) agreed that advantages to using case study research are the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which enhances data credibility. Another advantage of this approach is “the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, while enabling participants to tell their stories”. It is through these “stories” that the participants can define their views of what reality is and what protocol is. These aids the researcher in understanding the participants’ point of view and decision making processes (pp. 545-546).

According to Eisenhardt (2009) case studies are: “Particularly well suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate. This type of work is highly complementary to incremental theory building from normal science research. The former is useful in early stages of research on a topic or when a fresh perspective is needed, whilst the latter is useful in later stages of knowledge (pp. 548-549). Although somewhat narrow in their scope, case studies are “useful in providing answers to ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’ questions and in this role, can be used for exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research (p. 549). Case studies help to gain a more personal comprehension of the subject matter. The results will add valuable knowledge to the educational community.

3.2 School Leader Preparation and Training in Special Education Case Studies

This study will focus on the preparation and training of school leaders in Special Education Programs. Each of these case studies analyzed the role of the principal in developing effective special education programs, the implications of principal preparation programs and

certification policies, and the impact of principal leadership on teacher attitudes and the academic achievement of students with disabilities. An in-depth exploration of each of these case studies will be examined to determine themed data regarding the implications of administrator preparation programs on the academic achievement of students with disabilities.

3.3 Selection of School Leader Preparation and Training in Special Education Case Studies for Analysis

The cases included in this comparative case study analysis were selected through a purposive sample method. Specific boundaries were decided upon for inclusion of those case studies selected. The first criterion was to include case studies regarding school administrators with responsibilities for special education programming. The second criterion was to select case studies with a focus on administrative preparation programs. The third criterion was to select case studies with a focus on leadership and its impact on teacher effectiveness and academic achievement. This paper presents an analysis of three such case studies.

These studies were selected for inclusion after reviewing the resources available in both EBSCO host and JStor databases. The keywords in the Boolean search included “leadership practices and training in special education programs” and “case study” to best identify appropriate articles for inclusion. Each search was limited by the selection of “full text” and “professional journals.” Each search was further limited to include articles published within the past five years. In EBSCO host, the original search yielded 48 potential articles, 23 characterized as case studies specific to the selected subject. JStor yielded over 15,000 articles, many of which pertained to education and leadership, training and preparation for administrators;

however, they were out of the scope of this study. Therefore, a narrower search was conducted to find articles related to leadership in special education programs and academic achievement of students with disabilities. This search returned 400 articles specific to the study, with 49 classified as a case study. After review of the articles, three specific articles were selected. The search for appropriate case studies was guided further by Lynch (2012), in an update on the status of principal responsibilities and the implications of principal preparation programs and certification policies. This study seeks to discover the impact of principal preparation and certification programs on special education programs and the impact on the academic achievement of special education students.

3.4 Introduction of Case Study Number One

Garrison-Wade, D., Sobel, D., & Fulmer, C. (2007). Inclusive leadership: Preparing principals for the role that awaits them. *Educational Leadership and Administration* 19(1) 117-130.

The purpose of this study was to address the concerns regarding special education and administrator preparation programs at a western university. Garrison-Wade, Sobel, & Fulmer. (2007) investigated the program to determine how well preservice principals were being prepared to improve instruction for all learners. To determine program improvement and training needs, researchers collected data from focus groups and survey data from current student participation and alumni staff. Garrison-Wade et al. found in previous literature that there was a lack of special preparation for school principals, particularly in supervising special education programs (p.118). The literature also expanded on the challenges facing school leaders including changes in special education mandates, and increased job responsibilities. Garrison-Wade et al. (2005) examined the role of instructional leaders; principals need requisite knowledge in assessing the impact of disabilities on “student performance, monitoring referral-to-placement

procedures, providing various service delivery models and facilitating student support teams (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007, p. 118).

The School of Education and Human Development (SEHD) at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Centers (UCDHSC) offered an Administrative Preparation Program, Special Education and Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies (ALPS), which provided instruction and training for professionals seeking administrative certification. Based on new education initiatives and changing administrative roles, SEHD wished to examine its own program to determine if its program was meeting the needs of its students. Their primary purpose was to look at the ALPS program to determine if key content knowledge, and skills related to disability issues were infused across all core courses in the administrative preparation program.

3.4.1 Methodology

Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) utilized qualitative and quantitative data research methods. The qualitative portion of the study focused on data collected from two focus groups. The quantitative portion used the information collected through a survey instrument. Two research questions guided the study; first, “how well do graduates of the ALPS program feel they are prepared to lead inclusive school practices?” Second, “what are the most crucial skills that administrators need to have for inclusive leadership?” (p. 121).

124 participants took part in the study. Participants were identified through the ALPS principal licensure program, Masters and Specialist in Education programs database of alumni graduates between the years 2000 and 2005 and students completing their final semester in the ALPS program (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007, p. 121). The database generated 240 email invitations. 99 of the participants responded. The participants represented alumni/students from

twelve administrative preparation cohorts and seven school districts throughout Colorado. The qualitative portion of the study contained participants from a group of Special Education (SPED) students completing their final course in their MA program. 25 students were invited to participate of which 25 agreed to participate. Participation in the study was voluntary without compensation (p. 121).

Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) employed Kidder and Fine's (1980) analysis which supported use of quantitative and qualitative methods in research "because it is a form of triangulation which enhances the validity and reliability of the study" (p. 121)? The triangulation concept states bias in other data sources, methods, and investigations are used and/or identified. Triangulation of data in this study was attained by looking at similar data sources through different methods; focus groups and a survey instrument. The researchers conducted a "face validity" of the survey instrument prior to its administration. Three researchers not involved in the study were asked multiple questions to determine validity: "(1) What are your perceptions of what the instrument measures? (2) Is the instrument a reasonable tool to gain information? And (3) Is the instrument well designed?" (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007, p. 121). Feedback obtained aligned with anticipated outcome of the instrument.

Data were collected through a survey given to students to solicit their perceptions of the program to prepare administrators to lead inclusive schools. The survey was administered through an online survey tool, Zoomerang. The instrument consisted of four background questions, four open ended questions, and 11 questions using a Likert scale. The items aligned with the study's objectives and goals which sought to gather information from participants to assess ALPS' effectiveness in designing courses to support inclusive leadership in the principal licensure program (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007, p. 122).

Two study groups were conducted to gather data on the benefits and disadvantages of working within schools that serve students with diverse needs and backgrounds to offer specific strategies that they perceived were effective in working with students that struggle; and provide recommendations for principals and prospective principals to improve supportive inclusive practices. Participants were divided into two groups with each session lasting 1 ½ hours. A tape recorder was used to document participant responses. The recorded information was transcribed by a professional transcriber (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007, p. 122). Survey data were analyzed by using a statistical software program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), to present descriptive statistical data. For this study, data were coded and tallied as frequencies and percentages and displayed in frequency distribution tables to give a clear picture of distributions for relevance and comparison. Qualitative data were coded line by line using the constant comparative analysis. The process involved the researchers examining data to get a sense of the information. The researchers identified segments of information that were alike across interviews or focus groups. Open ended questions and focus group questions provided the initial coding organization. Various Microsoft Word tools were used to manage and analyze the data. Open coding of participants' responses was grouped into themes while an inductive approach was used to identify additional codes for remarks made that did not fit into initial categories. Lastly, selective coding was used to explicate themes and compared them between the ALPS and SPED groups (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007, p. 122).

3.4.2 Significance

This case study examined a university program designed to prepare preservice administrators for leadership roles. With changing roles for school administrators, increased student needs, and school reformation, research shows administrators lack the knowledge and

skill set to effectively manage special education programs. Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) solicited participants in the ALPS and SPED at the University of Denver to answer questions regarding whether the University adequately prepared them for an administrative role in special education. In addition, the study sought to answer what were the most crucial skills that administrators needed to have for inclusive leadership. This study is important to this case study analysis based on its goal of identifying skills administrators need to effectively manage special education programs and whether their education adequately prepared them to lead inclusive school practices.

