Elementary Principals’ Perspectives on Newly Graduated General Education Teachers’ Abilities to Teach Students with Disabilities in Inclusion Classrooms

Darla Jane England
Western Michigan University, jdlmengland@juno.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations

Part of the Elementary Education and Teaching Commons, Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons, and the Special Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
England, Darla Jane, "Elementary Principals’ Perspectives on Newly Graduated General Education Teachers’ Abilities to Teach Students with Disabilities in Inclusion Classrooms" (2014). Dissertations. 276.
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/276

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.
ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS’ PERSPECTIVES ON NEWLY GRADUATED
GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS’ ABILITIES TO TEACH
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN
INCLUSION CLASSROOMS

by

Darla Jane England

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
Western Michigan University
June 2014

Doctoral Committee:

Louann Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D., Chair
Sue Poppink, Ph.D.
John Shinsky, Ph.D.
Increasing numbers of students with disabilities are being educated in inclusive settings within elementary public schools across the United States. General education teachers are being hired to fill these positions, yet the characteristics principals view as necessary for them to be effective in such classrooms had yet to be explored. This study captured data on the knowledge, skills, and experiences candidates, coming directly out of college, should and do possess in order to be effective inclusion teachers. Principals’ perspectives on inclusion, as well as possible predictors for such perspectives, were also examined.

An online survey was used to collect the perspectives of 129 elementary public school principals in one Midwest state. The findings from this study indicate that principals do not feel general education candidates are being properly prepared to teach in inclusion settings. Further, findings indicate principals felt that the actual possession of knowledge, skills, and experiences concerning special education new general educators possess was much lower than what these administrators felt candidates should possess. Inadequate experience working with special needs students was found to be the greatest factor in candidates’ unpreparedness.
Comments from principals were categorized to find common themes and used along with analysis from closed-ended question data. Principals’ own knowledge of inclusion, years of experience in K12 education, and years of experience as an administrator, were not found to be predictors of their overriding perspectives on inclusion or the traits they felt general education candidates should possess in order to be effective teachers in inclusive settings. Suggestions for Teacher Education programs and general education teacher candidates are offered.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Jim England, and my sons, Logan and Mason. Without you three my world would be void of love and laughter.

To Jim, your constant support and encouragement kept me moving forward. Every time I felt like giving up, you’d remind me of how far I had come and how I simply could not stop now. You are and always have been my biggest fan; for that I am so blessed. I have yet to figure out what I did to deserve someone as amazing as you.

To Logan, without you all of my tables would never have been formatted correctly. Thank you for being patient with me and solving all of my technology issues, even when you were in the midst of your own midterm exams.

To Mason, thank you for providing the comic relief I needed each time things were getting rough. You constantly remind me that life is too fun to be taken so seriously. Now I will no longer have to miss out on evenings with you. My homework is all done.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I would like to thank for assisting me in the creation of this dissertation. Without them, this study would likely have never materialized. First, I’d like to thank Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer, my Committee Chair. I still am in awe of your ability to know just the right time and way to offer me encouragement or challenge me to go deeper. Your support prompted me to push myself to produce the best work I could.

Next, I would like to thank Dr. Sue Poppink. Without you, the ability to narrow down my topic would never have occurred. Your questioning of my desires and rationale forced me to uncover a topic I was truly passionate about exploring.

I also owe extreme thanks and gratitude to Dr. John Shinsky. Your actions reaffirmed for me how selfless acts of kindness can change someone’s world. Without your help my survey pool would have been miniscule, at best.

To Dr. Rhonda White, you were the first person to sit me down and begin a discussion on the need for a terminal degree. You planted the seed and kept revisiting the topic with me until I took action. You are a dear friend and a role model.

To Dr. Kerisa Myers, thank you for understanding each stage I was going through and preparing me for what was to come. Having you walk this road before me made my passage easier.
Acknowledgements-Continued

To Dr. Rick Ostrander and the Board of Trustees at Cornerstone University, thank you for providing me with the time to focus solely on this dissertation. I cannot imagine completing this task without the sabbatical I was so graciously granted. I am excited to use what I have learned to impact our Teacher Education program and the experiences of our student teachers.

To the principals who took the time to complete my survey, I am extremely grateful. Your perspectives were essential to my research and your comments helped me better understand the worlds of public school administration and elementary inclusion classrooms.

Finally, and most importantly, I praise God for all the blessings in my life.

Darla Jane England
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ ii
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................. viii
LIST OF FIGURES ............................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER

I INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
  Background ....................................................................................................................... 3
  Problem Statement and Research Questions ..................................................................... 6
  Conceptual Framework ..................................................................................................... 8
  Summary .......................................................................................................................... 11

II LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................................... 12
  Background ....................................................................................................................... 13
  Inclusion Legislation ......................................................................................................... 13
    Federal Law ...................................................................................................................... 13
    Michigan Law .................................................................................................................... 15
  Teacher Education Program Standards .............................................................................. 16
  Hiring Practices ................................................................................................................ 18
  Principals’ Value of Specific Traits .................................................................................. 21
    Candidates’ Knowledge Base .......................................................................................... 23
    Candidates’ Skill Base ...................................................................................................... 29
# Table of Contents-Continued

## CHAPTER

Candidates’ Experience Base................................................................. 33

Knowledge for Filling Special Education Positions.............................. 39

Summary................................................................................................. 42

### III METHODOLOGY ........................................................................... 43

Research Design.................................................................................... 43

Population, Sample or Participants....................................................... 44

Instrumentation..................................................................................... 45

Data Collection Procedures................................................................. 47

Data Analysis Plan.................................................................................. 49

Limitations and Delimitations............................................................... 51

Summary................................................................................................. 52

### IV RESULTS ....................................................................................... 53

Description of the Population.............................................................. 55

Analysis of Questions ............................................................................ 57

Research Question 1 ............................................................................. 57

Research Question 2 ............................................................................. 63

Research Question 3 ............................................................................. 65

Research Question 4 ............................................................................. 68

Summary................................................................................................. 76

### V DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ...................................... 77
# Table of Contents-Continued

### CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Major Results</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings Related to Candidates’ Knowledge, Skills, and Experiences</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings Related to Candidates’ Actual Possession of Knowledge, Skills, and Experience</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings Related to Extent of Possession</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings Related to Perceived Perceptions on Inclusion</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings Related to Predictors of Perceived Perspectives and Trait Possession</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of Results to Existing Studies</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Future Research</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations and Limitations</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Policy, Practice, and Organization</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Avenues for Improvement</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Knowledge</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Skills</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Experiences</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Thoughts</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REFERENCES                                                                 | 98   |

### APPENDICES                                                                 | 111  |

| A  Survey Instrument                                                  | 111  |
APPENDICES

B  Program Standards and Survey Question Formation ................................. 118
C  Email Messages to Participants ................................................................. 121
D  Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval .............. 125
E  Responses to Open-Ended Questions .......................................................... 127
**LIST OF TABLES**

1. Independent Variable Sub-Categories ................................................................. 49
2. Statistical Analysis Explanation ........................................................................... 50
3. Respondent Demographics ..................................................................................... 56
4. Rank Ordering of Knowledge Candidates Should Possess ....................................... 58
5. Rank Ordering of Skills Candidates Should Possess ................................................ 59
6. Rank Ordering of Experiences Candidates Should Possess ..................................... 60
7. Participants’ Comments on the Preparedness of New General Education Teachers to Teach in Inclusive Settings ........................................................................ 60
8. Rank Ordering of Skills Candidates Actually Possess ............................................. 64
9. Rank Ordering of Experiences Candidates Actually Possess .................................. 65
10. Paired Sample T-Tests Comparing Skills Candidates Should Posses with Actual Possession .................................................................................. 66
11. Paired Sample T-Tests Comparing Experiences Candidates Should Possess with Actual Possession .............................................................. 68
12. Inclusive Education Agreement Levels .................................................................. 69
13. Principals’ Agreement Levels on Knowledge of Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities in an Inclusion Classroom ................................................. 70
14. Hiring Decisions in Participants’ Buildings ............................................................. 70
15. Regression Analysis: Impact of Principals’ Knowledge, Years in K12, and Years as a Principal on Perceived Effectiveness of Teacher Education Programs ........................................................................... 71
16. Regression Analysis: Impact of Principals’ Knowledge, Years in K12, and Years as a Principal on Hiring Decisions .............................................................................. 72
List of Tables-Continued

17. Regression Analysis: Impact of Principals’ Knowledge, Years in K12, and Years as a Principal on Perceived Best Settings for Students with Special Needs…………………………………………………………………………………………72

18. Cronbach’s Alpha: Reliability Results for Candidate Knowledge, Candidate Skills, and Candidate Experiences…………………………………………………74

19. Multiple Regression Analysis for Years in K12, Years as an Administrator, and Personal Knowledge of Inclusion as Predictors for the Knowledge Candidates Should Possess…………………………………………………………75

20. Multiple Regression Analysis for Years in K12, Years as an Administrator, and Personal Knowledge of Inclusion as Predictors for the Skills Candidates Should Possess……………………………………………………………………75

21. Multiple Regression Analysis for Years in K12, Years as an Administrator, and Personal Knowledge of Inclusion as Predictors for the Experiences Candidates Should Possess…………………………………………………………76

22. Summary of Skills and Experiences Principals Thought Candidates Should and Actually Do Possess………………………………………………………………………84

23. Comparison Summary of Previous Research…………………………………………………………88

24. Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions and General Education Teacher Candidates………………………………………………………………………96
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Conceptual framework of research study…………………………………………9
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of general education classrooms have drastically changed within the past fifteen years. Inclusion classrooms, consisting of general education students and students with disabilities, are appearing at a significant rate as more students with special needs are being served in general education settings. Self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities, separated from the general education population, are a thing of the past due to federal legislation (Brandon, 2006; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997; 2004). With the approval of and updates to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, access to general education settings and curriculum must be enforced to the maximum extent appropriate for all students with disabilities (IDEA 1997; 2004).

According to the Special Education Expenditure Project (2003), this push to include diverse learners in general education settings is based on financial and social premises. On average, the cost to educate a student with a disability is about $12,500 per year, while the average cost to educate a general education student is approximately $6,500 per year; half the cost of a pupil with special needs (Chambers, Parrish, & Harr, 2002). The cost to serve students with varying disabilities in their own settings is a luxury few school districts can continue to undertake. With a 9% federal funding cut through IDEA for disability services (Kleppinger, 2013), the need to find and implement cost saving measures is essential.

The isolation of students with disabilities has also been shown to be detrimental to their emotional, social and academic growth (MacBeath et al., 2010). The mixture of individuals with varying degrees of strengths and differences is a characteristic of society. Isolating certain students deprives them of that right (IDEA 1997). Based on
mandates outlined in IDEA 1997 and 2004, inclusion classrooms are common place in today’s academic settings. More than 95% of all current students qualifying as possessing a learning, hearing, physical, visual, emotional, or cognitive disability receive some or all of their academic instruction in a general education setting (Dybvik, 2004).

Although there has been an increase in servicing students with special needs in general education settings, an increase in educators with special education training has not evolved. School districts, nationwide, are experiencing a shortage of teacher candidates with special education background and endorsements (American Association of Employment in Education, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Principals cannot fill all of their inclusion classrooms with teachers with special education training; they must also consider candidates from their general education pool. Therefore, in order to meet the varying needs of students in these settings, elementary public school principals are faced with the task of hiring general education teachers who have some knowledge, skills, and experience in inclusive education. Issues surrounding the skills elementary public school principals look for in hiring candidates, directly out of college, for such positions have yet to be studied.

Current research illustrates that most college level general education programs do not provide extensive coverage of special education. General education teachers enter the field with little to no experience addressing the needs of students with disabilities (Edelen-Smith, Prater & Sileo, 1993; Eksi, 2012; Reed & Monday-Amaya, 1995; Reitz & Kerr, 1991; Villa et al., 1996). In one recent quantitative study of 68 elementary teachers and 112 general teacher education candidates, only 10% of the classroom teachers and 5% of the teacher candidates reported receiving any education on meeting the needs of students with disabilities (Eksi, 2012). This puts the general education teacher, directly
out of college, at a grave disadvantage; proper care for the emotional, social, physical, and academic needs of students cannot be met if such needs are not even known (Cavanaugh, 2009). The perspectives of elementary public school principals as to what knowledge, skills, and experience are most desired for those general education teachers they are seeking to hire to teach in inclusion settings would be of value to the field and to the research base.

**Background**

Beginning in 1975, the education of children with disabilities has been driven by a series of federal laws and mandates. The Education of the Handicapped Act (PL 94-142) set the original parameters for special education by requiring a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all children, ages three to twenty-one, with disabilities. Instruction was to take place in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) had to be created to address the specific educational needs of each child. In 1986, The Education of the Handicapped Act was amended to further define special education instruction and included children with disabilities from birth to age two. Grants for preschoolers with disabilities as well as special education teacher training grants were added to The Education of the Handicapped Act at this time. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) followed in 1990. The ADA focused on discrimination in employment and public access exclusion. Soon after, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments was passed into law. This act changed the terminology from “handicapped” to “children with disabilities” as well as clearly defined specific categories of impairments. The IEP process and additional devices and services offered were more clearly defined as well (Damer, 2001).
The enforcement of these laws brought about the creation of the practice of mainstreaming. Special education students were placed in general education classrooms for a limited portion of the school day. These mainstreamed opportunities usually took place in less structured or less academically rigorous classes such as music, art, or physical education (Damer, 2001). Accommodations for students with disabilities were therefore not necessary; general education teachers did not have to provide individualized or altered curriculum, instruction, or assessment. If placed in a general education classroom, students with disabilities were expected to perform and accomplish the tasks of their peers. If they could not, the environment was viewed as inappropriate and the student was referred to a self-contained special education setting.

This practice of non-differentiated instruction continued until the late 1980s when the Regular Education Initiative (REI) arose. This movement changed the ideology of including students with disabilities with their general education peers. Instead of expecting students with disabilities to meet the demands of regular education classrooms and classmates, REI pushed to integrate students with disabilities into general education classrooms for the entire school day and expected the teacher to alter instruction to meet individual student needs. This movement helped formulate the definition of the inclusion settings of today. Support for inclusion was based on the premises that exposure to competent peers increased learning, supplementary support could be provided in a general education setting, and preparation for adult life had to focus on working with others with various abilities (Alper, Schloss, Etscheidt, & Macfarlane, 1995; IDEA, 1997; 2004).

The practice of non-exclusion for students with disabilities expanded with the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 and the IDEA Amendment in
2004. These laws further defined mandatory access to standard curriculum for students with disabilities as well as measurable performance assessment and reporting (Hardman & Dawson, 2008). NCLB required all students, regardless of special education diagnosis, to meet the same academic standards. General education teachers were expected to accomplish this while also upholding the requirements of IDEA’s individualized educational plan. Teachers were now responsible for the academic advancement of students with and without disabilities in the general education setting. A new ownership of responsibility for the needs of special education students was taking place. General education teachers were expected to drive the individualized instruction for students with disabilities while also generalizing instruction for the remaining masses (Ratcliffe & Willard, 2006). This new classroom formation also altered the strengths general education teachers needed to enter the field. Principals began interviewing candidates for such inclusion classrooms and background in general and special education was required for these positions (Nevin, 1998; Vaugh, Bos, & Schumm, 2007).

The individualized approach of special education was in direct contrast to the utilitarian approach that most general education teachers were following at that time. Knowledge and training of disability categories, adapting curriculum, individualized pedagogy, and behavior management techniques are now needed for general education teachers in order to meet the needs of all the students being placed in inclusion classrooms (Nevin, 1998; Vaugh, Bos, & Schumm, 2007). Legislation mandated the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education, yet many general education teachers were still not properly prepared to educate those with special needs. Finding and hiring such staff to fill these positions fall on the building principal.
Problem Statement and Research Questions

Principals in today’s public schools wear many “hats.” They juggle federal, state, district, and building policies as well as lead and manage programs that address the needs of students with disabilities (Sage & Burrello, 1994). In order to do so effectively, administrators hire educators to meet students’ needs in general education, special education, and inclusive education.

Administrators are responsible for hiring teachers to fill all positions in their buildings, and the hiring practices of K-12 public school principals to fulfill general education positions have been studied in detail. A set of studies have explored how these principals screen applicants, value specific skills, and make hiring decisions (Bolz, 2009; Donaldson, 2011; Mason & Schroder, 2010; Peterson, 2002).

Principals are also responsible for the task of hiring special education teachers. Another set of studies have outlined the key competencies that principals should look for in these candidates (Fenlon, 2008; Jackson, 2000; Toomes, 2004). The depth of this research is not as extensive as that available on the hiring practices for general education positions, but common themes have been noted.

The personal knowledge and beliefs, regarding inclusion, held by principals may also impact their hiring practices. Many administrators are being asked to select and hire candidates for special education and inclusion positions which they have very little knowledge of themselves (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).

The increase in needed inclusive settings has led to an increase in inclusion classrooms. This is acutely an issue at the elementary level where students have yet to be formally identified and classified as eligible for special education services. “The face of inclusion at the elementary level likely differs significantly from middle and high school
levels, exemplifying the difficulty associated with understanding the nature of inclusion” (Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinanello, 2010, p. 44). Special education qualification has usually already been determined by the middle and high school years and thus, inclusion settings are not as common or necessary at these levels.

Elementary principals are responsible for filling these inclusion positions. Their perspectives regarding the specific teaching traits, related to inclusion that they value in general teacher candidates have yet to be studied. My study focuses on this research gap, by examining what knowledge, skills, and experiences elementary public school principals feel candidates for inclusive setting should and do possess. No other studies currently could be found that explore this topic.

Therefore, the purpose of my quantitative survey is to measure the extent to which elementary public school principals in one Midwest state believe teachers coming directly out of college have, and should have, the knowledge, skills, and experiences concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Knowledge, skills and experiences include: college coursework, special education law and terminology, instructional practices, and prior experiences instructing students with disabilities. Specific research questions are as follows:

1. What knowledge, skills, and experiences regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities do elementary public school principals think general education teachers, upon graduating from their teacher training programs and being considered for teaching within an inclusion classroom, should possess?

2. What knowledge, skills, and experiences regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities do elementary public school principals find such general education teachers actually possess upon hiring them to teach within an inclusion classroom?
3. To what extent are there differences between what elementary public school principals think such general education teachers should possess and what these administrators find their general education teachers actually possess?

4. What are elementary public school principals’ knowledge surrounding inclusive education and experience and to what extent do these factors predict what these administrators believe about inclusion and candidates’ possession of traits when holding various demographic variables constant?

An on-line survey was emailed to every elementary public school principal within one Midwest state to request their perspective on these issues. The focus of my study involved elementary principals since that is the academic level where most opportunities for inclusive education are available. Following elementary school, formal special education labels have usually been determined and students are more likely to be offered differing course levels, resource options, or educational tracks.

