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## Will They Be Welcomed In? The Impact of K-12 Teachers' and Principals' Perceptions of Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

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Cover Page Footnote

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## **Introduction**

Many strides have been made over the last few decades in educating students with disabilities among their nondisabled peers. According to the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, there was an increase from 57.2% to 63.1% of students educated inside the general education classroom for 80% or more of the school day from 2007 to 2016 (DOE, 2018). Although the nation has seen great reform and effort in educating more students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers, there is a continuing need for growth. Kurth, Morningstar, and Kozleski (2014) argued that while there are added prospects to learning and advancing in inclusive educational settings, thousands of students with disabilities are still educated in overly restrictive settings.

## **History of Special Education**

The history of special education is rife with controversy, misinformation, unimaginable and inappropriate placements, and some examples of complete disregard for humanity (Osgood, 2008). Although the initial stories in special education begin with instances of pure neglect, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century showed individuals with disabilities moving from receiving education in segregated schools to a slow but sure progression toward the entitlement of all children to receive appropriate programming in their LRE (Mock & Kauffman, 2002).

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, there is no substantial evidence that individuals with disabilities received any type of formal education (Leonardi, 2001). Many 19<sup>th</sup> Century influencers saw special training as an avenue in which they could uplift those with disabilities. Henry Barnard and Horace Mann were two of these individuals. These men were paramount in establishing institutions that could serve individuals with disabilities. There were undoubtedly precursors and similarities in these early institutions to the FAPE mandate that was later instituted; however,

these institutions were often perceived as more charitable in nature than they were viewed as places where much education occurred (Winzer, 1993).

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, enrollment of those with disabilities in institutions increased as did the number of these institutions around America. Additional improvements included increased attendance, lengthened school year, standardization of the classification of disability categories, and the differentiation of programs offered. Even so, many students with disabilities were still not being educated due to several factors including poverty, a lack of understanding as to what the institutions would provide, as well as reluctance to allow children with disabilities out of the family's care (Winzer, 1993).

According to Winzer (1993), the opening of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw many changes in the areas of more specific classifications for students with disabilities. Teachers were also being better prepared to teach students based on their specific diagnoses and needs. Yet, there was a notion that came about that the "feble-minded" were the cause of such misery and despair, and that they could be a social threat (Winzer, 1993, p. 279). Solutions to eradicate this population included ideas such as sterilization and/or segregation of males with disabilities from females with disabilities (Winzer, 1993).

Moreover, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the initiative of segregated classes in a public-school building for children with special needs. Compulsory attendance laws also came into play. Special classes and special schools were developed with the intent of educating those with disabilities (Leonardi, 2001). From 1910-1930, there was a huge increase in the number of students with disabilities being enrolled in public schools (Winzer, 1993).

Since World War II, there were advances in special education both directly and inadvertently. Improvements with medicine provided treatment and prevention of disabling

conditions. The field of special education became professionalized. Segregation in education dropped as an issue and became widely accepted again (Winzer, 1993).

### **Legal Cases and Policies**

There have been several legal cases relevant to these ideas regarding inclusion of students with disabilities. The special education legal cases and policies that are paramount to this study are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Timeline for Special Education Legal Cases and Policies*

<b>Timeline for Special Education Legal Cases and Policies</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Description</b>
1954	<i>Brown v. the Board of Education</i>	This court ruling set the tone for the elimination of segregation. Although geared toward segregation of students of color, the ruling had implications for the segregation of students with disabilities as well (Winzer, 1993).
1962	Panel on Mental Retardation	President John F. Kennedy convened to determine ways in which to support those with disabilities. This initiative opened the door for conversations regarding those with disabilities (Department of Administration Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2019).
1971	<i>Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children (PARC) v. the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania</i>	Suit claimed that the commonwealth was in violation of providing access to public education for children with disabilities who could benefit from such schooling (334 F. Supp. 1257).
1975	P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act established	This law established regulations which guaranteed handicapped children FAPE. LRE was first mentioned in this law (Leonardi, 2001).