Each of these three case studies discusses the role principals play in leading effective inclusive programs from three distinct geographic locations in the United States, as well as their efforts to identify leadership practices that contribute to improved student outcomes. The following tables serve to clearly identify the methodologies used in each case study.

3.5 Introduction of Case Study Number Two

Waldron, N., McLeskey, J., & Redd, L. (2011). Setting the direction: The role of the Principal in Developing an Effective Inclusive School. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 24(2) 51-60.

Due to evolving changes in education, schools in the U.S. are accountable for the outcome of all students' learning as well as educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms for much of the school day. The result of this trend has been an increase in demands and additional pressure on schools to meet the needs of every student. Evidence indicates positive progress; however, few schools have been successful in attaining high academic achievement for all students in predominately inclusive environments. Existing evidence proposes that principals play a crucial role in school improvement and student

achievement outcome. New evidence is beginning to develop regarding the role principals may play in developing effective inclusive schools. Despite this new evidence, limited information on how principals attain this feat is available.

This case study (Waldron, N., McLeskey, J. & Redd, L., 2011) examined the critical features of the principal's role that contributed to the success of a highly effective, inclusive school. The study was conducted between 2009 and 2010 school year and was a part of a larger case study that focused on more generalized factors that contributed to the success of a highly effective inclusive school (p. 51). Thus, the researchers sought to answer the following question: What is the role of the principal in developing and sustaining a highly effective, inclusive schools? (p. 52)

3.5.1 Methodology

This case study was part of a larger case study that reviewed more generalized factors that contributed to the success of a highly effective, inclusive school. Per Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011), critical case sampling was used in the initial study to select an elementary school that was both highly effective and inclusive. The terms highly effective and inclusive were defined as a setting in which students were included in general education settings at a level well above the state and national average and that evidence levels of achievement for students with disabilities and at risk students were well above the state average (p. 52). Following the review of state data on school effectiveness and inclusive practices, and conferring with colleagues regarding possible sites for the research a location was determined. For the case study, Waldron, McLeskey & Redd elected to use pseudonym names to identify the school, teachers and principal. The focus of their investigation is on Creekside Elementary (CES) and Ms. Richards, principal, as determining her role in the development of a highly effective school is critical to

outcome of the case study. Through the investigation, it was also determined that Ms. Richards had played a “key role” in the CES reform project (p. 52).

Creekside Elementary School, located in a small, rural community with approximately 4500 residents, enrolls 480 students in grades K-4. According to Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011), the student body makeup is 68% Caucasian and 32%, African Americans, Hispanics, multicultural or other ethnic groups. They also reported 50% of the student body was from high-poverty backgrounds and 16% represented students with disabilities (p. 52). Accountability data revealed Creekside Elementary had been highly successful at including students with disabilities and improving outcome data for students with disabilities and those who struggle to meet state standards reported in 2006, 66% of students with disabilities (SWD) were educated in the general education setting at least 80% or more of the school day. When compared to state and district data, CES’s data were comparable. During the 2008-2009 school year, Waldron, McLeskey & Redd reported all students with disabilities were being serviced more than 80% of the time in the general education population. District data reported an average of 68% placement of students with disabilities and the state reported 63% placement of students with disabilities (p. 52). Student achievement data showed CES performed at a higher proficiency rate compared to district and state data. According to Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, students with disabilities at CES met annual yearly progress by achieving 69% on reading assessments and 58% on math assessments. State data showed SWD performed on an average of 33% on reading and 36% on math, while SWD averaged 32% on reading assessments and 36% on math assessments (p. 53). The results showed CES to be the richest participant from the selection of candidates.

The investigation used a qualitative case study to examine significant features of the principals’ role that contributed to the successes of CES. The study was conducted during the

2009-2010 school year. The researchers sought an insider's perspective on the issues and determined interviews were the best data collection method. Based on the recommendations, 22 teacher and administrator interviews were conducted during the course of the year. Follow-up interviews were conducted with the school principal and eight teachers (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 53). Interviews averaged 35 minutes, ranging from 24-92 minutes (p. 53). Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for use in data analysis. The researcher utilized open-ended questions. Information obtained from the first interviews was used to develop questions for follow up interviews that followed the classroom observations. Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) stated the purpose of the classroom observations was to document organizational structure and instructional strategies that were used at the school, as well as provide supplementary information that would be used to frame questions for subsequent interviews with teachers and administrators (p. 53). An analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of five themes regarding the leadership of the principal in supporting the development of CES as an effective, inclusive school (p. 54).

Through its investigation and analysis of interviews, documents, and observations, Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) could determine five distinct themes regarding Ms. Richards' leadership practices. The first theme focused on how the principal provided leadership and guidance to staff and was involved in day to day actions. Based on information obtain during the interview process, the researchers concluded that Ms. Richards, by her own admission, had arrived at CES with the mindset that her "primary goal" was to develop a "shared vision and moral-purpose for the school" (p. 54). To ensure the school was headed in the right direction, Ms. Richards also stated that she "wanted to meet the needs of ALL students" and "ensure students with disabilities...were a natural part of the school vision" (p. 54). The researchers also

obtained direct feedback from teachers which indicated a similar mindset to that of Ms. Richards. Numerous comments notated by the researchers were “teachers are all about student needs” and “we have on going conversations...as the meat of the curriculum is presented to everyone” Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (p. 54). Other Leithwood (2008) leadership characteristics that were noted by the researchers were Ms. Richards’ “optimistic attitude, resiliency, and persistence in moving towards established goals” (p. 54).

The second theme involved exploring Ms. Richards’ path to redesigning the organization. The Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) study found the shared approach was used throughout the process. Ms. Richards at no time indicated she would accomplish this task as an individual. Using a team approach, she worked alongside teachers to “develop a learning community that would share decision making” (p. 54). The researchers provided insight into the teachers’ perceptions by including direct quotes from one teacher regarding Ms. Richards’ supervision practices; “she manages from the top, but she manages in a way that’s not intrusive in the classroom. There are expectations set, but if you’re doing your job she’s not going to bother you” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 55).

The researchers also reported evidence to support Ms. Richards’ approach, which provided an avenue for teachers, administrators and other stakeholders to work together to “develop and implement a more inclusive program” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 55). The researchers share feedback from both teachers and Ms. Richards. For example, Ms. Richards was quoted as saying, “The inclusion movement came as a plan to meet all kids’ needs, but particularly students with disabilities. It’s not an add-on program...it became part of the whole school’s plan for improving achievement for all students” (p. 55). Waldron, McLeskey & Redd concluded by elaborating on the leadership skills required to develop the successful learning

community at CES. They further elaborated on the other strategies Ms. Richards used such as “encouraging risk taking among her teaching staff and developing teacher leaders” Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 55).

The third theme, improving work conditions, examined the development of the learning community. The researchers concluded that this built a level of “trust among teachers and ensured that they shared a common vision for CES”. They further reiterated that many teachers stated Ms. Richards did many other things to help improve the CES working conditions such as “hire teachers and para who were good fits...and who are highly effective professionals” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 55). The researchers also pointed out that when assessment results were not positive, Ms. Richards “buffered her teachers from external demands” (p. 56). Lastly, the researchers derived from the data that Ms. Richards was willing to make the difficult decisions to meet student needs without sacrificing teacher working conditions.