**Conceptual Framework**

My study attempts to examine the perspectives of public elementary school principals in regards to the qualities they feel new teacher candidates should, and actually do, possess directly after graduating from their teacher preparation programs.
Within Figure 1 there are three major components: the principal in the middle and on both sides are ovals that represent the knowledge, skills, and experiences teacher candidates should and actually do possess. The center oval is the driving force in my study. The perspectives of these administrators often determines hiring decisions whereby research has confirmed that in most districts which follow a decentralized hiring process, the principal holds the final say in contract offerings (Kersten, 2008). In order to discover which candidate qualities are valued, the study of principals’ perspectives is needed.

The two ovals on the sides of the diagram are based on individual interpretation and or/ reflection of the principals. How principals interpret teacher quality has yet to be researched in detail, but subject matter knowledge, caring, and strong teaching skills have
emerged as qualities principals desire (Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011). On the left side of the diagram, the oval represents the qualities principals feel teacher candidates should already be familiar with and utilize in their teaching practice. The oval on the right side of the diagram illustrates, directly after finishing their teacher preparation program, the principals’ perspectives of the caliber of qualities candidates bring to their first teaching position.

The rectangles on both sides of Figure 1 represent the three areas of qualification: knowledge, skills, and experience. These rectangles are a representation of the candidate’s abilities during the time of the principal’s review. Knowledge refers to the content or subject matter understanding that the candidate possesses. Principals value strong content knowledge in newly hired teachers (Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010). The skills rectangle refers to the pedagogy the candidate displays or possesses, and the final rectangle refers to the candidate’s past successful experiences in the field. In a study conducted by Kersten in 2008, 142 Illinois principals were surveyed regarding their teacher hiring practices, and 22.3% responded that their most frequently sought after quality in teacher candidates was the ability to illustrate knowledge in the field through student teaching or regular classroom experiences.

The triangle at the bottom of the diagram illustrates the concrete action taken by principals’ in offering positions to candidates. This is the ultimate, end result that the administrators’ perspectives impact.

The arrows in Figure 1 illustrate an item that impacts something else. Each arrow points to a larger category or action that is directly affected by the original item from which the arrow originated. The principals’ opinions on these items impact their decisions and future actions.
Summary

Elementary principals are hiring educators to fill inclusion settings. Many of the candidates for these positions are general education teachers and principals’ perspectives in regards to the qualifications that these teachers need has yet to be explored. This reflects the aim of my study. A better understanding of inclusion classrooms, current hiring practices, and candidate qualities are all directly related to my topic, and the current literature on these topics will be summarized in Chapter II.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Principals are responsible for hiring and maintaining educators who can meet the needs of their students filling positions in general education, special education, and inclusive education. This, in turn, creates a need for administrators to know if applicants for open positions possess the knowledge, skills, and experiences to teach in each of these settings, based on the opening. Administrators hire for all of these settings, but must pay close attention to the knowledge, skills, and experiences of those applicants they interview for inclusion classrooms since this environment is mandated by law (IDEA 1997; 2004).

As directors in their buildings, these administrators have been shown to assume the role of instructional leaders and coordinators of support systems for novice teachers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004; Brock & Grady, 1997; Colley, 2002). They are responsible for hiring educators to instruct students in settings that meet their academic needs, including inclusive settings.

Currently, there is a gap in the literature regarding public school principal’s perspectives on what knowledge, skills, and experiences general education recent college graduates should possess and actually possess in relation to teaching in an inclusive setting. This literature review focuses on the legislation associated with special education, current hiring practices within the field of education, sought after traits in teacher candidates, and principals’ own special education experience. It is important to understand these topics in relation to the hiring practices for inclusive settings since little research currently exists on that topic. This literature review provides information on
areas most closely related to my study area in order to provide a clear representation of
the surrounding issues related to the hiring practices for inclusive education.

**Inclusion Legislation**

Providing free, public education to students who qualify for special education
services is mandated by IDEA 1997 and 2004. Elementary principals are responsible for
knowing, understanding, and following the legislation that these mandates represent.

**Federal Law**

Federal laws dictate the minimum standards which must be adhered to when
addressing the needs of students that qualify for financial support and services under
special education regulations. Students receiving support and services within an
inclusive setting qualify for such standards. According to federal law, principals are
required to uphold such regulations when servicing the needs of students with disabilities
within their schools. The driving legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education
Act (IDEA), enacted in 1990 and revised in 1997, 2004 and 2011, mandates that all
children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that meets
their individual needs. Each qualifying student must have an individualized educational
plan (IEP) that provides a written identification of the pupil’s specific academic needs
and the methods being used to address those needs. All services and instruction must
take place in the least restrictive environment (IDEA 2004; No Child Left Behind Act,
2002). Although the word “inclusion” is not listed in the Individuals with Disabilities
Education Act text, the law implies that the least restrictive environment for all students,
regardless of their disability, is the general education classroom (Dybvik, 2004).

Principals are responsible for hiring teachers to fill these least restrictive environments of
inclusive configurations.
Federal law also states that any child between the ages of zero and 21 can qualify for services under IDEA as long as they meet the specific eligibility requirements of one or more of the 13 categories of special education disabilities. “To be eligible, a student must have a disability that adversely affects her or his educational performance and must need special education in order to receive an appropriate education” (National Resource Center on ADHD, 2012, p. 4). It must be demonstrated that the student’s impairment is negatively impacting their academic ability. Once eligibility is determined, it is the public school’s responsibility to carry out the IEP in the least restrictive environment. This usually means part, if not all, of the student’s school day will be spent within a general education classroom. Principals are hiring the teachers who assume the role of instructing students with disabilities in these settings and carrying out these mandates.

Children with disabilities, under IDEA law, must be placed and educated in general education settings unless the severity of their impairment limits the ability to do so satisfactorily; even with supplementary aids and services. In the last five years, the number of students qualifying for special education services has increased 17% (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). A few decades ago, when the practice of inclusion began to take place, only students with mild impairments were usually placed in general education settings and only for a very limited amount of time. These students spent the majority of their time in the general education settings for less structured events such as recess, physical education, story time, or “free” time (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007).

With the passage of IDEA and the recent revisions, the special education student population now constitutes 12.9% of the total student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Parents have become knowledgeable and active in advocating for full-time instruction in general education settings for their children.
This push for extensive inclusion requires Individualized Education Programs (IEP) which must be understood, signed, explained, and administered by general education teachers. “The major change is that the entire IEP process now focuses on student participation in the general education curriculum” (Yell & Shriner, 1997, p. 4). The Michigan in Brief website states that “even students with very severe impairments more frequently are being educated in regular classrooms for the full school day” (April, 2002, para. 5).

Additions in the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments (ADAA) of 2008 also expanded the number and range of students who are eligible to receive special education services (Zirkel, 2009). This widens the special education knowledge and techniques general educators must be familiar with. Elementary teachers no longer have classrooms consisting of only general education students. The inclusion of students with disabilities in all aspects of instruction is now the law. Elementary teachers are the first educators to interact with students; they are the first to spot difficulties that impact learning. These teachers are usually the first to recognize the possibility of an impairment and meet the needs of a student if such a deficit exists. Elementary principals are responsible for hiring inclusion teachers who are aware of and can address these issues within their classrooms.

**Michigan Law**

Elementary public school principals in the state of Michigan also have additional regulations that must be kept in mind during the hiring decisions for inclusion classrooms. Individual states have the authority to create special education regulations that go above and beyond federal mandates. The state of Michigan has exercised its right to do so. Federal law requires special education services be provided from birth through
to educate students with physical or severe cognitive disabilities, who have not completed
a normal course of study and graduated from high school, until the age of 26. Michigan
is the only state in the nation to uphold such an extension. Funding for special education
services within the state of Michigan must be divided and cover students for an additional
five years. This impacts the financial decisions and hiring options for Michigan
principals.

Michigan has also expanded the number of days per year that services must be
provided to qualifying individuals with disabilities. Federal law requires special
education services to be rendered for 180 days; Michigan law mandates these services for
230 days per year (U.S. Department of Education). Michigan law also determines the
teacher/student ratio of classes for each disability category. Smaller class sizes equates to
more staff needs that elementary principals must fill and monitor. Abiding by these legal
requirements rest on elementary public school principals’ shoulders, and they are carried
out by the general educator who is teaching in an inclusion setting.

**Teacher Education Program Standards**

Teacher education programs, wishing to gain accreditation, must go through a
thorough review by an accreditation council. In July 2013, the Council for the
Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) became the sole accrediting agency in
the United States. The two former accreditors, the National Council for Accreditation of
Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC)
are now housed under the umbrella of CAEP. Programs formally accredited through
these subsidiaries maintain their accreditation until they come up for review under CAEP.
At the current time, the NCATE and TEAC program standards for teacher education
majors are the requirements being adhered to for previously accredited programs. It is these standards that any college or university, holding valid accreditation status, must follow.

The standards for general elementary education teachers, under NCATE, include four basic components: curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professionalism (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2013). None of these elements contain specific standards relating to the instruction of students with disabilities. Under the instruction component, elementary education teachers are required to understand the developmental differences and approaches to learning that exist in elementary students as well as be able to adapt instruction to diverse students. A definition of diverse students is not provided. There is also no mention of the instruction of students with disabilities.

TEAC has a principle of evidence of candidate learning that focuses on pedagogical knowledge. Under this principle “the program candidates must be able to convert their knowledge of subject matter into compelling lessons that meet the needs of a wide range of pupils and students” (Teacher Education Accreditation Council, 2013, p. 1). Other than this broad language, standards or principles directly related to teaching students with disabilities are not included.

NCATE does have specific standards for what special educators must know and be able to do. Although specific outcomes are not listed, general expectations are included. These teacher candidates must have knowledge on human development and exceptionalities, understand how these exceptionalities impact academic, social, emotional, and physical abilities, and take these exceptionalities into consideration when planning individualized instruction. The role of formal and informal assessment,
Conducive environments for learning, adapting curriculum, and collaboration are all items special education teacher programs must address and special education teacher candidates must be able to do (NCATE, 2013). Given the absence of specific standards relating to special education for general education candidates, the standards related to special education teachers were used in my survey design.

Special education teachers are all exposed to this information; general education teachers, graduating from accredited institutions, are not required to have knowledge of these items. This puts the general education teacher, coming directly out of college, at a disadvantage when teaching in an inclusive setting. Although the general education teacher candidate can be hired to fill an inclusion classroom position, the program that this individual graduated under was not required to include special education knowledge or instruction.

**Hiring Practices**

Numerous researchers agree that one of the most important roles an administrator has is to hire effective educators (Bolz, 2009; Peterson, 2002; Place & Drake, 1994; Rothman, 2004). “Wise hiring decisions can add value to a school; poor hiring decisions can quickly damage a school and create a toxic culture” (Mason & Schroeder, 2010, p. 186). Keller (2006) explains that good teaching plays a bigger role in student achievement than any other single education resource. Effective teachers impact student performance. There is a direct link between effective teachers and student achievement; which then leads to future school success (Kersten, 2008). Hiring the most effective teachers, who can increase student achievement and propel students on to success, begins with the teacher hiring process. The assumption of responsibility for attracting,
communicating with, interviewing, and hiring teacher candidates varies from district to district but the principal usually plays an active role in the process (Rothman, 2004).

The amount of control an elementary principal has over the hiring of inclusion staff is of importance to my study. If administrators are expected to consult with others during the process, or can make hiring decisions alone, the outcome of what knowledge, skills, and experiences are valued can be impacted. The amount and type of involvement a principal has in the hiring of teachers within a building is not consistent among all districts. Some principals feel constrained by district policies which remove their involvement and leadership in the locating, reviewing, interviewing, hiring, and assigning of teacher candidates (Donaldson, 2011). A growing trend in the hiring process of teachers is the centralization and collaboration of responsibilities (Mason & Schroeder, 2010). This trend exists more frequently in large school districts where a very detailed, centralized process for screening teacher candidates is followed. In these districts, the review of resumes, references, and teaching credentials is accomplished by Human Resource personnel, who may not be located in or directly involved with a specific school building. Following this centralized process, only after initial decisions regarding each candidate’s status have been made, do principals become involved in the process (Mason & Schroeder, 2010). This takes the sole ownership of weeding through applications, arranging interviews, and making final hiring decisions off the school principal and creates a shared responsibility among many. Human resource personnel, fellow administrators, teachers, parents and superintendents are involved when a centralized process is followed.

Following this model, teacher candidates can expect to be asked to participate in: demonstration lessons, site-based interviews and classroom observations, online
interviews, and formal writing samples conducted by various employees within a district (Kersten, 2008). Hiring decisions in districts using this practice of centralization are made by a consensus or majority vote. In these situations, administrators’ opinions regarding the necessary traits for inclusion teacher candidates are not the sole voices in the decision making process.

Although this practice takes the responsibility of hiring off of a lone individual, it does not come without disadvantages (Kersten, 2008). New candidates may not be informed of the expectations of the building they are being hired into when individuals, such as those in Human Resources who do not work in the building and are unaware of school climate, make initial hiring decisions (Forsyth & Abernathy, 1998; Naper, 2010; Peterson, 2002). According to research by Williby (2004), in which the views of Catholic school principals from 80 elementary and secondary schools in the Catholic Archdiocese of Omaha, Nebraska on hiring and retaining high quality teachers were conveyed, this practice can violate a principals’ ability to choose a teacher who best fits with the building’s environment. Teacher personalities, work ethic, atmosphere and goals of a particular building are best known by the individuals working in that establishment on a daily basis (Donaldson, 2011).

The premise of giving administrators main control correlates with a decentralized hiring process where the school administrator is leading the applicant screening and interviewing process from the start. Following this decentralized approach, administrators are able to assess, earlier in the hiring process, whether a candidate has the qualities best suited for that school’s culture and community (Mason & Schroeder, 2010). This practice also has disadvantages. A qualitative study conducted by DeArmond, Gross, and Goldhaber (2010) analyzed the recruitment and interview practices of 10
elementary schools in a large, decentralized urban school district. The study found that allowing individual principals or school teams to take leadership of their own candidate selection lead to inconsistencies in the policies followed and the traits valued between buildings. Another study of 21 principals in Florida revealed that individual administrators also tend to value traits most specific to the needs of their own building (Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010). Those may or may not correlate with the values that centralized teams also give weight to. It was found that centralized teams valued broader traits such as certification areas and content knowledge skills which could benefit the district in more than one school or subject area (Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010). Individual principal’s hiring decisions may positively impact a specific school, but may not be advantageous to the district at large.

Allowing principals’ sole control over hiring practices may also not be advantageous if these administrators have limited knowledge of the position needing to be filled. This situation can occur when a principal is responsible for filling a special education or inclusive setting. Principals’ perspectives on valued teacher characteristics, and inclusion as a whole, may be impacted by their lack of knowledge. A quantitative study of 115 K-12 principals in Illinois found that only three participants had any special education teaching experience (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).

**Principals’ Value of Specific Traits**

The importance of administrators in the hiring process of teacher candidates has been well documented (Forsyth & Abernathy, 1998; Monson, Lignugaris-Kraft, Byrnes, & Johnson, 1995; Ralph, Desten, Lang, & Smith, 1998). Two realms of valued skills emerge from these studies of general education hiring practices. Preference is given to candidates with strong content knowledge and solid interpersonal communication skills.
Both of these skills are primarily assessed through previous teaching experiences. Strong content knowledge and being able to communicate effectively and discipline students are sought after traits by administrators (Ralph et al., 1998).

Administrators also turn to previous cooperating teachers and principals, who have witnessed candidates’ teaching, as appropriate judges of overall teaching abilities of general education candidates. Prior successful teaching experiences and reviews by former mentors are viewed as critical pieces of information in administrators’ hiring decisions. Principals hold the opinions of these fellow educators, to accurately assess and conveyed the strengths and weaknesses of their former interns, in high regard (Monson et al., 1995). Administrators also rely on these previous evaluators to provide an opinion of a candidate’s overall ability and management skills.

Regardless of the open position, federal, state, and district guidelines play a role in principals’ general education hiring processes and candidate selection (Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011). Mandates in the No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation dictate the qualifications for highly qualified teachers, and principals adhere to these standards when making candidate selections. Teachers must have completed accredited programs and be state certified in order to be eligible for highly qualified teacher status. Principals utilize proper certification as an initial criterion for narrowing the candidate pool.

The availability and quantity of highly qualified teachers, in certain subject areas and for specific districts, also influences hiring practices (Ingle, Rutledge & Bishop, 2011; Kersten, 2008). Special education is one concentration area where the supply of certified educators does not match the demand; numerous positions servicing the needs of students with disabilities go unfilled due to a lack of qualified applicants (Billingsley, 2005; Kersten, 2008). Large urban and small rural districts, with less affluent
reputations, also face more challenges in locating and hiring teachers than more affluent districts. This is especially true for those hard to fill positions, such as special education (Levin & Quinn, 2003).

**Candidates’ Knowledge Base**

When considering the knowledge base for new general education hires, principals feel that content knowledge is highly important. A telephone study of 60 southeastern Wisconsin principals, conducted by Mason and Schroeder (2010), focused on candidate screening and hiring practices and whether consistencies existed among schools. The study revealed that professional skills, such as content knowledge and grade point average, are initially favorable traits for review by principals because they “provide more defensible grounds for the acceptance or rejection of a candidate” (p. 187). Personal attributes, such as enthusiasm, appearance and work ethic are viewed as more subjective in nature.

After establishing a candidate’s overall expertise within the field of study and proof of a thorough understanding of content, principals’ attention then goes deeper than simply knowing what to teach. A multi-year study conducted in 2011 by Ingle, Rutledge and Bishop, in which 21 Florida principals from mid-sized districts were interviewed, noted that 48% of elementary principals expressed a desire to hire general education candidates with prior knowledge and experience with a specific reading program that was currently being implemented within their districts. The familiarity with a program and a candidate’s comfort level in teaching it were valued. This was true in 57% of their elementary and secondary principals’ responses in regards to familiarity with a specific reading program that their individual districts promoted. Principals desired to select applicants with previous knowledge or experience in reading instruction and
programming currently being utilized in their own districts (Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011). This prior knowledge could help decrease the learning curve for the newly hired candidates.

In a similar manner, Abernathy, Forsyth and Mitchell (2001) conducted a study regarding the relationships between participants’ opinions on the importance of specific hiring practices. The study surveyed 57 undergraduate teacher education students, ten teacher education faculty, and 75 local school principals in Rocky Mountain region. It revealed principals also valued the use of technology in teaching all content including reading; the ability to utilize current and various forms of technology in the classroom is seen as an asset in teacher candidates.

The presentation of material is also viewed as an important skill by principals; individual delivery styles of teaching are also taken into account. Presenting content in a variety of ways is valued. In a qualitative study conducted in Florida, principals were interviewed regarding the traits they looked for in hiring teachers. Presenting material in various ways, within the same class, to address various learning styles was valued (Weber, Coarulli-Daniels, & Leihauer, 2003). Principals want to hire candidates who can address the various learning styles of all the students in the classroom as well as individualize instruction to meet students’ needs (Rutledge et al., 2010; Weber, Coarulli-Daniels, & Leihauer, 2003).