- 1982 *Board of Education v. Rowley* In this supreme court ruling, FAPE was discussed in the realm of the meaning of *appropriateness* for a child with a disability as well as what outcomes IDEA expected for students. The court ruled that services had to be reasonably calculated for students to receive educational benefit (Winzer, 1993).
- 1983 *Roncker v. Walter* This case was known for the “Roncker Portability Test.” This test looked at the possibility that a segregated setting would be more appropriate for a child. The second tier of this test considered if the services provided in the segregated setting could be transported to the neighborhood school and be provided in a less restrictive setting. If so, the school district was responsible for this provision to maintain LRE (Yell, 2012).
- 1989 *Daniel R. R. v. State Board of Education* This case set the standard for a two-part test in determining if schools met their obligation in providing FAPE under IDEA. The first prong of the test was to determine whether the child’s needs could be met satisfactorily in the general education setting with the use of supplementary aids and services while the second prong looked at if a child was included with peers to the maximum extent appropriate when a student with a disability was placed in a special setting (Yell, 2012).
- 1994 *Gaskin v. Pennsylvania Department of Education* In the suit, the families called for IEP teams to consider whether the goals in a student’s IEP could be worked on and met in the general education setting with the use of supplementary aids and services before considering a more restrictive setting. In the general education classroom, responsibility was increased for districts to provide appropriate accommodations and related services. With the 2005 settlement agreement, PDE made systemic changes over special education. These changes included most notably the LRE mandate in terms of monitoring that districts complied with state and federal requirements. The settlement also established an LRE advisory panel (Silla-Zaleski,

Bauman, & Stuftt, 2007).

1997 *Hartmann v. Loudoun County Board of Education*

The court favored the district's decision of placing a student with aggressive behaviors and autism in a separate school and developed a three-part test in its ruling. They argued that mainstreaming was not the LRE when the student would not receive educational benefit from the model, that any minimal benefit from mainstreaming would be overshadowed by benefits that could be achieved in a more restrictive educational setting, and the student was a disruption to others' education in the general education classroom (Yell, 2012).

## **Inclusion**

One of the most notable changes to special education reform over the last half-century is regarding where students with special needs receive their education. Educational professionals have come to the realization that students with disabilities have an inherent right to be a part of a classroom learning community with their peers who do not have disabilities.

To make inclusion successful, school professionals need to find a way to blur the lines of general education and special education. Hornby (2015) noted that general and special education do not need to be conflicting entities in the education of children with and without disabilities. Instead, inclusive special education encompasses a shared vision of procedures and educational strategies for the benefit of all children. For IEP teams to collaborate for the social and civil rights of all students with disabilities, they should focus on constant team reflection, goal setting, action plans, and readily make changes when needed (Skilton-Sylvester & Slesaransky-Poe, 2009). Barnes and Gaines (2015) found that negative attitudes toward inclusive practices led to reduced self-efficacy contributing to increased stress levels of teachers. These increased stress levels can negatively impact student outcomes.

**Benefits of inclusion.** Not only is it morally and ethically upright for students with disabilities to be immersed in a heterogeneous school experience, but research also suggests that there are substantial benefits to inclusion and that inclusion is considered a best practice. Momentous increases in IEP quality in terms of age-appropriateness, functionality, and generalization were found when students were integrated into general education classes from more restrictive special education settings (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992). Furthermore, in the general education classroom, there was an increase in the number of practical lessons as well as academic activities when compared to a pull-out special education class. Students were also more engaged in the general education setting and were not alone or isolated (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994). In an additional study of elementary school students with significant disabilities, it was observed that general education classrooms delivered more instruction where content was addressed further, students were provided a comparable amount of one-to-one instructional time, and the teacher relied on non-disabled peers more and adults less (Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, & Sampson-Saul, 1998). In a two-year study of students with intellectual disabilities immersed in a general education setting, inclusion students made more progress in literacy skills than those with the same diagnosis who attended special schools (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012).

Although inclusive education is beneficial for students with disabilities, does it have a negative impact on the children without disabilities in the class? Misconceptions of students with disabilities as being a distraction to nondisabled peers have circulated for years. Nonetheless, research has shown that non-disabled students in an inclusive setting make similar or greater gains than those not being educated with students with disabilities regarding math and literacy (Waldron, Cole, & Majd, 2001). Moreover, Hollowood, Salisbury, Rainforth, and

Palombaro (1995) found that there was no difference in instructional time, engaged time, and time allotted for instruction between a general education class without students with severe disabilities and an inclusion class where there are those with disabilities. In fact, nondisabled peers benefit from building relationships with children with disabilities, and having these children included with them leads to new and enriching learning opportunities for all students (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998).