Theme four was providing high-quality instruction in all settings. The researchers concluded that through Ms. Richards efforts elevated the quality of instruction throughout the school. Teacher feedback stated students with disabilities had been placed in “separate classrooms” and taught only “rote skills”, never really exploring their true potential. With the new vision of an all-inclusive classrooms, all students were placed in general education classrooms, but those who required “individual” support still received the time required to enhance the skills. The researchers (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011) concluded that Ms. Richards recognized the need to improve the quality of instruction for students with disabilities by placing them in the general education environment where they had access to quality instruction equal to their peers. At the same time, she also recognized that some of the students’

cognitive abilities were below grade level and required additional support. Since bridging general education with special education, Ms. Richards ensured teachers had “high quality professional development” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, p. 56) opportunities in and out of school. The researchers reported responses from teachers were positive and verified through observation that “in most settings instruction at CES tended to be very high quality” (p. 56).

Theme five, using data to drive decision making, was the “most important consideration for making an effective, inclusive school as determined by the teachers and Ms. Richards” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd , 2011 , p. 57). Prior to the implementation of a data system, all data used were “teacher created” and not as reliable as “real data”. Ms. Rogers began conversations about data driven instruction, as this was not being utilized at CES. A review of state data confirmed students with disabilities were not unsuccessful at meeting performance standards. To address teacher concerns, Ms. Richards emphasized the positive aspects of the data collected and “praised” all teachers for their successes. Ms. Richards was quoted as saying, “we use data to make change last” and “if I could capture some from data...we would make a big deal out of it” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 58). Teachers were quoted as “buying into it” and were quoted as stating, “Look, we’re headed in the right direction, look at these increments we are making” (p. 58). The researchers concluded that the more the data were stressed, the use of them became the “fabric” of CES (p. 58).

3.5.2 Significance

The case study (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011) provided evidence to support previous research signifying that the principal plays “a key leadership role in supporting teachers and school-change activities” (p. 58). This specific case study provided two critical factors. First, detailed information on specific principal strategies used in reorganizing CES was

identified. Such strategies included “setting the direction” of CES, “organizing and redesigning” CES, “improving working conditions for staff”, “designing and implementing high-quality instruction” across all environments and “developing a data system to monitor the effectiveness of the program” (p. 58). The second critical factor provided information on the role of the principal in transitioning a school to full inclusion and increasing achievement for students with disabilities.

As mentioned previously, prior research has shown a movement from separate education settings to more inclusive settings, but there remains minimal information on the academic achievement for students with disabilities. The investigation conducted by Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) offers data on the academic achievement of all students, including students with disabilities. Their findings presented evidence to show that the principal used “high-quality instruction” throughout the school and a data system “to ensure accountability and program effectiveness” (p. 58). The researchers also noted that the leadership strategies employed at CES were “very similar” to other principals’ strategies used “in improving schools and student outcomes for all students” (p. 58) discussed in the research conducted by Leithwood and colleagues (2008). These investigators found that principals improve schools and achievement by: (1) building a vision and setting direction for their school (2) understanding and developing people, (3) managing the teaching and learning through program, (4) improving teaching and learning through staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions, (5) maintaining a core set of values while exhibiting characteristic such as open-mindedness, a willingness to learn from others, flexibility, persistence, resilience and optimism (p. 59).

3.5.3 Case Study Implications

Waldron, McLeskey & Redd's (2011) case study established two significant implications. The first implication was the strategies used and the role played by Ms. Richards were not unique, but typical of schools with missions, visions, and the desire to achieve positive outcomes for all students. The case study also showed key differences between the success of CES and other schools that are "less effective" in improving student outcomes. First, the principal and staff addressed the gaps in school improvement with "tenacity" and "persistence" (p. 59). Second, the shared vision of "high levels of achievement and inclusion for all students" was a necessity (p. 59). Despite barriers, foreseen and/or unseen, there was a common desire and motivation to do everything possible to ensure positive student outcomes. Lastly, the use of data driven decision making was significant to student improvement. CES customized a system that fit the needs of its building, allowing for monitoring of instruction and student progress. Unlike some schools, CES did not rely on the data shared by the district and state as it did provide information on quality of instruction that aided in measuring student progress (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011), p. 59).

The final implication from the case study conducted by Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) revealed that "effective, inclusive programs" can be designed in an environment that has adequate resources without the need for "outside experts in school change and professional development or inordinate levels of resources" (p. 60). The results of the case study presented evidence to support effective inclusive schools that show positive outcomes for all students requires: effective use of resources, high-quality professional development, a data system that facilitates decision making and determines how resources will be used to maximize effect, and a principal that exhibits a willingness to involve staff in the decision making process, and the

ability to provide leadership and guidance throughout the development and implementation process. This case study is an important inclusion for this current case study analysis for its thorough description of the leadership strategies employed by the principal to strengthen the inclusion program support teachers and improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

3.6 Introduction of Case Study Number Three

Hoppey & McLeskey (2013). A case study of principal leadership in an effective inclusive school. *Journal of Special Education* 46(4) 242-256

This case study (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013) examined the role of the principal in school change during the current era of high-stakes accountability. State and federal mandates for accountability and improved achievement outcomes for all students have required schools to “improve their quality of teacher practice and significantly increase student outcomes” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 245). This increased accountability has led to federal and state mandates to have in place “a teacher appraisal system and a student assessment tool designed to measure progress” (p. 245). Attaining the demands for improved student outcomes for all students coupled with the inclusion of increasing numbers of students with disabilities in general education classrooms requires significant changes in school.

Existing research has identified the school principal as “a key participant in directing school change and creating schools that support teachers to meet the needs of all students” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 245). Citing data from previous investigations, Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) determined that principals provided various supports as inclusive programs are developed and sustained. Further research disclosed that the types of activities principals

engaged in to support inclusive schools include “shared decision making, leading by example, and actively promoting learning communities” (McLeskey, 2013, p. 245).

3.6.1 Methodology

The principal selected to participate in the investigation (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013) was chosen using purposeful sampling. The participant showed a strong interest in partaking in this study, and previous contact with him by both researchers suggested he would be a valuable information source with the potential to “provide insight and in-depth understanding” of the principal’s role in school improvement. Moreover, this principal had extensive and successful experience working with reforms for both general and special education. His career spanned almost four decades and included experience as a classroom educator, district administrator, and, finally, a principal. To protect the identity and to ensure confidentiality, the researchers used a pseudonym name, Tom Smith, and Hawk’s Nest Elementary, to identify the school. Hawk’s Nest Elementary was located in a small town in a rural area in Florida. The school enrolls approximately 460 students and has 27 teachers. Just more than 61% of the students are Caucasian, 25% are African American, 7% are Hispanic, and the remainder are from other ethnic groups. Approximately 54% of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch. In addition, approximately 18% of the students at Hawk’s Nest are identified as having a disability (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 246).

Hawk’s Nest Elementary is generally recognized as an above average school in the local community, and has a model program for inclusive practice. The researchers reported evidence from several sources supporting the perspective that Hawk’s Nest Elementary has been successful in including students with disabilities in general education classrooms and improving student academic outcomes for low-achieving students (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 246). For

example, the proportion of students with disabilities who were educated in general education placements (special education services outside the general education classroom for less than 21% of the school day) increased from 44% in 2006–2007 to 67% in 2008–2009 (p. 246).

In addition to increased placement of students with disabilities in the general education environment, Hawk’s Nest has also become a highly effective school based on the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT), the state accountability measure for students. Hawk’s Nest has been successful in increasing student outcomes for low-achieving students or those “at risk” for being labeled with a disability, when compared to local school district averages. For instance, 79% of low-achieving students at Hawk’s Nest made learning gains in reading and 77% in math as compared to 56% of low-achieving students across the district in reading and 63% in math. In addition, data indicate that not only students with disabilities, but their nondisabled peers have substantially exceeded district and state averages in gain scores for students with disabilities in reading and math (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 247).