Unfortunately, although various teaching styles and delivery are valued, few principals include an assessment of this skill in their interviewing process. A survey conducted by Fortner (2011) examined the existing hiring practices of administrators within one county in Ohio that influence student achievement. In this mixed methods approach study, principals listed instructional strategies as one of the most important
when assessing new candidates, yet this was not highly valued on district interview documents. Another study found that 58% of administrators did not require candidates to participate in a mock teaching lesson even though this assignment can be an effective measure of true abilities (Balter & Duncombe, 2006). Principals rely on the opinion of others, or on written documentation, to assess the pedagogy of their teacher candidates.

Candidates’ own opinion of their knowledge possession also plays a role in the hiring process. Principals make hiring decisions based on a candidate’s knowledge. Opinions are formed from preparatory program participation and information disclosed during the interviewing process, but candidates’ own opinions of their expertise of the content also plays a role in the impressions they give off during the interview process. An electronic survey was completed by 45 principals in South Dakota to determine characteristics in teacher candidates that these administrators’ valued. Confidence and enthusiasm were highlighted as valuable traits that were looked for during the interview process. “New teachers must be excited about the profession they have chosen and have the eagerness to get started. They must have a confident attitude and a belief that education is the noblest of professions” (Kono, 2010, p. 61).

Although federal and state mandates require the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, studies have revealed that many general education teachers have wary or negative attitudes toward such students and their participation in a general education environment (D’Alzonzo, Giordano, & Cross, 1996; Orr, 2009; Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996). Research supports that these negative attitudes from teachers can impact the views of the students within their care (D’Alzonzo, Giordano, & Cross, 1996). These negative perceptions can also be conveyed to others in and outside of the classroom. For example, Orr (2009) interviewed
15 college graduates from a Midwestern college who all were teaching in full-time special education classrooms. These special education teachers listed unenthusiastic attitudes of their general education colleagues as their largest barrier to inclusion. In another qualitative study, involving group interviews of 74 special education, Chapter 1, and general education teachers revealed a majority of the teachers held negative views regarding inclusive education (Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996). Yet another study conducted in Scotland by Phtiaka (2005) interviewed three principals, three special education teachers, 15 general education teachers, and 60 pupils. The focus of this study was also to examine the participants’ attitudes on inclusion. Phtiaka found that almost half of the general education teachers felt uncertain about their abilities to meet the needs of a student with special needs. These feelings influence the confidence and effectiveness of novice teachers and could impact the interview process and principals’ hiring decisions in regards to filling an inclusive setting.

It has been shown that the apprehension toward inclusion felt by teacher graduates stems from the lack of knowledge and exposure, during the preparation stage, that most general education majors receive (Ammah & Hodge, 2006; Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999; Hanson et al., 2001; Idol, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; Pivik, McComas & LaFlamme, 2002; Singh, 2007; Swain, Nordess, & Leader-Janseen, 2012). One five year study of 25 preschool children revealed that a majority of students’ families chose to place their children in more restrictive settings, instead of an inclusive environment, due to the impressions of the educators within the field that they did not know how or could not meet the needs of their children (Hanson et al., 2001). Another study, involving a series of focus group meetings with 15 students with disabilities and 12 parents, reiterated the lack of teacher training and experience of general educators in inclusive settings (Pivik,
An evaluation of teachers within four elementary and four secondary schools revealed, via interviews, that more professional development opportunities are needed for general education teachers to meet the needs of students in inclusive settings (Idol, 2006). Yet another qualitative study involving interviews and observations, focusing on two high school physical education teachers, revealed that teachers must feel they are properly prepared in order to provide effective instruction to students with disabilities (Ammah & Hodge, 2006). This lack of confidence in teaching students with disabilities was also supported in a study by Singh (2007) in which 115 elementary and secondary general education teachers reported they felt unprepared and unknowledgeable to meet the needs of students with physical disabilities. An additional study by Cook, Tankersley, Cook, and Landrum (2000) suggested that teachers with prior experience “seem to feel they can potentially meet the needs of, and therefore hold attitudes of concern toward, more of their included students with disabilities” (p. 7). The sample pool for this survey study consisted of 70 general education inclusion teachers. Open-ended questioning of eight early childhood teachers also reiterated the need for additional education for teachers in inclusive classrooms (Leatherman, 2007). Mixed feelings regarding preparedness to teach students with disabilities in general education settings was noted in the survey responses of 1,002 pre-service teachers (Swain, Nordess, & Leader-Janseen, 2012).

This notion of gaining confidence through pre-training inclusive experiences is not one that is routinely employed in college settings. Most college and university’s general and special education preparation programs run separately and unilaterally. Classes for general education majors focus on content and pedagogy to teach general education pupils. Little time, if any, is spent on topics related neither to special education
nor in collaboration with special education majors. As Sapon-Shevin (1988) explained, “special educators and regular educators have jointly participated in a system that has divided and separated teachers in the same way that it has categorized and isolated students” (p. 106).

Without pre-training exposure to each other’s roles, general and special education majors have not experienced the need for collaboration. Although it is mandated that, in today’s public education settings, general and special needs students will and must be educated collaboratively, institutions of higher education have not geared their teacher education programs to meet that demand. The general and special education majors have been viewed for decades as two separate tracks, consisting of individual courses, internships, and instructors. Very rarely do the two tracks meet (Reed & Monday-Amaya, 1995; Villa, Thousand, & Chapple, 1996). This separation inhibits general education majors from collaborating with those that will ultimately be serving as their consultants as well as impedes their ability to gain knowledge about the needs of students with disabilities (Reed & Monday-Amaya, 1995; Villa et al., 1996). A survey of 35 universities in Illinois found general education majors received limited and inadequate instruction in special education (Reed & Monday-Amaya, 1995). The need for collaboration between general education staff, specialists, and school districts was noted in the recommendations from the review of a study of four teacher education programs. This collaboration impacts the confidence and impressions of the candidates applying for general education and inclusion classrooms (Villa et al., 1996).

When administrators are hiring teachers to fill classrooms, candidates’ confidence in teaching is weighed (Ammah & Hodge, 2006). Those with limited confidence in
meeting the needs of all the students in the class are at a disadvantage and impact the pool of acceptable candidates for progression through the selection process.

**Candidates’ Skill Base**

One of the first steps in the review of general education candidates revolves around the verification that a potential teacher is state certified to teach in the subject area and grade level for which an opening exists. After that process has been verified, principals begin focusing on character traits that they view as necessary to be an effective educator. In a study conducted by Weber, Coarulli-Daniels, and Leinhauser (2003), two principals in Florida provided their views on the traits necessary to be effective administrators in elementary schools for gifted students. Hiring exceptional teacher candidates was a priority of both respondents. One principal of a private school for gifted students in Palm Beach Gardens stated, “I look for teachers who are risk takers and show their creativity in teaching standard, basic topics” (Weber et al., 2003, p. 55). The study further explained that personal qualities, or soft skills, are also critiqued by administrators during the hiring process. These soft skills include: communication skills, flexibility, professionalism, drive and the ability to form and maintain relationships (Weber et al., 2003). Administrators are looking for teachers who can express how they utilize the latest trends, research, and pedagogy.

An applicant’s ability to provide specific examples from student teaching or classroom experience is valued. In order to do so, strong articulation skills are necessary (Kersten, 2008). Professional qualities, such as content knowledge and grade point average, can be used to reduce the initial pool of candidates and then soft skills further assist in the reduction of finalists during the interview stage for most hiring practices (Mason & Schroeder, 2010). In a mixed methods study conducted by Mason and
Schroder (2010), these hiring practices of K-12 principals were uncovered. Sixty southeastern Wisconsin administrators participated in the telephone survey, and “Results support the idea that professional attributes seem to weigh more heavily in the first level of the hiring process when the candidate pool is being reduced, but at the second level, personal attributes are weighed more heavily” (p. 192).

Another aspect principals assess during the screening of a candidate is the graduate’s ability to “fit” in the current school’s climate (Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011). In a multi-year, qualitative study of 21 Florida principals from mid-sized school districts, administrators showed consistency in their perception of the importance of individual personality and specific class or building fit for each job posting (Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011). Principals contemplate an applicant’s ability to “match the organizational culture and personality of the teachers already at the school (Rutledge et al., 2010, p. 583). Racial, gender and ethnical diversity is taken into account as well. Finding candidates that possess diversity can be difficult for administrators. Minority and male candidates are in limited supply; especially in specific subjects such as special education and elementary settings (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

Interviews are used to clarify personal characteristics that either match or are in contrast to the school’s makeup after professional skills have been previously analyzed by the administrator (Rutledge et al., 2008). Fortner (2011) conducted a mixed methods study of the hiring process in six school districts within one county in Ohio. Forty-five K-12 principals participated and voiced their opinions on characteristics they look for in candidates that increase student achievement. Although Fortner’s study revealed that 91% of principals assess a candidate’s personal skills during the interview process, only 22% of those administrators used a specific question or questions to formally critique
such traits. Exactly how administrators are making such assessments is not clear. Still other administrators use the face-to-face interview time to assess a combination of professional and personal or soft skills, but the exact assessment tool used for judging such skills is not known (Kersten, 2008).

General education candidates may be confident in their abilities to teach in a general education settings, but without the proper knowledge and strategies, may enter the inclusion classroom doubting their skills and abilities. An interview-based study conducted by Orr (2009) included 15 graduates from a Midwestern teaching program who described their experiences with inclusion. Orr’s study demonstrated that without the proper training, teachers’ feelings of ineptness creep into their attitudes regarding special education and inclusion and likely emerge during the screening process. It is evident that “preparedness is a critical component of inclusions’ success” (Orr, 2009, p. 237). A positive correlation between prior coursework teaching students with disabilities and teachers’ attitudes was shown. The more inclusion experience general education teachers bring with them to their positions, the more comfortable and confident they feel in meeting the needs of all students within their care (Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995). A quantitative study involving 127 general educators found that teachers with a positive attitude about mainstreaming were more likely to use effective inclusionary techniques (Bender et al., 1995). These feelings of assuredness could be involved in the assessment of personal skills principals are assessing during the interview selection process.

When considering candidates for an inclusion setting, confidence is lacking in most first year general education teachers in regards to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. A national study conducted by Goodlad and Field (1993), surveyed pre-service general education majors of teacher education programs and demonstrated that
students felt unprepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities both as a novice educator and in their later veteran years. Participants in the study doubted their future exposure to courses or content pertaining to special education and, thus, felt their unpreparedness would not likely change (Goodlad & Field, 1993).

This sentiment was reiterated in another study focusing on the perceived preparedness of general education teachers to teach students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The study, involving an online survey distributed to a random sample of 655 K-12 teachers in Connecticut, revealed that 75% of the respondents felt either “totally unprepared” or only “somewhat prepared” to meet such students’ needs (Teffs & Whitbread, 2011). As demonstrated in a study by Wood (2005) of 54 elementary principals from demographically and economically similar urban schools, novice teachers look to their principals for support and “clarification of their roles, duties, and other expectations” (p. 58). It rests upon the administrators’ shoulders to provide such support to first year educators if feelings of unpreparedness exist.

General educators must also now earn “highly qualified” status under the reauthorization of IDEA. This requires proof of content knowledge through formal, state-approved testing. General and special education teachers must be able to demonstrate subject-matter competency in all core subjects they teach (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). Understanding and fulfilling the requirements for this provision adds additional stress to educators who are attempting to balance meeting the needs of all pupils in their care.

Another stressor for the general education teacher is the demand from internal and external sources to not lose sight of the needs of the general population within their classrooms while addressing the needs of students with special needs. Defending how all
students’ needs are met by only one educator is something a general education teacher must be prepared to do. Parental pressure, as well as pressure from state mandates for Annual Yearly Progress of all students, are felt and create additional stress for the general education teacher. “Although teachers are increasingly being required to cater for children with disabilities in their classrooms, there is grave concern that they still continue to focus mainly on the typically achieving students rather than those with special needs” (Clark, Dyson, Millard, & Skidmore, 1997, p. 52).

Considerable research has been done on the stressors teachers feel. Unfortunately, only 1 out of 72 studies focused on the stress associated with meeting the needs of students with disabilities within a general education setting (Fitzwater, 1986). “89% of teachers believe that their ability to teach other students as effectively as they would like is reduced by having a child with an intellectual disability in the class and that this is quite stressful for them” (Forlin, 2010, p. 239). Although these findings were limited, the correlation between feelings of stress and inadequacy and teaching in inclusion settings was evident. A literature review conducted by Chen and Miller (1997) further confirmed that younger, less experienced teachers felt the greatest job related stress. This reiterates the important role principals must take in evaluating and mentoring their first year general education teachers. The responsibility of building inclusion content, pedagogy, and experience rests with elementary principals if novice general education teachers begin their careers without it.

**Candidate’s Experience Base**

Experts within the field agree that previous field experience is highly valued by principals when deciding on the qualifications of a general education teacher candidate (Ornstein, 1990). In order to reduce the chance of hiring an unprepared educator,
previous teaching experience is valued and reviewed. In the book, *Cultivating and Keeping Committed Special Educators: What Principals and District Leaders Can Do*, Billingsley (2005) provides administrators with specific actions to take in order to locate, hire, and maintain the most qualified candidates. “On the whole, a more experienced teacher can secure stronger student achievement gains” (Billingsley, 2005, p. 6). To gain a better understanding of candidate’s previous teaching experiences, principals highly value verbal references. In a study conducted in 2010 by Mason and Schroeder, 60 southeastern Wisconsin principals were surveyed via telephone on hiring practices using qualitative and quantitative measures. These administrators ranked verbal references as the most important aspect of a candidate’s application. Administrators weighed these verbal exchanges as more valuable than written recommendations, first impressions, portfolios or e-portfolios.

Where the verbal recommendation and prior experience come from can also play a role in the value placed on it. Some principals tend to hire candidates who have graduated from universities similar to their own college experience. An administrator’s loyalties to a certain university or type of higher education institution may influence the selection process as well (Baker & Cooer, 2005; Ingle et al., 2011). A study of 21 Florida principals, through 42 semi-structured interviews, revealed “that principals’ prior experiences with graduates of certain teacher training programs affected their hiring choices” (Ingle et al., 2011, p. 596). Research conducted by Baker and Cooer (2005) added that administrators tend to hire candidates who have graduated from similar types of institutions as themselves.

Recent graduates have completed a student teaching experience as partial fulfillment of their degree program, and although this experience is valued by principals,
some administrators prefer to hire candidates with additional teaching credentials (Ingle et al., 2011). In their study, 21 Floridian principals commented, during semi-structured interviews, that experienced teachers have a track record that can be proven. When analyzing the comments made by administrators from less affluent districts, 33% felt newly certified graduates cannot compete with seasoned educators in regards to prior teaching experience.

Exposure to students with disabilities is limited for many general education majors. In a study of pre-service teachers’ perceptions of students with disabilities conducted by Carroll, Forlin, and Jobling (2003), 220 pre-service general education teachers were surveyed about their contact levels with individuals with disabilities. Approximately one-third listed limited contact, consisting of less than four times per year, with anyone who possessed a disability. Only 12% of those surveyed had direct daily contact with an individual with special needs. First year general education teachers do not have the experience to understand, acknowledge, or meet the needs of students with deficits nor instruct in an inclusion setting. This lacking may be conveyed during the interview process and could impact hiring decisions.

Even if a specific protocol for teacher preparation programming was available that addressed the needs for inclusion exposure for general education majors, research on the best practices to include in such a program is conflicting. A study conducted by Hadadian and Chiang (2007) of 248 graduate and undergraduates’ pre-service perceptions of inclusion illustrated that simple exposure to students with disabilities did not enhance pre-service teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion. Yet another study involving 161 elementary and secondary education majors enrolled in special education courses contradicted that statement with findings that “proper exposure will increase general
educators’ inclination toward inclusion practices” (McHatton & McCray, 2007, p. 31). It is difficult for institutions to know what type of information and experiences are essential to expose general education majors to when consistent findings are not available.

Although specific standards do not exist, it is evident that special education coursework for general education majors is severely lacking in most general teacher education programs. A recent quantitative study of 71 urban, rural, and suburban inclusion teachers in New York concluded that general education participants complete an average of 2.83 classes related to inclusion practices (Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Riganldo, 2010). This is a small fraction of coursework within the average 40 class major requirement. A study conducted by Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen et al. (2004) involved the interviewing of 90 special education teachers, general education teachers, administrators, and parents in southern California, and supported the importance of general education teachers receiving more preparation in serving the needs of students with disabilities. A quantitative study involving 80 general and special education teachers in an urban Illinois high school also revealed a lack of knowledge on accommodations and modifications in general education teachers (Destefano, Shriner, & Lloyd, 2001). The need for additional inclusion training of general educators was also supported in a study of an urban elementary school where such an environment was teacher created and directed (Fisher, Sax, & Grove, 2000). These studies indicate that instruction in specific pedagogy to address the needs of students with disabilities is essential for successful inclusion, yet it is not a prominent part of college programming (Burstein et al., 2004; Destefano et al., 2001; Fisher et al., 2000). When the IDEA Amendments of 1997 were enacted, Yell and Shriner (1997) understood even then the shift in program content that general education pre-service teachers would need.
“General education teachers will be more involved in the IEP process. Teacher preparation programs for general educators, therefore, should include preparations to help them assume their expanding roles” (Yell & Shriner, 1997, p. 18). Higher education programs have yet to fully implement this suggestion (Yell & Shiner, 1997).

Teacher preparation programs, when constructing a program, need to look not only at the amount of special education courses offered to general education majors, but also investigate the content of such courses. A survey of 172 colleges and universities revealed that very limited special education content was included in the curriculum for pre-service general education majors; the most heavily covered information focused on strictly the characteristics of special education classification (Fender & Fiedler, 1990). This has been an issue in education for many years and a large body of research exists regarding this matter (Fender & Fiedler, 1990; Jones & Messenheimer-Young, 1989; McIntyre, 1985; Sattler & Graham, 1983). These national and local studies have illustrated the narrow content base of such classes. A national study including 200 universities randomly selected from the 50 states revealed that the majority of teacher preparation programs offered a single course in meeting the needs of exceptional children into their general education major (Jones & Messenheimer-Young, 1989). The greatest amount of time and emphasis in these courses had been placed on characteristics of specific disabilities with very limited exposure to pedagogy and adaptive instruction techniques (Jones & Messenheimer-Young, 1989).

More recently, additional studies have supported the need for not only coursework, but also fieldwork, for general education pre-service candidates. The study by Swain, Nordness, and Leader-Janssen (2012), previously reviewed in this chapter, noted an increase in positive attitudes and abilities in pre-service teachers who were
involved in an introductory special education course as well as a 24-hour practicum. Another study of 110 general education pre-service teachers found that those who were enrolled in teacher preparation programs that integrated curriculum and experiences from special education programming had the most positive attitudes about inclusive settings (Kim, 2011). Although the need for collaboration is evident, timing to do so is limited. A national electronic survey study of 703 faculty from institutes of higher education (IHE) found that time was needed, and not provided, to develop collaborative initiatives and coursework across general and special education disciplines and majors (Harvey et al., 2010).