**Challenges of inclusion.** Without a doubt, there are challenges when it comes to inclusive practices. Particularly to placement, some educators still believe that disabilities can be eradicated. Additionally, special education delivery not taking place in a general education classroom is another common misconception (Kirby, 2017). Kirby (2017) recommended that to make education a place where all can learn, districts must do away with labels. Stronger teacher preparation must occur as well as continued professional development in terms of special education and appropriate placement. Evidence-based instruction is key regardless of where a child is placed.

An additional challenge is that students with higher incidence disabilities are educated more often in general education settings but those with more significant, lower incidence disabilities are not. Kurth et al. (2014) depicted how highly restrictive placements for students with low-incidence disabilities are still commonplace. Districts do not set goals that are rigorous enough to bring students in restrictive placements back to their neighborhood schools (Kurth et al.). Therefore, there is quite a disproportionality between students with low-incidence disabilities being educated in restrictive placements with little initiative to move them toward being educated in less restrictive environments. In a 14-year study looking at the changes involving LRE for students with low-incidence disabilities, it was discovered that not much

change elicited for students with significant disabilities in terms of reform to lesser restrictive placements (Morningstar, Kurth, & Johnson, 2017).

### **Factors Related to Perceptions of Inclusion**

There are a multitude of factors that impact the perceptions of inclusion. For the purpose of this study, the focus will remain on the variables including years of experience in education, extent of special education courses and professional development, and the level of special education leadership within a school system.

**Years of experience in education.** Barnes and Gaines (2015) found that teachers with fewer years of experience had more negative attitudes towards inclusion when compared to educators with more experience. Contrary to this, MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013), found that more veteran teachers had more negative attitudes towards students with social, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. Gaines and Barnes (2017) discovered that teachers with more than 10 years of experience had added negative attitudes toward inclusion when compared with those with less experience. Regardless, years of experience in education impacts teachers' and principals' attitudes toward inclusion (Hwang & Evans, 2011).

**Special education courses and professional development.** Research has shown professional development as being a factor in the success of inclusive practices. Waitoller and Artiles (2013) brought to light that most professional development research for inclusive education utilized a unitary approach toward difference and exclusion and that teacher-learning for inclusive education is undertheorized. Zagona, Kurth, and MacFarland (2017) found a correlation between educators' preparedness for special education and whether they took university courses on the topic or received relevant professional development. Additionally, in a study of non-traditional preservice teachers, inclusion literature in teacher preparation programs

showed promising value among teacher candidates (Sutton, 2015). Swain, Nordness, and Leader-Janssen (2012) suggested breaking the system of ill-prepared inclusion teachers by providing preservice teachers with both theoretical and practical experience in working in effective inclusionary settings.

Aitken (2012) noted that those individuals working with students with disabilities must have proper professional development training for the children under that teacher's direction to be successful. Gokdere (2012) suggested increased professional development on inclusive practices for in-service teachers to increase the quality of services. Professional development as it relates to the development of teachers who believe in inclusive education is necessary for teachers to be able to change their practices to coincide with the attitude for the necessity of inclusionary practices (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Lack of teacher training (Alahbabi, 2009) negatively impacts teachers' perceptions of inclusion.

**Leadership.** Do principals' interpretations and knowledge of LRE trickle down to impact students' placement? Sumbera, Pazey, and Lashley (2014) implied that principals' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions regarding LRE and FAPE influence their policies on inclusion. O'Laughlin and Lindle (2015) echoed the same sentiment as the authors in terms of principals' interpretations of special education placement law and the effects those interpretations have on placement policy within their buildings. According to O'Laughlin and Lindle (2015), principals' ideas of what the law says differed from the intent, not to mention, principals may fail to realize that special education is a service and not a place (O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). Ultimately, their knowledge, or lack thereof in terms of LRE and FAPE, influences placements for students.

School leaders, specifically principals, having a knowledge base of special education is vital to the success of students with special needs under that principal's direction (Grogan, 2013).