The purpose of the FCAT Developmental Scale Score (DSS) is to determine student learning gains across grade levels, subject areas, and school years by tracking student progress over time. Students can demonstrate learning gains in two ways. First, students can demonstrate learning gains if they achieve proficiency on the corresponding grade-level FCAT math or reading assessment. If students do not meet proficiency standards but demonstrate a year of growth as indicated by their DSS gain or change score they are determined to have made a learning gain for that year (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 247).

Hawk’s Nest fourth and fifth grade data for the 2008–2009 year indicated that students with disabilities improved an average of 299 points in reading and 136 points in math when using DSS scores (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). This compared to a 200-point gain for students

with disabilities across the state, and 199 across the district in reading and 111 points across the state in math and 115 in the district. Finally, data on the proportion of students with disabilities who met proficiency standards revealed that Hawk's Nest exceeded state and district averages in reading and mathematics across grade levels. In summary, these data support the perspective that Hawk's Nest has developed a model program for students with disabilities that is both inclusive and effective in improving student outcomes.

Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) used case study methodology and ethnographic methods, interviews and observations, with a phenomenological lens to "study the lived experience of being a principal from Tom Smith's point of view gain an understanding of how one principal conceptualizes, negotiates, and enacts his role in today's era of high-stakes accountability" (p. 247). The researchers selected the method of an insider's point of view to provide insight into the meaning and interpretations attached to events that occurred while Hawk's Nest transitioned through the school improvement process.

Phenomenological interviews, participant observations, and informal conversational interviews with the principal were conducted throughout the school year. Three phenomenological interviews were conducted during the first month of the study. The focused, in-depth interviews lasted approximately two hours and explored the principal's past and present experiences related to the phenomena under study (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 247). Open-ended questions were employed to examine Mr. Smith's experiences as he identified and reflected on key events. Interviews also addressed critical events or themes that had been identified during informal interviews and observations. Weekly observations conducted during the school year involved "shadowing" the principal for a full day one time per week for the first

6 weeks of the school year, and provided in-depth information regarding the types of activities that the principal engaged in during a typical school day.

For the remainder of the school year, weekly observations lasted one to three hours and focused on selected critical events or issues such as Tom Smith's engagement in public relations activities, district meetings, and faculty meetings used to facilitate problem solving and use student data to inform their instruction. The researchers used the observations to document how Tom's beliefs and knowledge "were put into practice in his role as the school leader" (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 248). In addition, observation data were used to direct the interview questions and sessions which lasted 15 minutes to one hour. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a detailed "understanding of the principal's actions, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings about the specific events of the day and were conducted as specific situations arose" (p. 248).

Formal interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed. Field notes were taken to document all observations and informal interviews. Notes were transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed immediately after each observation or informal interview. The researchers' reflections and analyses were coded in the margins as observer comments differentiated from interview and observation data. Analysis of the data entailed a four-step process that involved both the researchers and the principal. First, the data were dissected by the researchers to examine "essential elements and structures that could be used to analyze the focus of the study" (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 248).

Following dissection of the data, the researchers and principal developed "imaginative variation" on each theme, as they sought to see the same data from a variety of perspectives (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 248). The researchers then began to write a "textural description" of the themes identified as critical features of the principal's behavior as he

supported school improvement (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 248). Finally, the researchers constructed an overall description and framework for the meanings discovered in the study. The researchers and principal reviewed the information and reached a mutual consensus.

To ensure the reliability of the investigation, the researchers worked closely with the principal to construct themes and write descriptions of those themes. Next, the researchers spent a lengthy period reviewing the specific themes that were “identified, resulting in prolonged engagement and persistent observation” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 248). Third, triangulation of data was used to cross-check findings from the interviews by observing the principal’s behavior in a natural setting. Finally, the researchers used “peer debriefing” to discuss the methods and themes as they formulated (p. 248).

3.6.1 Significance

Hoppey & McLeskey’s (2013) purpose for conducting the study was to expand on previous research regarding the role principals play in school change, as inclusive programs are developed, implemented, and sustained over time. The study employed qualitative methodology used to conduct a case study of one principal who had an extensive record of success in leading school change efforts and developing a model inclusive program in his school. The researchers reported the case study was not conducted during the development of the inclusive program, but during the implementation phase (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 246). The researchers further stated that through the year the study was conducted, the principal and school staff were working to improve their inclusive program and were working simultaneously with faculty from a local university to establish a professional development school partnership. The researchers contributed Mr. Smith’s success to his personal beliefs and persistent attitude. Mr. Smith believed the most important thing he did was “to take care of people.” His “personal investment”

in his staff and students was prevalent and “part of a belief system that exists” at Hawk’s Nest. This was a natural process as he “personally invests and works closely with his teachers” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 201, 3p. 246). Tom’s concept of care emerges from his priority to build relationships with his teachers. He also strives to develop a nurturing community as a shared norm at Hawk’s Nest Elementary.

The study yielded three characteristics of Tom’s leadership style describing how he facilitated the development of a supportive and caring school community. These include (a) caring for and personally investing in teachers, (b) buffering teachers and staff from external pressure, and (c) promoting teacher growth (Hoppey & McLeskey, p. 248). This case study is an important inclusion for this current case study analysis for its thorough description of the leadership strategies employed by the principal to strengthen the inclusion program and outcomes for students with disabilities.

3.7 Chapter Summary

The three preceding case studies and their collective findings will be used to answer the research questions posed in this paper. This chapter presented the comparative analysis findings of the three case studies in the following areas: case study methodology and demographics; significance to leadership and student achievement in each case study; the identification of specific leadership skills utilized throughout the process; and a review of training. In the following chapter, a comprehensive analysis and discussion of this comparative analysis will then distinguish those commonalities and differences in effective leadership practices found in successful schools with special education programs. This will serve to disclose those themes that are relevant to student achievement. The purpose of this study is to examine analysis and discussion of these similarities and differences in anticipation of providing current and future

educational leaders with a greater understanding of the practices and training required to improve student achievement in special education programs. The information obtained from the case study analysis will add significantly to the current body of knowledge.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The three preceding case studies and their collective findings comprised the case study analysis for this current study. A comprehensive analysis distinguished those commonalities and differences in leadership style, practices and training in relation to their impact on special education programs. The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership style and formal training of special education school leaders to determine their impact on the academic achievement of students with special needs.

This chapter presents the comparative analysis findings of the three case studies in the following areas: case study methodology, leadership style, and the impact leadership training and practices had on the academic achievement of students with disabilities. The following question guided the research: What factors influence the academic achievement of students with disabilities? The research questions were: (1) What courses do school leaders receive in school to prepare them to supervise special education programs? (2) What training do school leaders bring with them to assess and evaluate special education program needs? and (3) How do school leader training and education impact student achievement?

Correlations were also analyzed regarding the effects of leadership training and practices on the academic achievement of students with disabilities. Reading and Math achievement scores were available; therefore, this variable was incorporated into the data for future analysis. Each case study reported a unique process, of which two incorporated the use of inclusive practices and school reform within their environment.

4.1 Case Study Methodology Comparison and Analysis

The comparison and analysis of the methodologies from these three case studies reveal that, while the case studies in Florida (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011 and Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013) specifically used interviews to gather the desired data, the Denver (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007) case study utilized a focus group. In addition to the interviews, two case studies utilized other components to collect data. Garrison-Wade et al. (2013) utilized a survey to collect quantitative data, while Waldron, McLeskey & Redd utilized participant observations and examination of data to get a real-life perspective of day to day activities of the participant.