An education professor and well-known author, Cavanaugh (2009), notes that although proper diagnosis classification is important to know and understand, general education teachers must also be privy to specific pedagogy and assistive technology strategies that will benefit students with disabilities who are placed in their classrooms. Without having an arsenal of instructional strategies to pull from, general education teachers’ abilities end at a possible diagnosis.

By limiting pre-service training programming requirements to only coursework, the assumption that general education teachers can apply what they have learned in a classroom setting cannot be made. In a quantitative study comprised of 57 general and special education student teachers from a mid-western university, survey results supported that teachers need to have actual experience applying what they have learned in order to be effective (Cameron & Cook, 2007). Overall, research has revealed that elementary general education teachers enter the profession with limited training in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Without having the opportunity to apply
coursework to actual students within inclusion settings, these candidates do not have the experience principals are looking for when filling teacher positions in inclusive settings.

**Knowledge for Filling Special Education Positions**

When elementary principals have an inclusion opening to fill, what significance is given to finding candidates who possess knowledge, skills, and experiences related to special education? This is important to know for my study because these educators will be responsible for the instruction of students with special needs. If administrators weigh special education background as a prerequisite for such openings, then general education majors who are applying for such positions will likely be at a disadvantage.

Less research exists on the hiring practices principals follow when selecting special education teachers. An expert in the field of special education, Billingsley (2004) noted that the first obstacle that administrators cross is the verification of credentials. When reviewing a candidate’s application for a special education position, principals initially note the completion of a test for certification that measures academic skills associated to that field of study (Billingsley, 2005). These tests are completed by beginning teachers and focus on a specific endorsement area, such as Learning Disabilities or Cognitive Impairments.

In the article, *Qualities of a Great Special Ed Teacher* (Hugo, 2012), it was noted that after verifying the appropriate licenses of candidates, principals look for the ability to balance teaching content knowledge with working cooperatively with others. Nationally known author, presenter, and educator, Smittle (2003), adds that teacher candidates must be able to convey subject matter in a clear, sequential process so that students understand the expectations put upon them. Perspective special educators should also be able to
show the relevance of content so that students see how and why information is important for them to know and retain.

Special education teachers spend time communicating with administrators, teachers, staff, medical professionals, parents and students. Diplomacy allows for such transactions to run smoothly and is valued by administrators. In an article written by professors of education at Kent State University, the importance of a principal’s next move in the review of a candidate’s preparation program and letters of recommendation is explained. These references can illustrate the abilities the candidate possessed in such realms (Toomes & Crowe, 2004).

When filling a special education position, administrators consider the amount and type of previous exposure a candidate has had in working with students with disabilities. Principals pay attention to experiences which are similar to that of their own environment. The type and length of the student teaching practicum is considered. Letters of recommendation from university faculty and supervising teachers, associated with these experiences, are valued (Billingsley, 2005).

Solid behavior management skills are also deemed important by principals when filling special education positions. “To be truly effective, special education candidates must possess skills in functional behavior assessment and positive behavior support and intervention” (Fenlon, 2008, p. 26). Behavioral difficulties can coincide with, or be the basis for, special education classification. A special education teacher needs the tools to deal with such aspects in the classroom. A study of 255 K-12 Midwestern principals, regarding their impressions of first year teachers’ competencies, revealed that classroom management ranked as the lowest candidate ability area. The amount of classroom
management needed in a special education setting would warrant administrators’ desire to review and hire a candidate with strong skills in this area (Truog, 1998).

In another study of 84 elementary and secondary principals from across rural South Dakota, one of the most highly valued professional traits in new special education teachers was organizational skills (Kono, 2010). This ability would prove essential for special education teachers due to the amount of paperwork and legal documents they are responsible for creating, storing, or referring to (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997; 2004).

When principals are interviewing candidates for special education positions, they need also keep in mind the role they will play in the retention of such individuals. Studies have been conducted that focus on the excess stress and high burnout rate that exists in the field of special education (Billinglsey, 2004; Kaff, 2004). One in-depth analysis of 20 state and national surveys of special educators found that stress plays a major role in the weekly or daily life of special educators (Billingsley, 2004). Another qualitative survey of 400 special education teachers in Kansas determined a major reason for special education teachers leaving the field centered on lack of support from administrators, colleagues, and parents (Kaff, 2004). The attrition rate of special education teachers is concerning, but specific practices have been shown to help decrease this rate. Principals that provide special education teachers with adequate time for planning, collaboration, and paperwork have a lower attrition rate than those that do not (Westling & Whitten, 1996). Candidates who know how to effectively use this time are valued by administrators since juggling assessments, meetings, and reports have been shown to produce stress and role overload in special education teachers (Billingsley, 2005).
Summary

A better understanding of inclusion classrooms, current hiring practices, and candidate qualities, along with the current research on such items were addressed in this chapter. Overall, elementary principals are responsible for hiring candidates to meet the needs of students in inclusion classrooms. Research does not currently exist on principals’ opinions of the specific characteristics that they value and see in inclusive education teacher candidates. My study focuses on this research gap. The knowledge, skills, and experiences elementary public school principals’ value in inclusion candidates were collected. A description of the methods used in my study are provided in Chapter III.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Elementary principals are faced with the task of hiring teachers to fill inclusion classrooms where general education students and students with disabilities are being taught collaboratively. Administrators may choose to hire either special education teachers or general education teachers for these roles. Nationally, finding special education teachers for such positions is difficult to do. The pool of special education candidates is limited in most regions in the United States. “Nationally, special education teachers are hard to find” (Springer, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, many administrators may find themselves hiring general education teachers to fill inclusion classrooms.

If principals are hiring such general education candidates to serve as inclusion teachers, it is important to know their perspectives on what qualifications general education candidates need in order to be hired for such settings. Administrators’ thoughts on this topic have yet to be researched. As the number of inclusion classrooms grows, it is vital to learn what elementary principals think in regards to the knowledge, skills, and experiences new teachers, hired directly out of general teacher education programs, do and should possess, in order to be hired for inclusion classrooms.

Research Design

My quantitative study used a single-stage sampling survey design for data collection. An online format was chosen due to cost, effectiveness, completion time and return time (Creswell, 2003). This procedure was appropriate since all members of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA) organization could be reached directly via their work email addresses. According to Creswell’s (2003) definition of the use of surveys for inquiry, a cross-sectional study,
conducted at one point in time, using a survey questionnaire for data collection, assisted in the intent to form generalizations from the sample of elementary public school principals in Michigan. An online survey, titled *Elementary Principals’ Perspectives on Inclusive Education Candidates*, was created by the researcher to collect data to address each research question. This survey was created using the advanced SurveyMonkey program. Pre-established reliability and validity did not exist since this was an original researcher-developed instrument created specifically for this study. The resulting data was used to better understand the perspectives of elementary public school principals when making hiring decisions for inclusion settings. Conclusions were drawn regarding principals’ perspectives on newly graduated general education teachers’ knowledge, skills, and experiences related to inclusion classrooms.

**Population, Sample and Participants**

The sample for this study consisted of public elementary school principals in the state of Michigan who are members of MEMSPA at the time of this research study. The exact number of public elementary and middle school principals in this organization, and who receive their newsletter, was 956; although the exact number of these members who hold elementary positions was not known. A link to the survey, paragraph of explanation and request for participation, as well as two email reminder messages were supplied to MEMPSA. The executive director of the agency agreed to support this research, and a prominent dean of a local public university agreed to distribute the survey to all current members of MEMSPA who are public school principals in Michigan. Prospective respondents’ identities and school affiliation were confidential.
Instrumentation

The data for this study was collected via an online survey created especially for this research (see Appendix A). To develop the questions for the survey, a review of the previous research on inclusion, general and special education teacher preparation programming, principals’ perspectives, and hiring practices was undertaken. A review of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) for the Exceptional Needs Specialist was also utilized in question development. Although this national certification is an advanced degree, and does not pertain to the current teacher candidate pool for this study, it is of importance since these standards would be required for the next step in the professional growth of teacher candidates who already possess an undergraduate teaching degree.

The major expectations and ability survey question items were generated from the NCATE and TEAC standards for general and special education teachers. These standards, as well as those from the NBPTS, can be found in Appendix B. Since general education programs are not currently required to follow state or federal standards for the teaching of students with disabilities, referring to the requirements for special education teachers allowed for an extraction of the knowledge, skills, and experiences these special education teachers should be leaving college with. Each of the NCATE Special Education standards was addressed in at least one question or sub-question in the survey (see Appendix B). These are the skills that accreditation agencies agreed are essential for the teaching of students with disabilities, and if general education teachers are to assume inclusion teaching roles, knowing their familiarity and understanding of these objectives should be something of value to the principals hiring them.
The survey was divided into six main topic areas, with a collection of demographic information at the conclusion. The first section of the survey asked participants to state how important it is for general education teachers, coming directly out of college, to know specific information. This information was broken down into five brief subsets. The second section asked for the principals’ perspectives on the importance of candidates’ ability to do certain things. This main question was also broken down into six subsets. The third section focused on the candidates’ experiences and contained five sub-questions. The fourth section asked for participants’ agreement level on three items regarding general education and special education viewpoints as well as hiring preferences. The fifth section required participants to declare whether they had hired a general education candidate to fill an inclusion classroom opening within the last three years. If they had not, the survey automatically redirected the participant to the demographic items. If candidates stated they had hired such a candidate, the sixth and seventh sections of the survey asked for a rating of ability of those inclusion teachers in five tasks, as well as whether they demonstrated experience in five specific tasks.

As part of the pilot testing of this instrument, six current public elementary school principals, within the greater Grand Rapids area, reviewed drafts of the survey for content validity, clarity, accuracy, completion time, and additional input (Creswell, 2003). These volunteers were asked to compute the total time it took to take the survey, and that mean was used in the initial email to participants to gauge survey completion time. Two additional principals were asked to complete the survey using an electronic and hard copy. This final pilot testing was necessary, for any original instrument, so that the volunteers could write down edits they felt were necessary while completing the survey online (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Feedback was taken into account, and
editions and corrections were made, prior to the creation of the final survey format. These steps helped increase the instrument’s validity. Following the last pilot testing stage, approval to administer the survey and conduct the study was gained from the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to the survey launch, Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board approval was obtained. Respondents’ identifying information was not collected, nor known. Survey responses were initially stored on the SurveyMonkey website, and a password was needed to access the survey results. At the conclusion of the administration time frame window, the data was exported to SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 21.0; SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL) for statistical analysis. This data was then stored on a protected computer that also required a password for entry.

The Social Exchange Theory was utilized in the survey administration, whereby potential participants were told of the value their responses would have, the limited amount of time the survey would take, and the sponsorship through the MEMSPA organization may have increased the possibility of pre-established trust (Cook, 2003). Salant and Dillman’s (1994) administration process was followed in the distribution of the survey and may have helped to increase response rates. An initial paragraph and survey link, asking for participation in the study, appeared in the winter MEMSPA newsletter. This newsletter was sent electronically to all public elementary school principals in the state of Michigan who are MEMSPA members (see Appendix C). Two weeks later, a follow up message appeared in another edition of the newsletter and a final reminder notice and request for participation was sent three weeks after the original
newsletter link was received (Dillman, 2007). This final reminder was sent directly from a well-respected university dean. The initial message and two reminders were all sent on alternative days of the week. The total collection time for this study was approximately five weeks. A copy of all correspondences can be found in Appendices C1, C2, and C3.

When participants clicked on the link, the first screen included consent to participate. A copy of this request can be found in Appendix A. Participants were asked to complete a web-based survey consisting of six main closed question topics and 32 sub-questions with ordered choices. Each question allowed participants to rate the degree of possession or the importance value placed on each item. These questions had a six point visual, horizontal scale with forced choice options. Response options on these scales ranged from no importance to extremely important; strongly disagree to strongly agree; and yes, no, or unsure. Participants could skip, choose not to answer any questions, or exit the survey at any point. Demographic questions allowed for open ended responses so interval data was obtained for education and administrative experience, as well as student and teacher population size. As previously noted, a complete copy of the survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

A distribution list of all emails remained confidential, but a request for this survey to be sent out was made to the MEMSPA representatives. Information about the study, the data being collected, the use of the data, and their voluntary participation was provided to all potential respondents in the correspondences and in the initial page of the survey. Participants were also given the opportunity to have access to the results of the study after it completion. Results were shared with the executive director of MEMSPA.
Data Analysis Plan

The intent of my survey is to generate quantitative data, and for most questions individuals were asked to reply using a six point ordered response Likert scale. Principals’ perceptions of the knowledge, skills, and experiences general education teachers need to teach in inclusion classrooms was the main focus of the data collected. To what extent these abilities should be and are possessed by teacher candidates, directly out of college, was addressed in the final questions and sub-questions in the survey. The possession of specific knowledge, skills, and experiences served as the independent variables in this study, as broken down into five sub-categories, with a survey question developed for each. These three main principles were broken down into five sub-categories. Table 1 illustrates the independent variables for this study. The dependent variables were the principals’ perspectives on certain outcomes.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable Sub-Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KNOWLEDGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction modification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKILLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPERIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team/co teaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The five sub-categories were examined to determine principals’ perceptions on their importance for general education teacher possession, and for those who have recently hired general education candidates to teach in inclusive settings, as well as such candidates’ abilities to illustrate their experiences. General perspectives, regarding the field of special education, as well as what these teachers should and do possess were also generated using descriptive statistics based on the responses to all sub-questions listed
under questions 1-5 and 7-8 of the survey. This analysis examined the means, standard deviations, and ranges of the scores for each of these sub-questions (Creswell, 2003). An overall mean for each sub-question was also calculated. The specific test analyses being performed, as well as the coordinating research and survey questions, are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Statistical Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Knowledge, skills, and experiences candidates should possess</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Knowledge, skills, and experiences candidates actually possess</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Possible differences between what candidates should and actually possess</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 7, 8</td>
<td>T-tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Administrators’ beliefs and predictability of knowledge, skills, and experiences candidates should possess</td>
<td>4, 9, 11, 12</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics Regression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The possibility of a relationship between principals’ own knowledge of inclusion, years in K12 education, years as a principal, and final hiring decision responsibilities and the importance of the knowledge, skills, and experience they feel candidates should and do possess was also addressed through regression analysis involving questions 4, and 9, 11 and 12. Regression analysis is a method for measuring the correlation between two or more phenomena (Dizikes, 2010). Paired sample t-tests were performed with data from
questions 2, 3, 7, and 8 to see if there was a statistically significant difference in means (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

For the open-ended survey question, the three variables: knowledge, skills, and experiences were the focus of my analysis of respondents’ answers. For each of these variables, a tally of the words participants’ used was completed. Adjectives, such as preparedness and unpreparedness, were grouped together and crunched to tally results. This information allowed for the obtainment of the frequency of each word within each variable; the grouping of common remarks. An open ended question in a quantitative survey also allows participants the opportunity to explain or expand on an answer previously given to a close-ended question (Singer & Couper, 2011).

**Limitations and Delimitations**

My study was limited to public elementary school principals in Michigan who are members of MEMSPA. Therefore, the results from this study cannot be generalized to principals in private schools, middle or high school principals, or public elementary administrators from other states. Despite this limitation, having basic information regarding elementary public school principals’ perceptions was needed since no such data could be found at the current time regarding this subject matter.

Not having direct access to the email distribution list was another limitation to this study. The assurance that each MEMSPA member’s current email address was available within the MEMPSA database and that each potential participant received the emails was controlled by an outside party. MEMSPA spent two weeks, at the beginning of the 2013-2014 academic school year, updating their email database and creating an all-inclusive email distribution list. This hopefully helped eliminate the chance that outdated or incorrect email addresses existed.
Another limitation to this study was the fact that the data was self-reported and included only current principals’ perceptions. Further information from general education teacher candidates, regarding their opinions on the knowledge, skills, and experience they do or should possess, and the experience they have had with inclusion settings, would have been beneficial to compare with the administrators’ perspectives.

Finally, the research was conducted in a state with declining student enrollment, so fewer new teachers are being hired directly out of college to fill positions. This may have limited the number of responses for that section of the survey.

**Summary**

This chapter explained the methodology I used to survey public elementary school principals in Michigan regarding the knowledge, skills, and experiences they feel general education candidates, directly out of college, should and do possess in order to teach in an inclusion classroom. The Tailored Design Method was taken into account when designing the survey and its implementation. The validity of the survey was addressed through two-phase pilot testing. Individuals had a five week window of time to respond to the survey and participant anonymity was guaranteed. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Chapter IV presents the results from the data collected and analyzed.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

My study sought to measure the extent to which elementary public school principals in one Midwest state believe teachers coming directly out of college have, and should have, the knowledge, skills, and experiences concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Knowledge, skills and experiences include: college coursework, special education law and terminology, instructional practices, and prior experiences instructing students with disabilities. The research questions posed in my study were as follows:

1. What knowledge, skills, and experiences regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities do elementary public school principals think general education teachers, upon graduating from their teacher training programs and being considered for teaching within an inclusion classroom, should possess?

2. What knowledge, skills, and experiences regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities do elementary public school principals find such general education teachers actually possess upon hiring them to teach within an inclusion classroom?

3. To what extent are there differences between what elementary public school principals think such general education teachers should possess and what these administrators find their general education teachers actually possess?

4. What are elementary public school principals’ knowledge surrounding inclusive education and experience and to what extent do these factors predict what these administrators believe about inclusion and candidates’ possession of traits when holding various demographic variables constant?
To address these research questions, 956 public elementary and middle school principals were invited to participate in an online survey during a five-week period of time starting in January, 2014, in Michigan. Of the 956 administrators who were asked to participate, 130 elementary principals completed the survey. One participant was removed from survey analysis due to the large amount of questions left unanswered. Although it is unknown exactly what percentage of Michigan public elementary principals this survey sampled, my study represents the voices of 129 current administrators who are responsible for the inclusive settings within their buildings.

Participants had the option of skipping questions or stopping the survey at any point. Thus, the response rate for each item varied slightly throughout the survey. A redirect question was also built into the survey. Participants were asked whether they had hired any general education teachers, coming directly out of college, to teach within an inclusion classroom in their school within the last three years. If participants answered this question positively, the survey continued with questions regarding those candidates’ skills, knowledge, and experiences. If a negative answer was produced, the participant was redirected to the demographic questions at the survey’s conclusion. Therefore, only participants who had hired such candidates were able to answer specific questions in the second half of the survey. This reduced the pool of responses for those specific questions from 129 to 62. Those administrators who noted they had hired general education teachers, coming directly out of college, to teach in inclusion classrooms in their school within the last three years constituted 48% of all respondents.

All MEMSPA members were sent two reminder notifications, beginning two weeks after the initial survey launch and each two weeks apart, on differing days of the week, to attempt to increase the response rate.
Response bias was also addressed through the reminder protocol that was followed. The reminder notices varied in wording and format and were sent at different times of the week and day to accommodate workloads and schedules. In addition, I and a prominent Teacher Education dean at a large public university utilized our personal network of public elementary principals to encourage survey participation.