4.1.1 Selection of study location. One of the three case studies used a specific process to determine the appropriate location to conduct their investigation. Case Study Number One (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007) used random selection; however, there was a focus point for a post-secondary education leadership program to evaluate. Case Number Two (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011) utilized a critical sampling technique to select the elementary school where the investigation was to be conducted. The researchers searched for a school that was considered “highly effective and inclusive” (p. 52). Highly effective and inclusive was defined by the researchers as “a setting in which students were included in general, education settings at a level well above the state and national average and that evidenced levels of achievement for students with disabilities and others who struggled that were well above the state average” (p. 52). Case Study Number Three (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013) did use a specific strategy for location of the study. The researchers did note that, due to the purpose of their study, the location of the selected site was significant to the study. They also noted that the investigation was not conducted after the school had completed its transition into an inclusive school.

4.1.2 Participants. All three studies selected their participants based on the research questions they were attempting to answer. Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) utilized 124 participants for their study. The participants were identified through the Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies (ALPS) principal licensure, Masters, and Specialist in Education program database of alumni graduates between the years 2000-2005 and students completing their final semesters in the program. Based on information retrieved through a database, 240 invitations were emailed to all identified individuals. 99 of the recipients replied. The participants represented alumni/students from twelve administrative preparation cohorts and seven school districts throughout Colorado. The qualitative portion of the study consisted of a convenience sample of students completing their final course in their SPED MA program. Twenty-five students were invited to participate in focus group discussions; 100% of the students agreed to participate. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and no compensation was provided.

Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) utilized 22 participants during the study to conduct interviews. The participants consisted of special education and general teachers and administrators. They specifically identified the principal, Ms. Richards (a pseudonym), as the primary focus of the study. There was no specific process used to select the participants. It appears that the individuals were randomly selected after the location was identified.

Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) used purposeful sampling to select the principal participant, Tom Smith (a pseudonym). According to the researchers, the principal “showed a strong interest in participating in the study, and previous contact with him by both authors suggested he would be a rich information source who had the potential to provide insight and in-depth understanding of the principal’s role in school improvement” (p. 46). In addition, the principal had extensive

and successful experience working with reforms for both general education and special education. The researchers also determined that the principal had a vast amount of instructional experience spanning from elementary to high school, as well as 11 years of experience at an alternative school. The principal's experience also included nine years at the district level. Finally, the principal had served at the school (Hawk's Nest Elementary) for 18 years.

4.1.3 Validity. One of the three studies reported utilizing a system to ensure the security of the data. Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) utilized Kidder & Fine's (1987) triangulation theory for using qualitative and quantitative research methods. Kidder & Fine stated this method enhanced the validity and reliability of studies. For their study, Garrison-Wade et al. examined comparable data sources through the use of focus groups (qualitative method) and survey instruments (quantitative methods). In addition, a "face validity" method was used prior to the administration of the survey instrument (p. 121). Three researchers who were not related to the study were asked three questions: "(a) What are your perceptions of what the instrument measures? (b) Is the instrument a reasonable tool to gain information? (c) Is the instrument well designed?" (p. 121). The researchers' responses lined up to the anticipated outcome of the survey instrument.

Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) and Hoppey & McLeskey did not indicate the validity of the data prior to the administration of any instruments.

4.2 Research Question One

The first question posed by this study was what courses do school leaders receive in school to prepare them to supervise special education programs? The study looked to determine specific courses school leaders obtained in order to facilitate an understanding of what is

required to facilitate a successful special education program. More specifically, successful special education programs produce increased achievement results for students with disabilities.

4.2.1 Findings

Although there were no apparent themes for this question, two of the three case studies analyzed showed positive academic achievement results for students with disabilities. One study did not include student data in their study. Neither Waldron, McLeskey & Redd's (2011) or Hoppey & McLeskey's (2013) study mention that the school leader had taken any formal academic courses that helped them facilitate a successful special education program. Darling et. al (2007) referenced projects completed during enrollment in the program, but the specific classes were not referenced.

4.3 Research Question Two

4.3.1 Findings

The second question posed by this study was what training do school leaders bring with them to assess and evaluate special education program needs? Training refers to coursework, professional development, conferences or readings that address the following: (1) to ensure the needs of students with disabilities are being met, (2) how to get the appropriate resources for the program, (3) how to find available resources, (4) how to use data to steer instruction, and (5) how to use data to improve student achievement.

Three themes emerged from the research; redesigning the organization, improving working conditions, and promoting.

4.3.2 Redesigning the Organization

4.3.2.1 Building a strong school environment. The researchers from all three case study analyses found that building a strong school environment was a key to building staff morale, establishing a trust, sharing a common vision and mission, and working together to achieve established goals.

4.3.2.2 School culture. Garrison-Wade et al. (2007), reported that the participants identified school culture as one of the program projects that most facilitated learning how to support inclusive practices. However, the researchers did not elaborate on specific comments made by the participants.

On the other hand, Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) and Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) both elaborated extensively on building a strong school environment.

4.3.2.3 Setting the direction. Ms. Richards, principal of Creekside Elementary School and the primary focus of the investigation played an active role in the changeover to a fully inclusive school. Ms. Richards viewed developing a shared vision and moral purpose for the school as one of her primary goals. Her vision of meeting the needs of all students was shared by teachers who were interviewed. Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) shared comments made by one of the teachers, “Teachers are all about student needs. We have ongoing conversations about challenging students more as the meat of the curriculum is presented to everyone” (p. 54). Evidence collected from observations and interviews disclosed characteristics of Ms. Richards’ leadership practices. Leithwood and colleagues (2008) referred to the characteristics as effective leadership practices. While Ms. Richards remained unyielding and rigid in her stance on meeting the needs of every student, including students with disabilities, she was flexible in all other areas. The researchers further reported Ms. Richards worked collaboratively with staff to determine “how this vision would be enacted, shared decision-making power, and remained

flexible, open-minded, and ready to learn from others” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 54). Other characteristics found to be supported by Leithwood and colleagues (2008) was that Ms. Richards was “consistently optimistic while remaining resilient and persistent in moving toward enacting these common values” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 54).

4.3.2.4 Development of a supportive and caring school community. Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) reported Mr. Smith believed his primary role was “lubricating the human machinery” (p. 248). He defined this phrase as providing a supportive setting to help teachers do their best work. The researchers noted three characteristics of Mr. Smith’s leadership style that facilitated building a strong school community.

4.3.2.5 Caring for and personally investing in teachers. Displaying trust in teachers; listening to their ideas, concerns and problems; and treating staff fairly. Mr. Smith elaborated on the trust factor:

I think my teachers or my big people need to believe that I believe in them and I’m invested in their success. Not just because I want them to be happy, but because if they are happy, then there is a better chance that they will be professionally successful. And then the payoff is for the kids (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 249).

Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) expounded on Mr. Smith’s explanation by sharing additional comments made during the interviews:

Tom believes in the passion of teachers and trusts that if they’re motivated by the right thing and driven by the right ideas, something good is going to come out of it” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 249).

During their investigation, Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) found evidence to support Mr. Smith’s trust practices were not just one sided. He recognized the need to be transparent with

staff in order for them to trust him. To ensure his staff continued to trust and have confidence in him, an annual “vote of confidence in the principal” was conducted:

I’ve got to trust in them to a certain extent and they’ve got to trust me to a certain extent, and the degree to which we trust each other determines the degree to which we can actually get together and solve problems and figure things out (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 249).

4.3.2.6 Listening to ideas, concerns and problems. Mr. Smith fostered his faculty by listening to and respecting their ideas and concerns. He established an open-door policy so staff could readily access him when needed. During the interview, Mr. Smith made the following comments regarding trust:

If somebody needs to talk, that happened a couple of times this morning, you know, career decisions and life decisions and I’m mad about this, that stuff is hard to put off until this afternoon. I need to be available so my teachers can bounce ideas off of me and feel supported (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 249).

If you want to know what’s important in an organization, just walk around and listen to what people talk about and that’s what’s important...And I’ve found that to be very true. If people are always bitching about things, then, you know, then that’s important ...when people are talking about important educational issues in the lounge or the hallway or something then I think that says that’s important. If people are never talking about school, then that says something. If people are talking about kids, that says a whole lot about the school (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 249).

Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) reported in their findings that Mr. Smith carefully planned when to engage in employee conversations and that he spent a significant amount of time listening. When engaging in the conversations, Mr. Smith often used strategies to facilitate employee reflections. By doing so, it allows the teachers to evaluate what they are doing and what they have done.

4.3.2.7 Treating staff fairly. Mr. Smith attempts to “build and strengthen relationships” with staff by treating them fairly.

He regularly reflects on his practices and uncovers his motives by examining his leadership from a moral or ethical standpoint to consider whether he is treating somebody fairly (Hoppey & McLeskey, p. 250).

Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) further elaborated during their interview with Mr. Smith, that he believed the way people are treated in the school culture was “critical to the school’s long-term success” (p. 250).

I just think we have an obligation to create working environments where there is fairness and there is a sense of justice and decency and there’s a right way and a wrong way of treating people (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 250).

Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) concluded that Mr. Smith’s listening skills enable him to build strong, trusting relationships with his staff.

4.4 Improving Working Conditions. Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) found through their investigation, a key factor in improving working conditions at CES was the creation of learning communities. The learning communities permitted teachers to share ideas, have discussions regarding student academics and behavior, build trust among the teachers and ensure they share a common vision for the school. Ms. Gill, a first-grade teacher described how the learning communities helped to improve the working conditions at CES:

You have to have a community of professionals. If something is going on [in my classroom], there are several people I can go talk to who can help me work through it or who I can bounce ideas off of. If a child is having a behavior problem and I just can’t get them stop, I can go to any of our inclusion teachers and say, ‘This is what I’ve done, help me’ (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 55).

Ms. Richards promoted improved working conditions for staff by hiring teachers and para-professionals who were a good fit for the school mission and vision. Ms. Wood, a special educator at CES, stated: “the paras that Ms. Richards hires are team players. They’re all about kids doing the best they can and paras facilitating that. Over half of our paras should probably be teachers” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, p. 55).

Another key factor the researchers found that improved working conditions at CES was the use of resources. During observations, it was noted that Ms. Richards vigorously sought resources from the district office and other sources such as local businesses and fundraisers. As a result, teachers felt they could always provide for their students’ needs. First grade teacher, Ms. Taylor, stated: “When I need extra time resources for a student I talk to Ms. Richards. You just have to say this is not working, we need something else, and she provides the resources” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 56).

Furthermore, Ms. Richards was willing to make difficult decisions about scheduling, employment, appraisals, and other things that benefited students and improved working conditions for staff.

Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) found Tom Smith improved working conditions at Hawks Nest Elementary School by “buffering teachers and staff from external pressure” (p. 250). Due to increased concerns over high-stakes testing and narrowly defined accountability measures, an unnecessary anxiety had been created for teachers, students and the entire school community. Mr. Smith sought to address these concerns by developing an accountability system using a combination of state assessment data and school accountability data that met the needs of the school community.

During their investigation, Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) did not address working conditions.

4.4.1 Promoting Teacher Growth. Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) did not elaborate much on how the participants promoted teacher growth. However, they did discuss the need to obtain more training to improve instruction for all learners. Participants expressed the need to learn more about “special education law, strategies for organizing a school to best utilize the special education and general education teachers, concrete strategies and resources about the variety of diverse needs and managing discipline issues with students displaying special education needs” (Garrison-Wade et al., 2007, p. 127).

Ms. Richards addressed teacher growth by ensuring all teachers were providing “high-quality instruction in all settings” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p.56). After adopting an inclusive model of service delivery for students with disabilities, it became imperative to change the quality of services that were being provided to students with disabilities. Ms. Wyman, a third-grade teacher at CES stated, “children in separate special education classes were not pushed, they were not exposed to pacing. So, I don’t know that we really ever found out what those children could do. We locked them in and kept them held back” Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 56).

Ms. Richards stated that she watched kids leave very effective instruction [in a general education classroom], leave a very effective reading teacher to go to a very ineffective situation [in a separate class] where they misbehaved, where they just got rote skills. And I thought, they’re leaving these wonderful teachers and they’re going to this very ineffective setting...we have to figure out a way so they can be in [the general education classroom] for that effective instruction, but also have a time where they can go back and meet some individual skill needs because the regular education teacher can’t do all of that (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, p. 56).

Ms. Richards closed classrooms and moved students to a tier modeled instructional environment. This allowed general education and special education teachers “to collaborate and differentiate instruction and meet the needs of all kids” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 56). Ms. Richards also increased the quality of professional development. Teachers noted that the principal created a sense of “urgency to improve teacher practice and used every opportunity during the school day to do this” (p. 56). Professional development consisted of collaborating and learning from one another. Teachers also attended conferences to “collect information on new initiatives” and bring the information back to share with others at the school (p. 57). Finally, Ms. Richards shared in professional development activities with staff. Waldron, McLeskey & Redd acknowledged that Ms. Richards encouraged staff to become “experts in content or practices” (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 57). Ms. Richards was quoted as saying “I believe in creating experts in your building and encouraging them to coach others” (p. 57).

During the interview process, the researchers described examples of new skills teachers reported gaining through the new professional development process. Observations established that the majority of instructional environments were high-quality learning environments.

Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) concluded that Mr. Smith recognized the need to support teachers through providing multiple opportunities for high-stakes quality professional development and providing opportunities for teacher leadership. Referencing previous experiences, Mr. Smith shared that his role had “evolved from when he was primarily a supervisor who evaluated his teachers and spent much time doing clinical things like teaching competency checklists” (p. 252). Mr. Smith further elaborated to the investigators that his role had to be “redefined in order to be more of coach and mentor who spends the majority of the time growing people” (p. 252). To promote teacher growth, Mr. Smith built relationships with

teachers, provided professional development opportunities to “improve teacher learning and student achievement” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 252).

Despite successes with promoting growth with veteran staff, Mr. Smith expressed concerns with providing professional development to meet the needs of beginning teachers. He recognized the limited time available to provide the job support and mentoring. To address this need Mr. Smith created a school-based mentoring program for beginning teachers.

Schools as institutions are not very good at bringing in new teachers. We bring them in, chew them up, and spit them out. They are often given undoable jobs. I want them to be in an optimal situation. Thus, we provide them with veteran teachers to mentor them...mentors are a big brother or big sister who is invested in them. The mentor helps them to make sure they are set up for success (Hoppey & McLeskey, p. 252).

Furthermore, Mr. Smith voiced concerns regarding the quality of professional development provided for his teachers. District-mandated professional development addressed reading and math content rather than addressing “individual needs of teachers to improve their classroom practice” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 252). In an interview, Mr. Smith stated:

There’s not much time to do professional development now because of new mandated reading programs and next year’s math adoption. Most of the staff development indicated from the district office. This makes for some hard choices when I want to focus on school based-based work (p. 252).

Mr. Smith enhanced professional development for his staff by targeting activities that included “inclusive school reform” (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013, p. 252). The staff agreed to partake in “Project INCLUDE, a university-based professional development seminar targeting teacher professional development around the issuing of meeting the needs of students, including

students with disabilities” (Hoppey & McLeskey, p. 252). Project INCLUDE placed teachers in leadership roles to deliberate over issues involving inclusive school reorganization. Through this process, Project INCLUDE supported teachers and administrators in implementing action plans for improving inclusive programs in schools and assisted them with better preparing themselves to meet the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive environments.