Principals’ perceptions of the knowledge, skills, and experiences general education teachers need to teach in inclusion classrooms were the main focus of the data collected in the first portion of the survey. To what extent these abilities should be and are possessed by teacher candidates, coming directly out of college, were addressed in the final questions in the survey. The possession of specific knowledge, skills, and experiences served as the independent variables in this study, as broken down into five sub-categories, with a survey question developed for each.

Description of the Population

The target population for my study consisted of elementary public school principals in one Midwest state. The exact number of such administrators was not known, but 956 elementary and secondary public school administrators belong to the MEMSPA organization and they all received the survey notification requests. Only elementary public school principals were asked to participate. Of the 956 administrators contacted, 129 responses were analyzed. Descriptive data was acquired via blank answer keys at the conclusion of the survey and categories for analysis were then created. Over half of these respondents had served as a principal for 1-7 years (58.68%), with the mean of 8.03 (SD=6.25), and many had been in K12 education for 11-20 years (45.45%), with the mean of 20.93 (SD=8.09). Respondents were primarily serving in schools with 2 or 3 special education teachers (56.3%) and less than 11% of their student population
consisted of individuals with identified disabilities (53.9%). Smaller public elementary schools were most widely represented in this survey. Table 3 contains detailed demographics on all participant responses.

Table 3

**Respondent Demographics (n=120)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in K-12 education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as a principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of identified students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>53.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of general education teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 40</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of special education teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of inclusion classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents responded to all items.
Respondents were leading buildings with 11-20 general education teachers (60.2%) with the mean of 19.32 (SD=10.13) that housed a mean of 8.39 (SD=10.133) inclusive classrooms. A little over 25% of principals’ buildings had between one and five inclusion classrooms (27.4%) and 18.8% reported having no inclusive settings at all.

Analysis of Questions

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 examined what knowledge, skills, and experiences regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities elementary public school principals think general education teachers, upon graduating from their teacher training programs and being considered for teaching within an inclusion classroom, should possess.

To address this research question, survey questions 1-3 asked participants to what extent specific knowledge, skills, and experiences were important for these teacher candidates to possess. An interval scale was used to answer all of these questions. Degrees of measurement were 1=not at all important, 2=low importance, 3=slightly important, 4=moderately important, 5=high importance, and 6=extremely important.

Tables 4-6 show the percent responses regarding the knowledge, skills, and experiences elementary school principals thought general education teachers, coming directly out of college, should possess in relation to being able to effective teach in an inclusion setting. Results appear from highest to lowest mean for each topic.

Table 4 illustrates the knowledge elementary public school principals thought general education teachers, coming directly out of college, should possess. The top three topics principals perceived as being most important included how to modify instruction based on assessment information (M=5.39, SD=0.94), what teachers must legally do to follow IEP’s (M=5.23, SD=1.06), and how emotional disabilities can impact academic
growth (M=5.07, SD=0.82). All of these topics had means that fell between high and extremely important values. The least important topic was knowledge of different types of assessment used for special education eligibility (M=4.02, SD=1.21), with the mean falling within the moderately important range. Means for all sub-questions within this survey question fell within either moderately or high importance.

Table 4

*Rank Ordering of Knowledge Candidates Should Possess (n=128)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Topic</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to modify instruction based on assessment information</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (0.7)</td>
<td>8 (6.3)</td>
<td>47 (36.7)</td>
<td>70 (54.7)</td>
<td>5.39 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What teachers must legally do to follow IEP’s</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (0.7)</td>
<td>5 (3.9)</td>
<td>17 (13.3)</td>
<td>38 (29.7)</td>
<td>66 (51.6)</td>
<td>5.23 (1.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How emotional disabilities can impact academic growth</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (0.7)</td>
<td>4 (3.1)</td>
<td>21 (16.4)</td>
<td>61 (47.7)</td>
<td>41 (32.0)</td>
<td>5.07 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of specific special education impairments (e.g., Learning Disabilities)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (0.7)</td>
<td>7 (3.5)</td>
<td>33 (25.8)</td>
<td>56 (43.8)</td>
<td>31 (24.2)</td>
<td>4.83 (0.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different types of assessments used for special education eligibility</td>
<td>1 (0.7)</td>
<td>11 (8.6)</td>
<td>31 (24.2)</td>
<td>44 (34.4)</td>
<td>30 (23.4)</td>
<td>12 (9.4)</td>
<td>4.02 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: Not at all important=1, Low importance=2, Slightly important=3, Moderately important=4, High importance=5, Extremely important=6

Table 5 represents the skills elementary public school principals thought general education teachers, coming directly out of college, should possess. All six sub-questions regarding skills had means within the high importance level. The ability to use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities was ranked as the most important skill needed (M=5.32, SD=0.86) while principals ranked individualizing lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities as the second most important skill (M=5.21, SD=0.77). The least important item was matching learning styles to teaching
strategies for students with disabilities, but this item, as with all the others, still had a mean that fell within the high importance value (M=5.02, SD=0.90).

Table 5

*Rank Ordering of Skills Candidates Should Possess (n=128)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>5.32 (0.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5.21 (0.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify classroom settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5.18 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate lessons for future learning and instruction for students with disabilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.08 (0.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match learning styles to teaching strategies for students with disabilities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5.02 (0.90)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: Not at all important=1, Low importance=2, Slightly important=3, Moderately important=4, High importance=5, Extremely important=6

Rank ordering of the means for the experiences public elementary school principals thought general education teachers, coming directly out of college, should possess can be found in Table 6. All of the mean rankings in this question fell within the moderately important level. Respondents ranked helping students with special needs as the most important experience new teachers should have (M=4.96, SD=1.05) followed by student teaching in an inclusion setting (M=4.66, SD=1.05). Experience team or co-teaching in an inclusion setting, prior to graduation, was ranked as the least important experience of the items (M=4.10, SD=1.23).
Table 6

*Rank Ordering of Experiences Candidates Should Possess (n=127)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>1 (%)</th>
<th>2 (%)</th>
<th>3 (%)</th>
<th>4 (%)</th>
<th>5 (%)</th>
<th>6 (%)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helping students with special needs</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>5 (3.9)</td>
<td>27 (21.3)</td>
<td>52 (40.9)</td>
<td>42 (33.1)</td>
<td>4.96 (1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>1 (0.7)</td>
<td>15 (11.8)</td>
<td>33 (26.0)</td>
<td>50 (39.4)</td>
<td>28 (22.0)</td>
<td>4.66 (1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending an IEP</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>5 (3.9)</td>
<td>19 (15.0)</td>
<td>38 (29.9)</td>
<td>35 (27.6)</td>
<td>30 (23.6)</td>
<td>4.48 (1.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing undergraduate classes in special education</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (1.6)</td>
<td>19 (5.0)</td>
<td>39 (30.1)</td>
<td>50 (39.4)</td>
<td>17 (13.4)</td>
<td>4.40 (1.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team/co teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>5 (3.9)</td>
<td>29 (22.8)</td>
<td>44 (34.6)</td>
<td>30 (23.6)</td>
<td>17 (13.4)</td>
<td>4.10 (1.23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: Not at all important=1, Low importance=2, Slightly important=3, Moderately important=4, High importance=5, Extremely important=6

Participants were also encouraged to share any additional thoughts on the preparation of general education teacher candidates to teach in inclusion settings. Survey question 5 was structured as an open-ended response item to allow such feedback. Major themes were drawn after an analysis of the 66 participant responses. Common theme responses are found in Table 7.

Table 7

*Participants’ Comments on the Preparedness of New General Education Teachers to Teach in Inclusive Settings (Open-Ended Responses; n=66)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ill-prepared; lack of experience</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of collaboration</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness determined by specific program</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge of differentiation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of classroom management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal skills needed to teach all students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good grasp of differentiation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion or urban internship preferred</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception that SPED teacher is responsible</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need general and special education mentors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7-Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Properly prepared</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong content, but cannot apply it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability is key</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional time and experience needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must be empathetic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to be able to reflect on own abilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents provided open-ended comments for this question.

Respondents overwhelmingly stated that they felt general education teachers, coming directly out of college, were ill-prepared or lacked enough experience to teach in inclusion settings. This theme was stated in 43.9% of all responses and was illustrated in the following comment by a veteran principal with 41 years of K12 experience. “In my experience, most gen ed teachers new to the field of education have not received appropriate levels of course work or training to prepare them to adequately participate instructionally with students in inclusion classrooms.” Another administrator, with 13 years of leadership experience, echoed this sentiment. “General education teachers entering the hiring ranks are not adequately prepared to work with children with even a minimal disability.” Yet another principal’s views were more direct. “Most teachers that I have hired in the past 5 years have not had any experience in an inclusive classroom.” Finally, an administrator with 30 years in the field summarized the concerns of the lack of preparedness of these new educators by stating, “Overall, they are not prepared to work within inclusion classrooms and are not prepared to work with special needs students.”

In addition, the importance of collaboration with other educators was also stated as a necessary preparatory tool for new teachers to have. This sentiment was expressed
by 15.2% of the respondents and is clearly stated by a principal who leads a building with 40% of its students receiving special education services.

I really think a big part of serving special education students within an inclusion classroom has to do with collaboration with the resource teacher(s). Knowing how to work alongside a speech pathologist or resource teacher is important for a general education teacher to be prepared for.

Another principal, who once served as a special education teacher, reiterated the importance of collaboration by stating, “A lot of how successful an inclusion room is is based on the relationship of the two teachers. If it is a beautiful match, then magic happens.” Yet another administrator, who oversees 13 inclusion classrooms, explained that the collaboration is not just about discussing student progress and goal creation; it also includes the willingness to share ownership of a classroom. “[New teachers] lack the skills to co-teach and are often uncomfortable sharing their classroom.”

The specific institution a general education teacher graduated from was also stated by respondents as impacting preparedness. Differences in college programming were expressed by 13.6% of the respondents. One participant, with 15 years of administrative experience, summarized this viewpoint. “It depends upon what college they received their undergrad degree from. Some are better in preparing the students than others.” The length of internship experience and size of a school were also noted as preparation factors. An administrator who oversees 10 inclusion rooms stated, “It really depends on the college. Students from smaller, private colleges are not as well prepared to work within inclusion classrooms.”

Positive comments were also noted in participants’ responses, although the percentage of such comments was low (4.5%). Three individuals felt candidates coming
directly out of college had a good grasp of differentiated instruction. One principal explained that “the teachers that [he has] recently hired have been trained very well in the importance of differentiation.” Another participant felt general education teachers coming directly out of college were properly prepared to teach in inclusion settings, but the explanation for such preparedness also included specific protocol followed by institutions in that area. “I believe that most general education teachers are prepared. Most of the colleges in our area do a great job of weeding out students before they are ready to work in the classroom.”

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 examined what knowledge, skills, and experiences regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities elementary public school principals find such general education teachers actually possess upon hiring them to teach within an inclusion classroom.

To address this research question, survey Questions 7 and 8 asked participants to what extent specific skills were shown and evidence of experiences were possessed by teacher candidates. An interval scale was used to answer all of these questions. Degrees of measurement were 1=not at all, 2=barely able, 3=just satisfactory, 4=slightly well, 5=moderately well, and 6=extremely well.

Table 8 provides a rank ordering of the perceived skills public elementary school principals thought general education teachers, coming directly out of college, actually possess. The top two, the ability to individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities and the ability modify classroom settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities both fell within the slightly well range, with means of 4.22 (SD=1.04) and 4.17 (SD=1.09) respectively. The four remaining skill items all had means within the
just satisfactory range. Lack of knowledge in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities was expressed by seven participants and appears as something general education teachers possess to just a satisfactory level. From the open-ended responses, a first year principal summarized this sentiment.

Every classroom is very diverse. Having education on how to differentiate and teach students with various needs is extremely important in today's society.

Everyone learns differently and at different paces. Learning how to differentiate, having lots of tools in a teacher’s tool belt, and being able to co-teach are crucial for teacher candidates to acquire.

Table 8

*Rank Ordering of Skills Candidates Actually Possess (n=59)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Item</th>
<th>1 n (%)</th>
<th>2 n (%)</th>
<th>3 n (%)</th>
<th>4 n (%)</th>
<th>5 n (%)</th>
<th>6 n (%)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3 (5.1)</td>
<td>13 (22.0)</td>
<td>15 (25.4)</td>
<td>24 (40.1)</td>
<td>4 (6.8)</td>
<td>4.22 (1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify classroom settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3 (5.1)</td>
<td>16 (27.1)</td>
<td>12 (20.0)</td>
<td>22 (37.3)</td>
<td>5 (8.5)</td>
<td>4.17 (1.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>9 (15.3)</td>
<td>13 (22.0)</td>
<td>15 (25.4)</td>
<td>19 (32.2)</td>
<td>2 (3.4)</td>
<td>3.86 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify assessments to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>9 (15.3)</td>
<td>13 (22.0)</td>
<td>18 (30.5)</td>
<td>17 (28.8)</td>
<td>2 (3.4)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match learning styles to teaching strategies for students with disabilities</td>
<td>1 (1.7)</td>
<td>10 (16.9)</td>
<td>8 (13.6)</td>
<td>19 (32.2)</td>
<td>20 (33.9)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>3.81 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate lessons for future learning and instruction for students with disabilities</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>11 (18.6)</td>
<td>15 (25.4)</td>
<td>16 (27.1)</td>
<td>16 (27.1)</td>
<td>1 (1.7)</td>
<td>3.68 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: Not at all=1, Barely able=2, Just satisfactory=3, Slightly well=4, Moderately well=5, Extremely well=6

Assisting students with special needs was shown to be the experience elementary public school principals thought general education teachers, coming directly out of college, possessed the most (M=3.91, SD=1.12). Respondents felt that five out of the six
items in Question 8 were possessed by new general education candidates only to a just satisfactory degree (see Table 9). Participants responded that general education teachers just barely possess experience in team or co-teaching within an inclusive setting \((M=2.88, SD=1.35)\). One principal, leading a school with 14 inclusion classrooms, expressed the need for such collaborative experiences. “Every undergraduate teaching candidate should observe quality team teaching on a consistent basis. They should also interview and prepare with the team teaches to see the level of preparation and differentiation that is needed to be successful.”

Table 9

*Rank Ordering of Experiences Candidates Actually Possess \((n=59)\)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assisting students with special needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.91 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifying instruction based on assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.50 (1.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.47 (1.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending an IEP</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.34 (1.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing undergraduate classes in special education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.19 (1.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team/co teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.88 (1.35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: Not at all=1, Barely able=2, Just satisfactory=3, Slightly well=4, Moderately well=5, Extremely well=6

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 examined to what extent are there differences between what elementary public school principals think such general education teachers *should possess* and what these administrators find their general education teachers *actually possess*. 
To identify the relationship between participants’ perceptions of candidates’ actual abilities and the skills they felt candidates’ should possess, paired sample t-tests were performed using the six sub-unit questions from survey Question 2 and the six sub-unit questions from survey Question 7. To identify the relationship between participants’ perceptions of candidates’ actual experiences and those they felt candidates should have experience, similar analysis was performed with the five sub-unit questions from survey Questions 3 and 8. The results from the paired sample t-tests appear in Table 10 and 11, as listed from highest to lowest mean difference.

Table 10

*Paired Sample T-Tests Comparing Skills Candidates Should Posses with Actual Possession*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Should Possess Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Actually Possess Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean Diff. (SD)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig* (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5.33 (.685)</td>
<td>3.86 (1.146)</td>
<td>-1.466 (1.354)</td>
<td>8.246</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate lessons for future learning and instruction for students with disabilities</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.03 (.890)</td>
<td>3.68 (1.121)</td>
<td>-1.356 (1.387)</td>
<td>7.511</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify assessments to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.10 (.759)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.117)</td>
<td>-1.271 (1.460)</td>
<td>6.687</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match learning styles to teaching strategies for students with disabilities</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.96 (.823)</td>
<td>3.81 (1.156)</td>
<td>-1.158 (1.412)</td>
<td>6.193</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.24 (.795)</td>
<td>4.22 (1.035)</td>
<td>-1.107 (1.266)</td>
<td>6.169</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify classroom settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5.22 (.817)</td>
<td>4.17 (1.094)</td>
<td>-1.052 (1.407)</td>
<td>5.693</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference is significant at p<0.05

An examination of the data collected from each sub-question revealed that elementary public school principals, overall, thought that general education candidates, coming directly out of college, do not actually possess the amount of skills they should
possess. All six skills were rated lower in actual possession than participants felt candidates should possess. Furthermore, of the six skills, the differences in all the means were statistically significant. The largest difference in skills that participants felt general education candidates should possess and actually possess was using differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Analysis showed that principals felt new teachers only possessed such skills at a just satisfactory level, while they felt these new teachers should have possessed the same traits at the moderately well level. Respondents were clear in their stance that general education teachers are not being prepared with the skills necessary to teach in an inclusion setting. One principal, with two special education teachers on staff and 14 inclusion classrooms, expressed frustration at this lack of preparation.

Teachers coming right out of college seem to be very ill-prepared to work with students with learning disabilities. These people are not being trained/educated on how to modify instruction/lessons or how to handle these students in the classroom; some who come with many behavioral and/or learning struggles.

The perspective of a lack of preparedness was also evident in the analysis from the experiences general education teachers have or should have in regards to inclusion experiences (see Table 11 which provides the data as listed from highest to lowest mean difference). Findings suggest respondents again thought candidates’ actual possession of experiences was lower than the experiences these participants felt general education teachers should have. All five sub-units generated actual possession means lower than principals’ perceptions of what experiences those candidates should possess. All the five sub-questions had means which were statistically significant with the largest mean difference in completing undergraduate classes in special education. Principals stated
they did not feel one class in special education was sufficient for such teacher candidates and that teachers, themselves, felt unprepared. “Generally, pre-service teachers have one required class on inclusion and feel unprepared for the reality of the classroom.”

Table 11

**Paired Sample T-Tests Comparing Experiences Candidates Should Possess with Actual Possession**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Should Possess Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Actually Possess Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean Diff. (SD)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completing undergraduate classes in special education</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.58 (1.194)</td>
<td>3.16 (1.399)</td>
<td>-1.421 (1.690)</td>
<td>6.349</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4.88 (.957)</td>
<td>3.47 (1.287)</td>
<td>-1.414 (1.534)</td>
<td>7.021</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team/co teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4.28 (.933)</td>
<td>2.88 (1.352)</td>
<td>-1.397 (1.664)</td>
<td>6.391</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending an IEP</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>4.51 (1.040)</td>
<td>3.34 (1.422)</td>
<td>-1.169 (1.683)</td>
<td>5.337</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting students with special needs</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.02 (.896)</td>
<td>3.91 (1.123)</td>
<td>-1.105 (1.398)</td>
<td>5.971</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference is significant at p<0.05

**Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 examined elementary public school principals’ knowledge surrounding inclusive education, experience, and hiring authority, and to what extent these factors predict what these administrators believe about inclusion and the possession of specific traits when holding various demographic variables constant.