Through their investigation, Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) determined that Mr. Smith also promoted teacher growth through various leadership opportunities. To address this need, Mr. Smith created natural opportunities for teachers to lead as part of professional development. Through their partnership with the university, Hawk’s Nest Elementary designed an advanced degree program focused on teacher leadership for school improvement. Mr. Smith’s professional development strategies are embedded into the daily work of his staff. By doing so, his goal is “to improve student outcomes by creating a lot of institutional learning” (p. 253).

4.5 Research Question Three

The third question posed in the study was how do school leader training and education impact student achievement?

4.5.1 Findings

Two of the three cases analyzed presented academic data to support how inclusive schools improved student outcomes. Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) did not specifically discuss how school leader training and education impacted student achievement. However, they did elaborate on the participants’ desire to become better equipped to educate students with diverse needs. The participants also recognized the need to obtain more training to become more efficient leaders. Table 4 outlines participant responses from the survey instrument.

Table 4
Respondents by Level of Perceived Competence

Research Questions	1 Emergent	2	3 Proficient	4	5 Exemplary
1. I have the ability to develop school-wide positive behavior support programs.	6% 6	3% 3	38% 38	37% 37	15% 15
2. I have the ability to facilitate effective collaboration between general and special education teachers.	3% 3	9% 9	34% 34	38% 38	15% 15
3. I have the ability to make and implement differentiated learning recommendations for learners with diverse needs.	2% 2	11% 11	32% 32	32% 32	22% 22
4. I have the ability to lead an initiative that creates a learning environment that allows for alternative styles of learning.	1% 1	12% 12	28% 28	47% 47	11% 11
5. I have the ability to develop activities and make recommendations for professional development training regarding inclusive practices.	4% 4	11% 11	29% 29	41% 41	14% 14
6. I have the ability to generate options and possible solutions in resource management (i.e. planning time, paperwork demands and alternative scheduling).	4% 4	14% 14	35% 34	23% 23	13% 13
7. I have the ability to coach and provide constructive feedback and mentoring to special education and support service personnel.	10% 10	18% 18	35% 34	23% 23	13% 13
8. I have the ability to foster collegial relationships between general and special education personnel	4% 4	8% 8	32% 31	39% 38	17% 17
9. I have the ability to understand and make recommendations regarding the challenges parents and children with disabilities frequently encounter.	10% 10	15% 15	31% 31	34% 34	9% 9
10. I have the ability to understand and make recommendations regarding legal issues related to special education.	12% 12	27% 26	29% 28	26% 25	7% 7
11. I have the ability to develop and implement inclusionary practices in schools.	6% 6	12% 12	40% 29	33% 32	9% 9

Note: Adapted from “Inclusive Leadership: Preparing Principals for the Role that Awaits Them” (Garrison-Wade, Sobel & Fulmer, 2007)

After reviewing Creekside Elementary School's accountability data, Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) confirmed there was a high degree of success at including students with disabilities and improving outcome data for students with disabilities as well as for at-risk students. The leadership practices Ms. Richards employed during the change process contributed greatly to the over success of the school. Table 5 shows a comparison of the data between 2006 and 2009.

Table 5
CES Accountability Data

Category	2006 School Term			2008-2009 School Term		
	CES/SWD	State	District	CES/SWD	State	District
Percentage of students with disabilities placed in general education setting.	60%	66%	66%	100%	63%	68%
Reading Proficiency Scores	Scores not available			69%	33%	32%
Math Proficiency Scores	Scores not available			58%	38%	36%

Note: data retrieved from Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011

Placement data showed an increase in students with disabilities being placed in the general education setting, accountability scores improved. The 2008-2009 Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test Proficiency results for Hawk's Nest Elementary are depicted below.

Table 6
2008-2009 Hawk's Nest Elementary Reading and Math Proficiency Data

SWD	Reading Proficiency Percentage	Math Proficiency Percentage
3 rd Grade		
State	45	56
District	46	54
Hawk's Nest	61	70
4th Grade		
State	46	50
District	44	47
Hawk's Nest	46	51
5th Grade		
State	40	34
District	37	31
Hawk's Nest	57	36

Note: data retrieved from Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013

4.6 Summary of Essential Themes

Three case studies were analyzed for this study. Interview and observation data were used to determine mutual themes. Three themes emerged from the research; redesigning the organization, improving working conditions, and promoting teacher growth. Several subset themes emerged from two of themes. These themes and subthemes are interrelated and helped to shape my comprehension of the impact of leadership practices and training on the academic achievement of students with disabilities in special education programs.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of leadership practices and training on student achievement in special education programs. Chapter V discusses the comparative analysis findings from the previous chapter as compared to existing literature and this study's conceptual frameworks. Several leadership theories guided the analysis of the practices and training reported in the three case studies. This comprehensive analysis has distinguished those commonalities and differences in the emerging themes that formed as a result of this research. This discussion serves to inform educational leaders at all levels, legislators, parents and students who may be impacted by the educational reform that is taking place across the nation.

Results from this case study analysis support the existing literature that school leaders (i.e., principals) play a key role in influencing school culture and student academic achievement, including students with disabilities. Two of three cases studies provided detailed information regarding how principals, Ms. Smith (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011) and Mr. Smith (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013) transformed the direction and culture of their respective schools. As a result of these changes, proficiency scores improved in reading and mathematics.

In the second case study, Ms. Richards (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011) was able to demonstrate success after experiencing non-success in previous years. Ms. Richards' experiences assisted her in developing a keen insight into the general needs of the school and aided her in making the necessary adjustments to develop a highly effective inclusive school. Through collaboration with staff and a clear mission and vision, Ms. Richards 1) established a specific direction for the school, 2) redesigned the organization, 3) improved working conditions for employees, 4) implemented high-quality instruction in all settings, and 5) implemented a data

system to monitor the effectiveness of the inclusive program (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011).

Like Ms. Richards, Mr. Smith (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013), recognized the need for school change that resulted in an inclusive program that improved student outcomes. Mr. Smith's efforts to "lubricate the human machinery" included 1) caring for and personally investing in teachers, 2) buffering teachers from external pressure, and 3) promoting teacher growth, helped to promote effective inclusive practices, and to help teachers and students thrive in an era of high-stakes accountability. If not for the direct leadership practices facilitated by Mr. Smith and Ms. Richards, Hawk's Nest Elementary and Creekside Elementary School may not have experienced success. Therefore, this research adds to the limited knowledge base on effective principals who actively promote inclusive best practices in a time of school reform.

5.1 Implications

5.1.1 Leaders and Leadership

As mentioned previously in this current study, the importance of leadership in shaping school culture is dependent upon the school leader and his or her ability to initiate and maintain change. The responsibilities of today's school leader are more complex and require the support from others to be effective. Subsequently, leaders must ensure teachers provide quality instruction so students can learn while managing the day to day functions and leading for change. Murphy & Datnow (2003) stated leaders are responsible "for creating climates that permit all to do their jobs and recognize the importance of operating within the established school culture (p. 87).

Ms. Richards and Mr. Smith were both willing to share and collaborate with their staff. Relationship development and the establishment of trust were two critical components that aided in the success of both schools.

5.1.2 School Reform and Leadership Effects

A renewed sense of urgency to reform schools across the nation has brought about a change in the way school leadership is viewed. While it is impractical to think a single leader can successfully reform a school, that is the unspoken expectation. Leaders are responsible for creating climates that permit all to do their jobs and recognize the importance of operating within an established school culture; therefore, making interactions between leadership and culture critical components to achieving school reform (Murphy & Datnow, 2003, pp. 86-87).

5.1.3 Leadership Styles and Practices

Paynter et al. (2014) discussed the influences of leadership style on education:

Leadership style is not always constant. It changes from person to person or from situation to situation. Many of the leadership style changes occur because of the different leadership phenomenon that these educational leaders have applied in an attempt to improve the nation's educational system. With the many demands of educational reforms, educational leaders have either supported or criticized certain leadership styles. As such, which style suits and works best is subjected to a matter of opinion (Paynter et al., 2014 p. 68).