Administrators’ general perceptions of special education were collected, as participants were asked their agreement level on three statements related to the field. An interval scale was used, with the degrees of measurement of 1=strongly disagree, 2=moderately disagree, 3=disagree, 4=agree, 5=moderately agree, and 6=strongly agree. Principals’ perceptions are illustrated in Table 12, as listed from highest to lowest mean.
Respondents agreed that students with special needs learn best in inclusion settings (M=4.41, SD=1.26). They barely agreed on the preference to hire special education teachers to teach in inclusion settings (M=3.79, SD=1.34). Principals also disagreed that Teacher Education programs are effectively preparing general education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms (M=3.10, SD=1.22). This statement was met with the strongest level of disagreement of all three items asked.

Table 12

Inclusive Education Agreement Levels (n=127)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusive Education Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with special needs learn best in inclusion settings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.41 (1.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to hire special education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.79 (1.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education programs are effectively preparing general education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.10 (1.22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents responded to all items. Likert scale: Strongly disagree=1, Moderately disagree=2, Disagree=3, Agree=4, Moderately agree=5, Strongly agree=6

To gain data on principals’ perception of their own knowledge of special education, respondents were asked to state their level of agreement on being very knowledgeable about meeting the needs of students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom. A six point interval scale was utilized for possible responses. Degrees of measurement were 1=strongly disagree, 2=moderately disagree, 3=disagree, 4=agree, 5=moderately disagree, and 6=strongly agree. Over half (51%) of all participants answered this question by stating they moderately agreed to being very knowledgeable and nearly all respondents (97.52%) chose a level of agreement to this question. Table 13 illustrates this data.
### Table 13

**Principals’ Agreement Levels on Knowledge of Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities in an Inclusion Classroom (n=121)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately agree</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were also asked about the hiring protocol in their buildings, asking who, at the school level, makes the hiring decisions. An interval scale was used for responses which included: me, a committee including me, the superintendent or assistant superintendent, and someone else. It was evident that most hiring decisions are made by a committee including the principal (see Table 14). Responses to this question were not varied enough to utilize it as a variable in the regression models.

### Table 14

**Hiring Decisions in Participants’ Buildings (n=121)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A committee including me</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>84.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The superintendent or assistant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superintendent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone else</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to analyze the extent that participants’ beliefs and experience impact their opinions on inclusion, multiple regressions were conducted. A multiple regression model includes more than one independent variable to make accurate predictions on a dependent variable (Mendenhall & Sincich, 2012). This is the most commonly used analysis tool to maximize predictions (Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012).
The independent variables for my first regression models were years of K12 experience, years of experience as a principal, and knowledge of inclusion. The dependent variable for each model was one of the overarching statements regarding inclusion in Question 4. These statements included: Teacher Education programs are effectively preparing general education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms, I prefer to hire special education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms, and Students with special needs learn best in inclusion settings.

In order to determine whether principals’ knowledge, years in K12, and years as a principal predict their perceived effectiveness of Teacher Education programs, the three independent variables were entered into the regression models and the assumption of the independence of scores was met. Normal distribution was assumed through the adequate sample size. The unstandardized regression coefficients for perceived effectiveness of Teacher Education programs and the coefficient of determination can be found in Table 15. Two of the coefficients were negative. Thus, these variables had a negative effect or subtracted from the perceived effectiveness. The results of the multiple regression suggest that only 5.4% of variability in principals’ perceived effectiveness of Teacher Education programs can be explained by these three predictors.

Table 15

Regression Analysis: Impact of Principals’ Knowledge, Years in K12, and Years as a Principal on Perceived Effectiveness of Teacher Education Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.893</td>
<td>.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in K12</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as a Principal</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Knowledge</td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar results were found when examining the regression model for these same independent variables in regards to the question about hiring preferences. Years as a principal and inclusion knowledge were negative coefficients; including them in the model subtracted from the variability.

Table 16

*Regression Analysis: Impact of Principals’ Knowledge, Years in K12, and Years as a Principal on Hiring Decisions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.552</td>
<td>.761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in K12</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as a Principal</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Knowledge</td>
<td>-.156</td>
<td>.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final multiple regression model analyzed correlated with the same independent variables on principals’ perceptions of best settings for students with disabilities. This was the only model that produced all positive coefficients as seen in Table 17.

Table 17

*Regression Analysis: Impact of Principals’ Knowledge, Years in K12, and Years as a Principal on Perceived Best Settings for Students with Special Needs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.930</td>
<td>.652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in K12</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as a Principal</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion Knowledge</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17 shows that while holding the other coefficients constant, if a principal’s years in K12 increases by one unit, there is a .001 increase in agreement that students with special needs learn best in an inclusion setting. Likewise, holding other coefficients constant, if a principal’s years in administration increases by one unit, there is a .019
increase in agreement with the placement of students with disabilities in an inclusive setting to produce optimum learning. Finally, for one unit of increase in a principal’s knowledge of inclusion, .097 increase in agreement to an inclusion setting for placement results. Although all of the coefficients for this model were positive, only 1.7% of variability in perceived agreement that students with special needs learn best in inclusion settings can be explained by these three predictors. Therefore, there is not a significant relationship between these variables and the perception of inclusion settings as being the best learning environments for students with disabilities.

Further analysis for Research Question 4 was performed using additional regression models to explore the possible predictors of the knowledge, skills, and experiences principals felt general education candidates should possess. Sub-questions regarding specific knowledge, skills and experiences were analyzed for reliability to demonstrate internal consistency, so that they could be collapsed to create new variables. Internal consistency is most often measured through Cronbach’s alpha (Creswell, 2008). A coefficient above 0.70 is indicative of acceptable reliability (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). All coefficients in my models were above this acceptable range, thus allowing the creation of three new variables: desired candidate knowledge, desired candidate skills, and desired candidate experiences.

The first group of statements referred to the knowledge that candidates, coming directly out of college, should possess. All items within this question were collapsed to form a new variable labeled desired candidate knowledge. The next group of items required principals to rank the importance of specific skills that general education candidates should possess. These items were collapsed into a new variable entitled desired candidate skills. The remaining statements allowed administrators to rank the
importance of specific experiences they felt teacher candidates should possess. These sub-questions were again collapsed into a new variable titled *desired candidate experiences*. Results of the Cronbach’s alpha analysis can be found in Table 18.

Table 18

*Cronbach’s Alpha: Reliability Results for Desired Candidate Knowledge, Desired Candidate Skills, and Desired Candidate Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Variable</th>
<th>Number of collapsed items</th>
<th>Valid N</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desired Candidate Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desired Candidate Skills</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desired Candidate Experiences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using these newly created variables, regression analysis was performed to see if administrators’ own inclusion knowledge, years in K12, and years as a principal were predictors of the knowledge, skills, and experiences they felt general education teachers *should* possess in order to teach in an inclusive setting. The first regression model, examining the predictors for desired candidate knowledge, can be found in Table 19. Only principals’ inclusion knowledge was statistically significant and illustrated a prediction of desired candidate knowledge. The other two variables, principals’ years of K12 experience and years in administration, were not statistically significant and diluted the overall predictability. In all, this regression model explained 6.4% of the variation in the knowledge principals felt general education candidates *should* possess.
A second regression analysis was performed to determine whether years of K12 experience, years as a principal, and inclusion knowledge were predictors of desired candidate skills. As seen in Table 20, none of these variables proved to be statistically significant (p>0.05). This model explained only 2.7% of the variability of the skills administrators felt candidates should possess in order to be effective inclusion teachers.

A final regression model was created to analyze the predictors of years in K12, years as an administrator, and personal inclusion knowledge on the experiences candidates should possess. Table 21 illustrates the results from this analysis. It can be seen that none of these variables were statistically significant and only 1.7% of the variability can be explained using these possible predictors.
Table 21

*Multiple Regression Analysis for Years in K12, Years as an Administrator, and Personal Knowledge of Inclusion as Predictors for the Experiences Candidates Should Possess*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B(unstandardized)</th>
<th>SE B(standardized)</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in K12</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>.524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as an administrator</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.102</td>
<td>.367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own knowledge</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*;p<0.05

These findings suggest that other variables, besides years of K12 experience, years as an administrator, and principals’ personal knowledge on inclusion have a much larger impact on the perceived knowledge, skills, and experiences teacher candidates should possess. Exactly what these variables are was not uncovered in this study.

Summary

Chapter IV provided a detailed analysis of the results obtained through my electronic survey. Descriptive statistics were provided for each question, as well as the results of paired t-tests and multiple regression models. An open-ended question was analyzed, common themes were presented, and individual responses were included to support results. Chapter V will describe how these results relate to current research and literature while also offering recommendations for general education teacher candidates and Teacher Education programs.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter examines the results from an online instrument titled, *Elementary Principals’ Perspectives on Inclusive Education Candidates*, that was completed by 129 elementary public school principals in a Midwest state. The intent of this study was twofold. First, it was to measure the extent to which elementary public school principals believe teachers coming directly out of college have, and should have, the knowledge, skills, and experiences concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Knowledge, skills and experiences include: college coursework, special education law and terminology, instructional practices, and prior experiences instructing students with disabilities. Second, this study was intended to examine principals’ overall perspectives on inclusion and see to what extent certain factors predict these beliefs.

As Chapter II explained, very little previous research exists on principals’ perceptions in regards to general education teachers educating students in inclusion classrooms. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of students qualifying to receive special education services has increased 17% in the last five years, yet federal and state funding for public education has consistently decreased. Meeting students’ needs in self-contained classrooms is no longer financially viable for many districts and inclusive settings are more cost effective (Dybvik, 2004). Since these settings include students with disabilities, which are mandated by law, principals must pay close attention to the knowledge, skills, and experiences of teacher candidates when hiring for such positions (IDEA 1997; 2004). This study began the exploration of principals’ perceptions of such attributes.
Summary of Major Results

The findings presented in this study represent the voices of 129 elementary public school principals in a Midwest state. These participants had served in an administrative role for an average of 8.03 years. Respondents worked in smaller buildings with an average of 19.32 general education teachers and housing an average of 8.39 inclusion classrooms.

Findings Related to Candidates’ Knowledge, Skills, and Experiences

My survey asked participants to what extent specific knowledge, skills, and experiences were important for general education teachers, coming directly out of college, to possess in order to teach in an inclusive setting. Data gathered through this study suggest that principals felt all the items listed were of moderate or high importance. The ability to modify or differentiate instruction, based on assessment information, was ranked as the highest overall trait new general education teachers need to possess in order to be effective classroom teachers. This sentiment was also expressed through the open-ended question. Seven principals commented on students’ lack of knowledge of differentiation, while three administrators spoke of candidates’ strengths in this area. When these statements were combined, the concept of lesson modification, based on assessment, was addressed in 10 respondents’ responses; earning it the second most widely noted topic to be covered in the open-ended question.

This finding regarding the need to be able to modify lessons to meet individual student needs supports prior research in this area (Weber, Coarulli-Daniels, & Leihauzer, 2003). A study conducted by Clark, Dyson, Millard, and Skidmore (1997) explained the stressors placed on teachers to meet all students’ needs within one classrooms; teachers in the study felt pressured to meet students’ individual academic needs; it was expected of
them. A nationally known author, presenter, and educator, Smittle (2003), also
highlighted the importance of conveying knowledge to students in a clear and sequential
process so they each can understand. The findings from my study reiterate the
importance that administrators are placing on this skill.

The notion of proper preparedness in a specific pedagogy, such as differentiation,
also adds to the research done by Ingle, Rutledge, and Bishop (2011). Their study
revealed principals’ preference to hire teachers who were familiar with specific programs
currently being utilized in order to decrease the learning curve. This same philosophy
could be applied to teaching styles. The ability to effectively modify instruction, as a
novice teacher, would shorten the amount of time and support administrators would need
to spend working with a candidate. This would be one less skill a new teacher would
need to focus on acquiring; it would already be known and implemented.

It is of interest to note that the least important knowledge, skill, or experience
ranked by respondents was the understanding of different types of assessment used for
special education eligibility. With a mean of 4.02 (SD=1.21), this item fell at the lowest
end of being moderately important for candidates to know. This is in contrast to
 principals’ higher ranking of lesson modification knowledge based on assessment.
Without proper knowledge of the formal assessments used for special education
eligibility, candidates would struggle to be proficient at using formal assessments to
differentiate the instruction for these same students. Previous research has suggested
administrators look for candidates who can illustrate the usage of the latest trends,
research, and technology in the field (Weber et al., 2003). Formal assessment appears
frequently in current literature and research; yet my study revealed that, in regards to
students with disabilities, principals do not weigh this item as heavily as previous research illustrated.

Another interesting finding from my study was the lower related ranking of importance given to team/co-teaching in an inclusion setting. Respondents overwhelmingly felt teachers were ill-prepared to teach in inclusion settings, and needed additional experiences in such environments, yet they ranked this specific experience near slightly important on the interval scale (M=4.10, SD=1.23). In contrast, student teaching in an inclusion setting was ranked higher (M=4.66, SD=1.05). This preference for previous exposure to inclusion settings was also noted in a study by Billingsley (2005). When filling a special education setting, administrators tend to consider the type and amount of prior experience a candidate has had working with special needs populations.

Findings Related to Candidates’ Actual Possession of Knowledge, Skills, and Experiences

The second research question of my study investigated the knowledge, skills, and experiences principals felt general education teachers, coming directly out of college, actually possess. Overall, participants ranked all skills, knowledge, and experiences lower in regards to candidates’ actual possession when compared to what they should possess. Means for all items fell within the barely able to slightly well range.

The highest ranking trait respondents felt new teachers exhibited was the ability to individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Providing lesson differentiation and modifying classroom environments to meet students’ needs were the only two items that fell within the slightly well range of responses. All other sub-questions, except for the item related to team/co-teaching, generated means that
expressed participants’ views of candidates only possessing such traits at a just satisfactory level.

Findings from Question 2 reiterated the importance for teachers to have additional experience assisting students with special needs. Research has revealed that elementary general education teachers enter the profession with limited training in inclusion. Due to this fact, they lack the experience principals are looking for (Cameron & Cook, 2007). This was supported by my study’s findings. Participants noted that teachers only have had experiences in assisting and student teaching in inclusion classrooms at the just satisfactory level. Knowing the value these respondents placed on these types of experiences, it is obvious that current general education teachers are not entering the field with enough exposure to satisfy administrators.

Question 2 asked respondents to rate how well new general education teachers provided evidence that they had specific experiences. Findings revealed that teachers were weak in providing such proof. Principals ranked teachers’ abilities, in these demonstrations, as barely able to just satisfactory. In order to verify such experiences, a candidate would need to be confident in expressing themselves and promoting their previous ventures. Many general education teachers lack this confidence (Bender, Val, & Scott, 1995; Goodlad & Field, 1993; Orr, 2009; Teffs & Whitbread, 2011). The inability to do so might have altered principals’ perspective on a teacher’s actual experience base. This would correlate with the findings revealed from Question 2 of my study. The lack of confidence, which would inhibit teachers from accurately expressing their experiences, would be conveyed during the interview process (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003).
Findings Related to the Extent of Possession

The results of the paired sample t-tests, used to answer Question 3, suggest that teacher candidates do not possess any of the items listed to the degree principals think they should be (see Table 22). Principals felt candidates did not actually possess any skills or experiences to the degree they desire from new inclusion teachers. The mean difference for each item were all at least -1.052; principals are not seeing these traits to the degree they hope to. Only principals who had hired a general education teacher, coming directly out of college, to teach in an inclusive setting could answer this question, but of those that did reply, also had very similar views on the skills they felt were lacking. The standard deviations on these questions were all less than 1. This data supports a close range of answers; principals shared similar responses to the inability of teachers to possess these traits.

It is interesting to note that the largest range in mean difference between a skill principals thought a candidate should possess and was actually shown to possess was in the area of differentiated instruction. This is also the skill that respondents ranked as the most important skill a teacher should possess (M=5.33), yet the actual possession ranking was considerably lower (M=3.86). The second skills ranked as most important for teacher candidates to possess was the ability to individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities (M=5.24). Both of these findings support the importance reiterated throughout the survey on differentiation and lesson modification and the lack of teacher know how of these task. Data suggests that universities are not spending enough time on these skills during the undergraduate years.

The comparison between what teachers should possess and what they actually possess in regards to experiences revealed that none of the five experiences listed were
possessed by candidates to the degree principals desired. Administrators ranked assisting students with special needs as the highest importance of all five experiences; they ranked the candidates actual ability to illustrate the possession of the experience as only just satisfactory. This data again suggests that teacher candidates are not gaining enough experience, during their college years, with special needs populations. These findings explain teachers’ hesitation and lack of confidence for teaching in inclusion settings and support previous research (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003; Ornstein, 1990).

When reviewing the rank ordering of items in Table 22, it is interesting to note that participants valued skills over experiences. The top five items ranked as most important for teacher candidates to possess were all skill-based. The possession of previous experiences all fell below the level of importance of possession of these skills. Therefore, findings support that principals felt knowledge and skills were more important for candidates to possess than experiences. The only experience ranked in the top half of the items was assisting students with special needs (M=5.02). This statement was included on the survey to represent beginning level aiding opportunities that usually are tied to methods coursework. Perhaps principals are stating that the application of all the knowledge they ranked as most important is also vital. Assisting students with special needs allows for the teacher candidate to perform, and put into action, the skills that are being highlighted by principals as the most important items to possess.

Table 22 also reveals that administrators felt that team or co-teaching in an inclusive setting was of the lowest importance in regards to an item teacher candidates should possess (M=4.28). This experience would directly correlate with the responsibilities of assuming a new inclusion position, but principals may have ranked this item lower due to the fact that it might have been assumed that such an experience would
only come with previous full-time teaching and would not be possessed by many teachers coming directly out of college.

A summary of all skills and experiences participants thought teacher candidates should and do possess, can be found in rank order in Table 22.