Mr. Smith and Ms. Richards employed a variety of leadership practices to move their schools in a positive direction. Leithwood and colleagues (2008) identified research-supported claims about school-leadership practices that result in improved student outcomes:

- Building vision and setting directions for their school;
- Understanding and developing people;

- Redesigning the organization;
- Managing the teaching and learning through staff motivation;
- Demonstrating responsiveness to contexts in which they work;
- Improving teaching and learning through staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions;
- Distributive leadership; and
- Maintaining a set of core values while exhibiting characteristics such as open-mindedness, a willingness to learn from others, flexibility, persistence, resilience, and optimism (Waldron, McLeskey & Redd, 2011, p. 59).

It should be noted that most of the practices mentioned above are not unique to developing an effective inclusive school program that fosters positive outcomes for students with disabilities. These practices have been around for decades, but have been modified or renamed to fit the current trends. What makes the practices effective are the actions of the leader.

5.1.4 Leadership Training and Student Achievement

As previously referenced, Pazey & Cole (2013) stated “colleges of education along with a number of national organizations and specialized professional associations have sought to improve educational administration programs through the incorporation of a broad policy framework designed to develop socially just leaders” (p. 243). As the assessment of education equality evolves, advocates for students with disabilities have been pushing back against persistent inequities within schools. Pazey & Cole (2013) stated “content related to special education and special education law has been a long-neglected area within university-based administrator preparation programs and has been strangely absent in conversations relevant to the creation of administrator preparation programs” (p. 243).

Results from the Garrison-Wade et al. (2007) investigation exposed an increasing need to incorporate more coursework into administrative certification programs by gathering personal insight from current and future administrators.

As previous research has shown, school leaders are facing complex issues regarding school reform and the need to demonstrate change in an era of high-stakes accountability. In addition to carrying out the responsibilities of their role as building leader, school leaders must also assume an array of other responsibilities including meeting accountability demands, providing teacher support and meeting the diverse needs of all students. The research suggests that it is imperative for school leaders to be exposed to more rigorous administrative preparation programs. These programs must address school change topics, diversity in education, and special education programming. Furthermore, beyond the academic preparation, school leaders must participate in continuous professional development to assess and evaluate all school programs and to make the necessary changes to promote student growth.

5.2 Limitations

This study was limited by several factors. First, the study was limited to analyzing three case studies, limiting the scope of the research. Second, two of the case studies focused on elementary schools which does not give the full perspective of implementing inclusive practices in the middle and high schools. Third, there was not enough information on the academic backgrounds of Mr. Smith and Ms. Richards, making it difficult to determine if they had sufficient backgrounds in special education. Fourth, the Garrison-Wade et al. (date) study did not specify the actual courses offered in the program and did not include any student data. Fifth, the student data provided in the Waldron, McLeskey & Redd (2011) and Hoppey & McLeskey (2013) case studies was limited due to the one school term timeframe.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed based on the case study analysis. The first recommendation is that further research be conducted regarding the academic needs of school leaders. This case study analysis revealed a gap that exists for current and future administrators who encounter special education students and programs. Understanding how to meet the needs of students with disabilities cannot be done without first understanding the diversity of their needs. Post-secondary institutions need to collaborate with state departments of education to determine administrator certification needs and make the necessary adjustments to their programs.

The second recommendation is that state departments of education revisit the requirements of their administrative certification programs. Given that a school leader is most likely to encounter students with disabilities, it is necessary that he or she be academically prepared to meet all students' needs. The state department of education should consider the addition of a dual certification requirement for administrators. This will ensure that administrators receive special education training.

The third recommendation is that K-12 schools consider school-wide professional development training on special education. This training should be specific to the needs of the building, but cover a range of topics (i.e., understanding disabilities, how to handle a student with an emotional disturbance, how to differentiate instruction for students with disabilities, understanding and implementing an Individualized IEP, cultural diversity). This training should be a regular addition to professional development calendar and not just a one and done moment.

The fourth recommendation is that schools utilize resources allotted to special education programs specifically for that purpose. Implications from this case study analysis is that many

times funding is used to hire dually certified teachers for the purpose of educating both general and special education students, but this is not always the case. Qualitative data showed teachers held the appropriate certification, but lacked the experience or knowledge to adequately educate students with disabilities. Teachers indicated wanting better training to better prepare them to work with special education students. School leaders need to be more conscience about hiring staff to work with students with disabilities if they expect to see sustained growth.

The fifth recommendation is that school leaders review the practices determined by this case study analysis to be directly linked to the successful academic achievement for students with disabilities. School leaders can compare their personal leadership style and practices to that of the principals identified in the investigations to determine how they can foster stronger employee relationships and build a solid school culture. As indicated in this case study analysis, the two school leaders were focused on building a school culture that facilitated meeting student needs first. In today's environment, there is a struggle for school leaders to put the needs of special education students first. Their personal perspectives, experiences and educational backgrounds all play a part in the success of special education programs.

The final recommendation is that the research continue in order to determine the impact of leadership practices on the academic achievement of students with disabilities. The focus of future investigations should examine specific leadership styles and practices that are associated with student improvement, including students with disabilities. Other factors that should be included in the investigation are the educational background and experience of the participants. This will create a well-rounded picture of the school leaders.

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Appendix A

Education Leadership (ISLLC) Standards- Comparison of 2007 and 2015 Standards

2007 Standards	2015 Standards
Standard 1: Vision and Mission-An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.	Standard 1: Vision Mission-An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal well-being of every student by ensuring the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a child- centered vision of high quality schooling that is shared by all members of the school community.
Standard 2: Instruction, Learning, Culture, Professional Learning -An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.	Standard 2: Instructional Capacity-An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal wellbeing of every student by enhancing instructional capacity.
	Standard 3: Instruction -An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal wellbeing of every student by promoting instruction that maximizes student learning.
	Standard 4: Curriculum and Assessment -An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal wellbeing of every student by promoting robust and meaningful curricula and assessment programs.
	Standard 6: Professional Culture for Teachers and Staff -An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal well-being of every student by promoting professionally-normed communities for teachers and other professional staff.
Standard 3: Operations and Management -An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.	Standard 8: Operations and Management -An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal wellbeing of every student by ensuring effective and efficient management of the school or district to promote student social and academic learning.

Standard 4: Engaging with Faculty and Community-An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.	Standard 7: Communities of Engagement for Families-An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal wellbeing of every student by promoting communities of engagement for families and other stakeholders in the school's community.
Standard 5: Ethical Principles and Professional Norms-An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner	Standard 9: Ethical Principles and Professional Norms-An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal wellbeing of every student by adhering to ethical principles and professional norms.
Standard 6: Responding to the Education Context-An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.	Standard 6: Responding to the Education Context-An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.
	Standard 5: Community of Care for Students-An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal well-being of every student by promoting the development of an inclusive school climate characterized by supportive relationships and a personalized culture of care.
	Standard 11: Continuous School Improvement-An educational leader promotes the academic success and personal wellbeing of every student by ensuring the development of a culture of continuous school improvement.

Reprinted from GAPSC (2015)

Appendix B

IRB Exemption Approval



DELAWARE STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects Protection Committee

March 17, 2017

Dear Veronica,

Delaware State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB)-Human Subjects Protection Committee has reviewed your project "A Case Study Analysis: Assessing the Impact of Leadership Practices and Training on Student Achievement in Special Education

Programs". After review of application, the Committee has granted an exemption from the IRB as it meets a Category of Exempt Research specified in 45 CFR 46.101 (b),

Please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs at 302457-6934 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brian Friel

Chairperson, Human Subjects Committee (IRB) ckh