Table 22

Summary of Skills and Experiences Principals Thought Candidates Should and Actually Do Possess (Rank Order by Items Candidates Should Possess)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill (S) or Experience (E)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Should Possess Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Actually Possess Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Mean Diff. (SD)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig* (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities (S)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5.33 (.685)</td>
<td>3.86 (1.146)</td>
<td>-1.466 (1.354)</td>
<td>8.246</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities (S)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.24 (.795)</td>
<td>4.22 (1.035)</td>
<td>-1.107 (1.266)</td>
<td>6.169</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify classroom settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities (S)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5.22 (.817)</td>
<td>4.17 (1.094)</td>
<td>-1.052 (1.407)</td>
<td>5.693</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify assessments to meet the needs of students with disabilities (S)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.10 (.759)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.117)</td>
<td>-1.271 (1.460)</td>
<td>6.687</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate lessons for future learning and instruction for students with disabilities (S)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.03 (.890)</td>
<td>3.68 (1.121)</td>
<td>-1.356 (1.387)</td>
<td>7.511</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting students with special needs (E)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.02 (.896)</td>
<td>3.91 (1.123)</td>
<td>-1.105 (1.398)</td>
<td>5.971</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Match learning styles to teaching strategies for students with disabilities (S)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.96 (.823)</td>
<td>3.81 (1.156)</td>
<td>-1.158 (1.412)</td>
<td>6.193</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student teaching in an inclusion setting (E)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4.88 (.957)</td>
<td>3.47 (1.287)</td>
<td>-1.414 (1.534)</td>
<td>7.021</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing undergraduate classes in special education (E)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.58 (1.194)</td>
<td>3.16 (1.399)</td>
<td>-1.421 (1.690)</td>
<td>6.349</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending an IEP (E)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>4.51 (1.040)</td>
<td>3.34 (1.422)</td>
<td>-1.169 (1.683)</td>
<td>5.337</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team/co teaching in an inclusion setting (E)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4.28 (.933)</td>
<td>2.88 (1.352)</td>
<td>-1.397 (1.664)</td>
<td>6.391</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference is significant at p<0.05. Likert scale: Not at all=1, Barely able=2, Just satisfactory=3, Slightly well=4, Moderately well=5, Extremely well=6 Likert scale: Not at all important=1, Low importance=2, Slightly important=3, Moderately important=4, High importance=5, Extremely important=6
Findings Related to Perceived Perspectives on Inclusion

The final question of my study dealt with principals’ perspectives on three overriding statements regarding inclusion and specific teaching traits. Findings revealed that participants disagreed with the statement that Teacher Education programs are effectively preparing general education teachers to teach in inclusion settings. Open-ended responses most prevalently addressed this topic with 43.9% of the comments containing this theme.

Respondents also disagreed with the statement that they prefer to hire special education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms. This data conflicts with other findings; principals previously acknowledged the need for special education background for inclusion teachers, yet data supports that they prefer to fill inclusion classrooms with general education teachers. The rationale behind this trend is unknown from the data collected in this specific survey, but principals’ agreement that students with special needs learn best in an inclusion setting further complicates these findings. In order for students with special needs to learn best, it seems the most highly qualified and experienced teacher for that setting would be a special education teacher. Perhaps personality traits play a larger part in the hiring decision process than credentials. This notion was expressed by a principal with 30 years of administration experience.

The most pivotal component any prospective teacher must possess is the ability to develop relationships with students and peers and to have empathy. In addition, they MUST be able to examine their own strengths and weaknesses and continually improve. I care far less about where a candidate starts than my opinion of their drive to find greatness in themselves.
As previously stated, this study was of an exploratory nature and further research would be needed to better understand the significance of the data collected.

**Findings Related to Predictors of Perceived Perspectives and Trait Possession**

As outlined in Chapter IV, multiple regression was performed to examine the predictors of principals’ perspectives on three overriding statements regarding inclusion. The independent variables of knowledge of inclusion, years in K12, and years as a principal were used in the prediction model.

To examine the impact of principals’ knowledge, years in K12, and years as an administrator have on the perceived effectiveness of Teacher Education programs, a multiple regression was performed. Data revealed that these variables explained only 5% of variability in principals’ perspectives on the effectiveness of Teacher Education programs. In other words, this model failed to explain 94.6% of the variability. Therefore, other variables are primary contributors to the variability in this model; what those variables are were not revealed nor known from this study.

To examine the impact principals’ self-reported knowledge, years in K12, and years as an administrator have on the hiring decisions principals follow to fill inclusion classrooms, another multiple regression was performed. Data revealed that these variables played even less of a role in the variability of this model. Regression analysis for this statement revealed only 1.5% of variability can be attributed to these variables.

A final regression model was performed using the same independent variables and looking at the impact they had on principals’ perceptions on best settings for students with special needs. This model revealed that 1.7% of variability could be explained through these variables. My data did reveal that, for this specific model, while holding all the other coefficients constant, if a principal’s knowledge of inclusion increase by one
unit, there was a .097 increase in inclusion settings being the best environment for students with special needs. This amount is not significant enough to be viewed as an impact and it was the largest unstandardized coefficient revealed.

In two of the three regression models, negative coefficients were found. These findings suggest that the variables of years in K12 and principals’ own inclusion knowledge played a negative role or subtracted from the variability in the model. Again, these findings are perplexing and the rationale behind them could not be determined from the survey conducted.

The regression analysis performed to explore variables for the knowledge, skills, and experiences principals perceived as important were not found to be strong predictors of traits teachers should possess. From my findings, years in K12 education, years as an administrator, and principals’ own understanding of inclusive education did not predict the traits they thought candidates should possess. Further, two of these variables, years in K12 and principals’ own knowledge regarding inclusion, served as negative predictors and detracted from the variability in two of the three regression models. Additional inquiry into other possible predictors would be warranted to better address this question as well as an in-depth understanding of administrators’ definition of their own inclusion knowledge would be beneficial for a more complete understanding of their answers.

**Relationship of Results to Existing Studies**

Table 23 provides an overall summary of the relationship of my study’s findings to existing research.
### Comparison Summary of Previous Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Findings (England, 2014)</th>
<th>Previous Research and Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidates’ traits</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Differentiation is the highest importance item for teacher candidates (M=5.33 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td>- Administrators are looking for candidates who can express the latest pedagogy (Weber, Coarulli-Daniels, &amp; Leihauer, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Least important knowledge, skill, or experience ranked by respondents was the understanding of different types of assessment used for special education eligibility (M=4.02 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td>- Importance of conveying knowledge to students in a clear and sequential process so they each can understand (Smittle, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Team/co-teaching ranked as the lowest of importance for candidates to possess (M=2.88 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidates’ possession of traits</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The ability to provide differentiation is lacking in teacher candidates (M=4.22 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td>- Administrators are looking for candidates with knowledge of the latest research trends (Weber et al., 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Candidates lack experiences assisting students with special needs (M=3.91 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Candidates were weak in providing proof of specific experiences (M=3.91 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Candidates lack experience in inclusive settings (M=3.47 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived perspectives on inclusion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Teacher Education programs are not properly preparing candidates (M=3.10 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td>- Teachers lack the experience principals are looking for (Cameron &amp; Cook, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Principals do not prefer to hire special education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms (M=3.79 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td>- General education teachers lack confidence for teaching in inclusion (Carroll, Forlin, &amp; Jobling, 2003; Ornstein, 1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Principals feel students with disabilities learn best in an inclusive setting (M=4.41 on 1-6 scale)</td>
<td>- General education teachers lack confidence (Bender, Val, &amp; Scott, 1995; Goodlad &amp; Field, 1993; Orr, 2009; Teffs &amp; Whitbread, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictors of perceived perspectives</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Knowledge of inclusion, years in K12, and years of administration did not impact perceived perspectives on the effectiveness of Teacher Education programs, hiring practices for inclusion settings, nor inclusion settings being the best environment for students with disabilities (Explains 5% of variability)</td>
<td>- No previous research or literature could be found</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Knowledge of inclusion, years in K12, and years of administration did not impact perceived traits of importance for teacher candidates to possess in order to effectively teach in an inclusion classroom.</td>
<td>- No previous research or literature could be found</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications for Future Research

Little research is available on principals’ perceptions of necessary traits for general education teachers to teach in inclusion settings. Previous studies have focused on administrator preference for filling general education and special education positions, but little is known about the perspectives principals have when making decisions regarding inclusion classrooms. As the trend for inclusion increases, additional research should focus on not only principals’ perspectives, but also on new general education teachers’ views on necessary traits for effectiveness when teaching in such a setting. The voices of these educators have not yet been heard and are an intricate part of the data that needs to be studied.

Researching the details of undergraduate programs provided to general education teachers, serving in inclusive classrooms, would also be of added benefit to this field of study. Seeing what aspects of their coursework and fieldwork were highly valued, compared to those that were not, would provide Teacher Education programs with additional information for evaluation.

Additional research, from the vantage point of the student, would also add valuable insight into the effectiveness of hiring inclusion teachers. Collecting former students’ thoughts and perceptions on the traits they felt were manifested in their most effective teachers and mentors would allow for specific teaching pedagogy to be compared. This would further assist colleges and universities in their planning for the inclusion teacher.

My study has helped develop a basic understanding of what knowledge, skills, and experiences elementary public school principals’ feel general education teachers, coming directly out of college, should and do possess. A qualitative study, expanding on
this understanding, could provide great insight into the rationale behind the data that this study collected. Being able to ask participants why they chose a certain answer, or to explain their thoughts in greater detail, might uncover the answers to some of the contradictory results this study revealed. For example, as stated in Chapter IV, the majority of participants in my study stated they were knowledgeable in the field of inclusion. It would be beneficial to expand on that impression by asking administrators to rank their own expertise on the same specific items that they ranked general education candidates on in this study. It would be interesting to note where principals’ knowledge base was strongest and where they felt their knowledge, skills, or experiences were lacking. Without further questioning and explanation, self-reporting inflation may have played a role in participants’ responses and thus, impacted analysis.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

The intent of my study was to examine the views of elementary public school principals. In doing so, I decreased the generalizability of the information since public middle and high school principals’ perspectives were not included. I also only included public schools in this study. The rationale behind this was deliberate; these are the only institutions that are required by law to follow special education mandates and policies. Therefore, the perspectives of these principals cannot be generalized to private schools.

My study consisted of participants within one Midwest state within the Great Lakes region. Different state guidelines for special education classification and teacher certification could impact administrators’ responses in other locations.

The response rate for my study was adequate, but by not knowing the total number of public elementary school principals, this study cannot be generalized as a representation of such principals across the state. The launch of the survey also took
place during a record snow storm. Schools were closed for multiple days and administrators, when they returned, were behind in their responsibilities and may not have had time to read and act upon my request. This may have impacted the response rate for my survey.

Using personal networks to increase the response rate also likely increased the number of responses from one side of the state, and therefore the distribution of responses in the sample pool was not likely evenly distributed across the entire state. This study also did not take into account district demographics. Further research on principals’ perspectives, based on the socio economic status of their district’s population, would add additional information to the field.

**Implications for Policy, Practice, and Organization**

The findings gained from this study can assist new general education teachers, elementary school principals, and Teacher Education programs. It was evident that the principals in this study did not feel that general education teachers, coming directly out of college, were prepared to teach in an inclusion setting. Their expectations as to what these candidates should possess, compared with what they actually possess, were much higher. In order to address this issue, general education candidates need to take specific steps to close the gap between their actual possess of and principals’ expectation of knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to be an effective teacher in an inclusive setting.

Based on survey analysis, specific actions have been drafted that college and university Teacher Education programs can take in order to increase the preparedness of their general education candidates. The following recommendations address the greatest areas of need based on this study.
Programming

1. General education majors’ programs need to include more than one course in special education. (This statement appeared in open-ended responses and 43% of principals’ felt teacher candidates were ill-prepared to teach in an inclusion setting.)

2. Application requirements, associated with methods coursework, should also include opportunities to work with and instruct students with disabilities. (95.3% of principals thought experiences working with students with special needs was either moderately, highly, or extremely important for teacher candidates to have.)

3. Introductory special education classes, which most colleges and universities require of general education majors, need to include more than characteristics of classifications. Time out in the field, working with students, should be a mandatory part of such classes. (Coursework in special education was ranked as the second most important skill teacher candidates should possess with a mean of 4.82 on a 1-6 scale of importance.)

4. Special and general education programs need to be entwined, and students should spend considerable time collaborating. Working closely with special education and auxiliary staff is a daily occurrence for an inclusion teacher and candidates need experience doing such. (15.2% of open-ended responses focused on the need for additional opportunities to collaborate with other educational staff.)

Additional Avenues for Improvement

5. Students should be provided with opportunities to practice their interviewing skills and recruiting Teacher Education alumni could serve as a means for providing such experiences. Specific instruction should be included on the art of
using specific examples to illustrate previous experiences working with special needs populations. (In my study, principals felt teacher candidates only slightly well (M=3.91 on a 1-6 scale) expressed their experiences working with special needs populations.)

6. Opportunities to hear administrators’ perspectives should be organized, and meeting the needs of administrators, in regards to the preparation of general education teachers for inclusion classrooms needs to be a priority. Program success is heavily weighed on job placement rates and jobs will not be offered to candidates who do not possess the greatest amount of knowledge, skills, and experiences in this area (Findings revealed that 43.9% of administrators felt general education candidates were ill-prepared or lacked experience to teach effectively in an inclusive setting.)

Based on the findings of my study, the following nine recommendations for general education teacher candidates are proposed to address the issues elementary principals stated were lacking in their preparedness.

**Inclusion Knowledge**

1. Prepare a lesson, based on formal assessment data, which illustrates the ability to modify instruction to meet student academic abilities. Include this lesson in a professional portfolio. (This was ranked as the skill principals felt was most important for teacher candidates to possess.)

2. Be familiar with IEP laws and regulations. Understand the difference between goals and objectives and practice composing both. (23.6% of principals thought IEP knowledge was extremely important for teachers to know and 27.6% felt it was of high importance.)
3. Understand the basic characteristics of all 13 categories under special education and how these disabilities impact learning. Become familiar with special education acronyms. (Principals rated the completion of undergraduate Special Education classes as the highest mean difference (M=-1.421) between what candidates actually possess and what they felt the candidates should possess).

**Inclusion Skills**

4. Formal lesson plans, including specific pedagogy to address differentiation, should be included in a professional portfolio. If possible, such a lesson should have been observed during the internship phase and a copy of the supervisor’s critique of the lesson should be readily available for potential employers. (Principals ranked the ability to differentiate instruction as the most lacking skill in current candidates, with a mean of -1.466 difference between the degree that should be possessed and actual possession.)

5. Candidates should be able to describe specific steps that could be taken to modify a classroom setting to meet the needs of students with various disabilities such as Learning Disabilities, Physical Impairments, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. (Data showed that 32.2% of principals felt that teacher candidates were barely able or at a just satisfactory level in modifying classroom settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities.)

**Inclusion Experiences**

6. Volunteer experiences working with children are usually a required component for entrance into a Teacher Education program. General education majors should be diligent in participating in experiences that include working with students with disabilities. Method courses that include a teaching component should be geared
toward settings which include students with disabilities. All of these experiences
working with students with disabilities should be included on the candidate’s
resume. (Experience assisting students with special needs was ranked as the
highest experience teacher candidates should have; 74% of principals thought this
experience was either extremely important or highly important.)

7. If allowed any voice in the decision making process for a student teaching
placement, general education candidates should request an inclusion classroom.
(Student teaching in an inclusive setting was ranked as the second most important
experience needed. 78 principals ranked this as either extremely or highly
important for teacher candidates to have accomplished.)

8. Undergraduate elective courses should be sought out that pertain to special needs
populations. More than one course in special education should appear on a
candidate’s transcript. (43.9% of principals felt teachers were ill-prepared and
four open-ended responses specifically stated one class in special education was
not sufficient.)

9. During the interview process, general education candidates should clearly define
the knowledge, skills, and experiences they have regarding inclusion and special
needs populations. (Results from my study showed that principals felt teacher
candidates did not possess the knowledge, skills, or experiences needed for all
items. Therefore, clearly stating all such material during the interview process is
vital so administrators have an accurate picture of a teacher’s background.)

Table 24 provides an overall summary of all the recommendations created from my
study.
Table 24

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions and General Education Teacher Candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations for Teacher Education Programs</th>
<th>Recommendations for General Education Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Require additional courses in special education</td>
<td>1. Include differentiated lesson plans in portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Require more exposure to special needs populations prior to acceptance into the program</td>
<td>2. Become familiar with IEP laws and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Require more field experience working with students with disabilities</td>
<td>3. Increase familiarity with 13 special education categories and acronyms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Increase collaboration between general and special education majors</td>
<td>4. Include observed/graded differentiated lesson plans in portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Provide interview practice (using specific examples to promote experience)</td>
<td>5. Be able to describe a modified classroom setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Increase participation with special needs populations</td>
<td>7. Student teach within an inclusive setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Select more course electives within the special education field</td>
<td>9. Practice interviewing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Closing Thoughts

Inclusion classrooms are a necessity in public education today. With cuts being made on a regular basis to federal and state education funds, teaching all children together, instead of separately, constitutes a savings. Fewer teachers, classrooms, equipment, and materials are needed when inclusion rooms are utilized. My research finds that principals’ feel these settings provide the best learning environment for students with special needs, but my findings, based on the perspectives of Midwest principals, also reveal that general educators are ill-prepared to teach in such settings at this time.
If this is the arrangement that is supported by administrators and is necessary due to financial constraints, then general education teachers must be properly prepared to teach in such settings upon graduation. Accrediting bodies must reevaluate the standards for elementary education majors. If these candidates are being hired to fill inclusive settings, more specific and in-depth objectives regarding teaching students with disabilities must be required in their programming. Collaboration between K12 principals and Teacher Education programs is also essential for evaluating strengths and weaknesses in current programming.

Further research is needed to expand on the findings revealed in my study. We owe it to the candidates who are entering our education programs to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to meet the needs of all students placed under their care. Even more importantly, we owe it to the students with special needs who long simply to be placed in classrooms with teachers who understand and can help them succeed.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Survey Instrument

*Elementary Principals’ Perspectives on Inclusive Education Candidates*
PLEASE READ THIS CONSENT INFORMATION BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE SURVEY.

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled "Elementary Principals’ Perspectives on Novice General Education Teachers’ Abilities to Teach Students with Disabilities in Inclusion Settings" designed to gather administrators’ perspectives on the skills, knowledge, and experiences these teachers should and do possess. The study is being conducted by Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer and Darla England from Western Michigan University, Department of Educational Leadership, Research & Technology. This research is being conducted as part of the dissertation requirements for Darla England.

This survey consists of between 6-8 major questions, depending on whether you have recently hired any new teachers to work in inclusion classrooms, and will take approximately 5-8 minutes to complete.

Your replies will be completely anonymous. When you begin the survey, you are consenting to participate in the study. If you do not agree to participate in this research project simply exit now. If, after beginning the survey, you decide that you do not wish to continue, you may stop at any time. You may choose not to answer any question for any reason. If you have any questions prior to or during the study, you may contact Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer at 269-387-3596, Darla England at 616-254-1638, Western Michigan University Department of Educational Leadership, Research & Technology, the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-3293 or the vice president for research at 269-387-3298.

This study was approved by the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) on January 21, 2014. Please do not participate in this study after January 21, 2015.

Participating in this survey online indicates your consent for use of the answers you provide.
1. How important is it for general education teachers, coming directly out of college and being considered for teaching in an inclusive setting, to know the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Low importance</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>High importance</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Characteristics of specific special education impairments (e.g. Learning Disabilities)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Different types of assessments used for special education eligibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) How to modify instruction based on assessment information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) What teachers must legally do to follow IEPs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) How emotional disabilities can impact academic growth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. How important is it for general education teachers, coming directly out of college and being considered for teaching in an inclusive setting, to be able to do the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Low importance</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>High importance</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Modify classroom settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Modify assessments to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Match learning styles to teaching strategies for students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Evaluate lessons for future learning and instruction for students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. How important is it that general education teachers, coming directly out of college and being considered for teaching in an inclusive setting, to have the following experiences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Low importance</th>
<th>Slightly important</th>
<th>Moderately important</th>
<th>High importance</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Attending an IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Helping students with special needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Completing undergraduate classes in special education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Student teaching in an inclusion setting (Inclusion classroom are taught by general education teachers and include general education students and students with disabilities.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Team/Co teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Please note your level of agreement with the following statements about inclusive education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Moderately disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Moderately agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Teacher Education programs are effectively preparing general education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) I prefer to hire general education teachers to teach in inclusion classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Students with special needs learn best in inclusion settings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Please share any thoughts on how well you believe new general education teachers, coming directly out of college, are or are not prepared to work within inclusion classrooms.
6. Have you hired any general education teachers, coming directly out of college, to teach within an inclusion classroom in your school within the last three years?

☐ No
☐ Yes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. How well have such new general education teachers been able to do the following within your inclusion classroom(s)?</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Barely able</th>
<th>Just satisfactory</th>
<th>Slightly well</th>
<th>Moderately well</th>
<th>Extremely well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Individualize lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Modify classroom settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Modify assessment to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Match learning styles to teaching strategies for students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Use differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Evaluate lessons for future learning and instruction for students with disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8. During the interview and hiring process, how well did such new general education teachers provide evidence that they had the following experiences:</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Barely able</th>
<th>Just satisfactory</th>
<th>Slightly well</th>
<th>Moderately well</th>
<th>Extremely well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Attending an IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Assisting students with special needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Completing undergraduate classes in special education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Student teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Team/co teaching in an inclusion setting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Modifying instruction based on assessment information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please answer the following demographic questions.

**9. Your experience (round to the nearest whole number)**

a) Years in K-12 education? 

b) Years as a principal? 

**10. Within your school building, please share the following information**

a) Percent of identified students with disabilities? 

b) Number of general education teachers? 

c) Number of special education teachers? 

d) Number of inclusion classrooms? 

**11. Overall, I am very knowledgeable about meeting the needs of students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom.**

- [ ] Strongly disagree
- [ ] Moderately disagree
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Moderately agree
- [ ] Strongly agree

**12. At the school level, the decision on exactly who is hired in my building is made by:**

- [ ] Me
- [ ] A committee including myself
- [ ] The superintendent or assistant superintendent
- [ ] Someone else
Appendix B

Program Standards and Survey Question Formation
### Program Standards for Special Education Teachers & Corresponding Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCATE Special Education Standards</th>
<th>Corresponding Survey Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>1a, 1d, 3a, 3c, 4a, 4b, 8a, 8c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development &amp; Characteristics of Learners</td>
<td>1a, 1f, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e, 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d, 8e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Learning Differences</td>
<td>1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 4b 4c, 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, 7e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Strategies</td>
<td>1c, 2e, 7e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environments &amp; Social Interactions</td>
<td>1f, 2b, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e, 7b, 8b, 8c, 8d, 8e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>2a, 2e, 7a, 7c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Planning</td>
<td>1c, 2a, 2e, 2f, 7a, 7e, 7f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>1b, 1c, 2c, 7c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; Ethical Practices</td>
<td>2f, 3a, 3b, 3d, 3e, 4a, 7f, 8a, 8b, 8d, 8e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>3a, 3d, 3e, 4a, 4b, 8a, 8d, 8e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NBPTS Exceptional Needs Specialist Standards</th>
<th>Corresponding Survey Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Students</td>
<td>1a, 2d, 3b, 3d, 3e, 4a, 7d, 8b, 8d, 8e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of Philosophy, History, &amp; Law</td>
<td>1a, 1d, 3a, 3c, 8a, 8c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>1a, 2a, 2e, 7a, 7e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Partnerships</td>
<td>1d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>1b, 1c, 2c, 7c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2c, 7c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Development &amp; Behavior</td>
<td>1f, 4c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum &amp; Instruction</td>
<td>1c, 2a, 2c, 2d, 2e, 7a, 7c, 7d, 7e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>1d, 2b, 3b, 3d, 7b, 8b, 8d, 8e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Resources</td>
<td>1b, 2c, 2e, 7c, 7e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the Profession and to Education through Collaboration</td>
<td>3e, 4c, 8e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Practice</td>
<td>2f, 3b, 7f, 8b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program Standards for General Education Teachers & Corresponding Survey Questions

* None of these standards included specific expectations for students with disabilities, but instead focused on the needs of the “individual student”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEAC Standards for General Education Candidates</th>
<th>Corresponding Survey Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter Knowledge</td>
<td>1b, 1c, 2a, 2c, 2e, 2f, 7a, 7c, 7e, 7f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Knowledge</td>
<td>1c, 2a, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, 7a, 7c, 7d, 7e, 7f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring &amp; Effective Teaching Skills</td>
<td>1a, 1d, 1f, 2b, 2d, 3a, 3b, 3d, 3e 4a, 7b, 7d, 8a, 8d, 8f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-cutting Themes</td>
<td>2f, 3c, 3d, 7f, 8c, 8d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NCATE Elementary Education Standards</th>
<th>Corresponding Survey Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development, Learning &amp; Motivation</td>
<td>1a, 1c, 1f, 2a, 2b, 2d, 2e, 3a, 3d, 3e, 4c, 7a, 7b, 7d, 8a, 8d, 8e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>1d, 2a, 2f, 7a, 7f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>1c, 2a, 2e, 2f, 7a, 7e, 7f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>1b, 1c, 2e, 7c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>3a, 3b, 3d, 3e, 4b, 8a, 8b, 8d, 8e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Email Messages to Participants
VITAL INFORMATION ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION BEING GATHERED TO HELP PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS. We need your perspectives on the training of general education teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities. We are also interested in your hiring practices for inclusive settings. Please click on the link below to complete this brief, 4-8 minute, survey. Your voice is needed! Thank you, in advance, for your participation.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DKLGQDJ
Appendix C2

First Reminder Notice

Fellow MEMSPA Member,

Last week you received our newsletter with a message asking for your thoughts on how well new general education teachers are being prepared to work with students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. If you have not had a chance to complete the short survey yet, please do so by clicking on the link below. This survey should take no more than 5-8 minutes to complete.

Click this link to begin:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DKLGQDJ

Thank you for providing us with feedback which will help us better understand principals’ perceptions on inclusion settings.

Paul Liabenow
Executive Director
MEMSPA
Second Reminder Notice

PRINCIPALS' OPINIONS NEEDED!!
IMPORTANT SURVEY ON SPECIAL EDUCATION!!
PLEASE TAKE THIS BRIEF 4-8 MINUTE SURVEY. THE RESEARCH
COLLECTED WILL HELP PRINCIPALS HIRE THE BEST TEACHERS TO MEET
THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.
YOUR PERSPECTIVE MATTERS! PLEASE LEND YOUR VOICE TO THIS
ISSUE. ONLY 8 MINUTES! YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS ARE GREATLY
APPRECIATED!
Simply paste this URL in your search area

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DKLGQDJ
Appendix D

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval
Date: January 21, 2014

To: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
   Darla England, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 14-01-27

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Elementary Principal's Perspectives on Newly Graduated General Education Teachers' Abilities to Teach Students with Disabilities in Inclusion Classrooms” has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: January 21, 2015
Appendix E

Responses to Open-Ended Questions
Responses to Open-Ended Question #5

*Note: Responses were typed verbatim, including misspellings and grammatical errors.*

1. Most general education teachers coming out of college do not have very much experience working with special needs students.

2. I believe that when general education teachers are teaching in an inclusion classroom, the special education case-load teacher has a great responsibility to help in the differentiation of instruction and tests.

3. My elementary building contains the districts elementary Emotional Impaired program. We also have "resource room" learning disabled students. All of the teachers in my building will deal with students that will demonstrate high to low special education support. The teachers that I have interviewed have been varied in their abilities and experiences depending on their own personal background and student teacher placements. I have looked very closely at teachers with Special education endorsements for general education classrooms. My observation is that teachers that have been placed in buildings with students with such needs are more prepared that teachers that have not had that experience. I believe less that 50% of the teachers that I have interviewed are prepared for being in inclusive classrooms.

4. I think new general education teachers have not had a great deal of experience with everything that is involved in teach students with learning differences. I am a firm believer in inclusive education, being a former LD resource room teacher as well as TC and a co-teacher in an inclusive classroom. I believe wit the influence of a good special educator (someone to teach the new teacher needed skills) a new general education teacher with a strong desire to be in an inclusive classroom would be able to learn and become an asset to a program.

5. I like considering GVSU students for positions They seem well prepared.

6. Teachers coming right out of college seemed to be very ill-prepared to work with students with learning disabilities. These people are not being trained/educated on how modify instruction/lessons or how to handle these students in the classroom; some who which come with many behavorial and/of learning struggles.

7. Teachers who did student teaching in urban areas are more likely to have had experience in inclusion classrooms.
8. Preparation varies wildly from student to student. More needs to be done to prepare all new teachers to run an effective inclusion classroom.

9. I don't believe that I have had any new general education teachers know a lot about inclusion.

10. General Ed teachers MUST have a solid understanding in specia education supports. My thought is, if it supports a special needs student, it supports all students. I.e. A visual schedule is an excellent support for autistic kids as well as the visual learner or student with ADHD. Thank you for asking these questions! Good luck!

11. Generally, pre-service teachers have one required class on inclusion and feel unprepared for the reality of the classroom. However, I also believe best practices in any classroom setting benefit the widest range of users, including those with special needs.

12. General Education teachers need to be taught the foundations of co teaching practices, if not there is often a lot of frustration or the special ed teacher is used as a one-on-one aid.

13. General ed teachers find it difficult to keep up since policy and procedures change so often and they don't usually have that many students receiving special education services. Keeping current is challenging.

14. I am not completely clear on what is meant by gen ed teachers teaching in inclusion classrooms. If you mean a regular classroom with both gen ed and SE kids all day, that is a regular and expected occurrence.

15. In my experience, most gen ed teachers new to the field of education have not received appropriate levels of course work or training to prepare them to adequately participate instructionally with students in inclusion classrooms.

16. Due to lack of funding we have not hired a new teacher since I have been principal. (4 years)

17. I have found that their is a general misconception of inclusion and the philosophy that special needs students are only the responsibility of the special education teacher or that this type of learner "does not belong" in a gen ed setting. There are situations where self contained classrooms are least restrictive but this should not be the go to assumption. I would also like to see students prepared to teacher and understand those students with ADHD as they often are treated as behavior problems rather than students with medical needs.

18. Number 4 c is too general to answer. Many students with special needs learn better in inclusion settings, but some do not. For example, we have noticed that our students on the low end of the mildly CI range would have their needs better met in a self-contained classroom. In my 7 years as a principal, I have noticed that the new general education teachers from certain colleges/universities are better prepared than others. I think this has everything to do with the amount of time they spend in the interning portion of their education. I highly support a 1 year internship.

19. I don't even know if it is addressed.
20. Good luck!
21. General education teachers will all have a special needs student in their class at one time. There are many children with behavior problems that don't qualify. Classroom management is key. How a teacher interacts with a student is key. If they don't like dealing with difficult children at times they are going to struggle.
22. I believe that most general education teachers are prepared. Most of the colleges in our area do a great job of weeding out students before they are ready to work in the classroom.
23. There are a multitude of factors that are important for preparation, however, the most critical of these is the ability to adapt quickly to fluid situations without getting or at least appearing flustered.
24. I think this is a tough question to answer, as is #4, due to the vast differences in teacher training programs. Some colleges do a great job incorporating special education into their program, while others seem to have a minimum included. With regard to hiring teachers for the inclusion setting, I'm looking for the best person to hire. We can teach them what they need to know; it is much easier when they are prepared before they get to us though.
25. They have little experience with a co-teaching arrangement.
26. The last section of the survey had some general statements. I do think there are teachers in differences in the level of preparedness from one program to another. I have seen both effective and ineffective inclusion settings - the teacher makes all the difference. The right person no matter their training can be effective in an inclusion setting.
27. I believe that new general education teachers frequently exit college with great energy and academic understanding of how to work within an inclusion classroom. However, colleges are not providing adequate opportunities for them to practice the skills of handling disruptions efficiently, and organizing their time and lessons for students of varying learning styles and needs.
28. I don't feel the one special education class graduates have to take is nearly enough for what teachers really have to know coming into a school setting.
29. General Education teachers with out the experiences described in this survey require significant on-the-job-training to prepare them to meet the needs of Special Education students.
30. Every undergrad. teaching candidate should observe quality team teaching on a consistent basis. They should also interview and prepare with the team teaches to see the level of preparation and differentiation that is needed to be successful.
31. It's difficult for some veteran teachers to differentiate instruction enough for all students including those with disabilities. This is tough for many new teachers as well.
32. Need more experiences interacting with teachers and students early on on their trainong
33. I think that the skills need to teach ANY and ALL students apply not only to students with disabilities, but to all students. I am not sure why you have decided to put such an emphasis on teaching just students with disabilities, the questions you have asked are just as important, if not more important for all students.

34. University Programs need more hands on experiences for teachers working with students who have special education needs.

35. I do not believe they are prepared.

36. New teachers are coming out of programs with more experience then in the past, however, the needs are increasing. Although each student is unique, having some experience is extremely helpful.

37. I am not sure general education teachers just coming out of college to teach are ready to teach in an inclusion classroom.

38. These students do not have adequate preparation to work with special needs students. They view them as students of the special education teachers, and not their students too.

39. Colleges and universities are not preparing candidates in the teacher education programs for mastery teaching. Classroom management continues to be an issue, elementary teachers have little or no knowledge on DIBELS assessments, and the understanding of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). Most colleges of education are heavy in theory with minimal focus on the practitioner approach.

40. The most pivotal component any prospective teacher must possess is the ability to develop relationships with students and peers, and to have empathy. In addition, they MUST be able to examine their own strengths and weaknesses and continually improve. I care far less about where a candidate starts than my opinion of their drive to find greatness in themselves.

41. Overall, new teachers I have hired have been ill prepared to handle work within inclusion classrooms.

42. I think it would be valuable for all new general education teachers to have general education and special education mentor to help provide support in both areas. The guidance and support from their administrator should support how general education and special education involve all students at the school.

43. Depends on the college as well as the individual candidate

44. It depends upon what college that received their undergrad degree from. Some are better in preparing the students than others.

45. It really depends on the college. Students from smaller, private colleges are not as well prepared to work within inclusion classrooms.

46. It appears that they've only had to one basic class on special education.

47. Overall, they are not prepared to work within inclusion classrooms and are not prepared to work with special needs students. (Many believe that is the responsibility of the SPED teacher.)
48. Our district along with many others are implementing RTI. Every classroom is very diverse. Having education on how to differentiate and teach students with various needs is extremely important in today's society. Everyone learns differently and at different paces. Learning how to differentiate, having lots of tools in a teachers toolbelt, and being able to co-teach are going to be crucial for teacher candidates to acquire.

49. Most teachers that I have hired in the past 5 years have not had any experience in an inclusive classroom. It's also frustrating when gen ed teachers don't feel accountable for any of the special needs student's learning.

50. I believe at one time the current prep that these teachers are receiving to work with students with disabilities would have been sufficient, however, we are faced with an ever increasing more challenging and higher level of need group of students with disabilities. The need for restraint and crisis intervention is now common place in many buildings. New teachers need basic skills to handle these situations and to be able to be flexible in how they work in their classroom and with teams that support these students.

51. New teachers have the enthusiasm and energy to teach in inclusion classrooms but sometimes lack the toolset to successfully navigate learning differences, learning disabilities, and build an inclusive classroom environment.

52. This is the biggest struggle new teachers have along with classroom management. They find it extremely difficult to differentiate to meet the needs of all their students, not to mention those with special needs.

53. They don't have enough experience actually doing it.

54. I think they are generally prepared for basic inclusion, but most have to adjust to specific situations.

55. A high quality teacher training program would prepare a teacher to teach through high quality differentiated instruction. Accommodating and modifying for SpEd students should be a characteristic of good teaching—responding to the needs of the students. It isn't necessary that teachers learn the technicalities of IEPs in college. That can be taught on the job. However, the principles of good teaching should be taught to all teachers.

56. Like with any profession, time and experience will always help with perspective and know-how.

57. Not enough course work or experiences working with students with disabilities.

58. General education teachers need to know how to help/teach students with disabilities. They will have students with disabilities in their classrooms. They need to know the IEP process and what it means to them as a general education teacher. They need to be familiar with each disability and understand how they as classroom teachers can adjust their instruction to meet the needs of ALL students in their classrooms, regardless of the label they may or may not carry.
59. I don't believe most teachers know how to differentiate learning for special education students. New teachers have very little if any knowledge and definitely did not have enough experience while in college. Depending on the needs of the student pullout may be more helpful.

60. The majority of new teacher I have hired do not have experience with special education students. They lack the skills to co-teach and are often uncomfortable sharing their classroom.

61. The question up above about asking would I hire a spec. ed teacher for an inclusion setting, depends on the need. I staff my inclusion rooms with a gen ed teacher and a spec. ed teacher, so whichever one I am missing is who I would hire...not specifically one with a spec. ed background for a gen. ed. room. A lot of how successful an inclusion room is based on the relationship of the two teachers...if it is a beautiful match, then magic happens (and that isn't something that can be "taught" in a college class). Two people together who are a misfit, is a disaster waiting to happen and again, that isn't "taught" in a college class. I would rather take two newbie teachers and let them work in tandem, fresh out of college, then two mediocre veteran teachers just putting their time in in an inclusion room.

62. I believe general education teachers are coming out of college better prepared than special-education teachers. I believe special-education teachers do not believe that all kids can learn at high levels. The special education teachers I have worked with for 30 years do not demonstrate that they believe that they can help a child to function to learn the core curriculum. I believe it is our special-education teachers that need more preparation than are general education teachers at this point.

63. The teachers that I have recently hired have been trained very well in the importance of differentiation. Putting ideas into practice can be a little more tricky, however those that have had direct experience with this in their student teaching assignments have more ideas on how to put theory into practice.

64. I believe it depends on the individual's experience. I think it is very favorable to have a candidate that has had a student teacher experience in an inclusion classroom. It is the best way for them to experience IEPs and making appropriate and necessary accommodations. I do feel new teachers have a better grasp on differentiation, which inevitably aids in the teaching of special education students. I really think a big part of serving special educations students within an inclusion classroom has to do with collaboration with the resource teacher(s). Knowing how to work along side a speech pathologist or resource teacher is important for a general education teacher to be prepared for.

65. General education teachers entering the hiring ranks are not adequately prepared to work with children with even the ones with a minimal disability. I especially believe working with students with emotional impairments and autism are the most challenging for new teachers in a full inclusion school/district. Children with
disabilities deserve to be educated in a general education classroom supported by special education and appropriate resources.