To resolve situations dealing with IEPs, 504s, due process hearings, and staying in compliance with IDEA, one must possess a deep understanding of special education to make sound decisions involving students with disabilities. Unfortunately, many school leaders have neither received proper education nor had professional development in special education (Grogan, 2013; Yell, 2013). Therefore, these leaders place districts at a significant disadvantage compared to districts that do have leaders well versed in special education. Yell (2013) reinforced the imperativeness of school leaders needing extensive training to be both compliant with IDEA and to avoid common procedural errors in the provision of special education services in the LRE. Potmesilova, Potmesil, and Roubalova (2013) reiterated that supervision is a needed prevention for staff morale, and a correlation exists between strong supervision and attitudes of those inclusively serving students with disabilities. Lack of administrative support has shown to negatively impact the provision of inclusive practices (Fuchs, 2010).

Weintraub (2012) noted that although special education delivery has improved substantially over the last half-century, LRE and increased access to the general education classroom and curriculum for students with disabilities need to continue to advance. How can the issue of students being in LRE settings develop? One way is to promote inclusive practices from an early age. Lee, Yeung, Tracey, and Barker (2015) found that in an early childhood setting, teachers' attitudes toward inclusion depend on the severity of the special needs. This study also implied that regardless of staff role, their opinions were similar in terms of educating students with disabilities.

Additionally, the application of a special education continuum of services may have a negative impact on restrictive placement. Because there is an option for students to be removed from their nondisabled peers, it oftentimes happens that districts try to prove why students

cannot be in a general education setting instead of how they can meet with success in that setting (Ryndak et al., 2014). A suggestion that is offered to guide IEP teams is to bring special education to the child and not the child to special education (Marx et al., 2014). Therefore, if appropriate services can be provided in the general education classroom for students with disabilities, and they enhance educational benefit as a result, that is their LRE and there is no need for removal from this setting.

Ultimately, the move to more inclusive practices has come a far way since the days of students with disabilities not being educated at all. Inclusion is currently revered as a best practice in education. Suleymanov (2015) remarked that effective inclusion is the result of no single factor but a combination of planning, staff training, and appropriate funding. Nonetheless, increasing tasks placed on teachers' and principals' shoulders can make differentiating instruction and delivering services to students with special needs in a general education setting a burden. Teachers' and principals' attitudes and perceptions can impact a child's authentic LRE from not being realized. Therefore, gaining insight into teachers' and principals' views on inclusion is a foundational step in determining what measures need to be taken to eliminate negative attitudes toward inclusion and promote a successful inclusive setting.

Special education has made many positive strides to honor all individuals' civil rights. Inclusion and LRE are two substantial successes of this initiative. To move backwards to separate classrooms and schools for those with disabilities would be a detrimental reversal that cannot happen (McLeskey, 2007). Nonetheless, to continue paving the way for inclusion and the rights of students to be educated in their LREs, a study into the perceptions of teachers and principals needs examined to determine underlying negativity that is hindering ideal inclusive practices. This research study can serve as a starting point for further research as to the impact

of providing teachers and principals with necessary training and support to educate students with disabilities within the general education setting and abolish pessimism toward this vital educational initiative.

### **Methods**

Teachers' and principals' views of inclusion likely exist along a continuum starting at negative perceptions of inclusion and progressing to positive perceptions. The current investigation examines the following questions:

1. What differences exist between teachers' and principals' perceptions of inclusion?
2. Is there a relationship between teachers' and principals' perceptions of inclusion and their years of educational experience?
3. Is there a relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusion and their level of support they receive from administrators?

The study is a quantitative survey research study. The participants in this study included principals and teachers in a Western Pennsylvania school district. The district administrators include the superintendent, high school principal, high school assistant principal, two 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade co-principals, and a PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade principal/director of special education.

### **Participants**

During the 2015-2016 school year, 255 students were identified as needing special education services in this school district. Of those 255 students, 69.9% of students with disabilities were inside the general education classroom for 80% or more of the school day (District Plan Report, 2018). In 2008, 30 district students with disabilities were placed in alternative placements. This number was reduced to 17 students in 2014 in outside placements.

Only 12 students with disabilities were educated in outside placements in the 2017-2018 school year (District Special Education Plan Report, 2018).

### **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation utilized was the MATIES survey (see Appendix A). According to Mahat (2008), MATIES measures the affective, cognitive, and behavioral attitudes regarding inclusion. This instrument incorporates both theoretical and psychometric approaches to scale development. These components of the attitudes' instrument include brevity, ease of administration, flexibility, validity, and reliability (Mahat, 2008). The MATIES utilizes a Likert-type scale that allows for six ratings about the inclusion of students with disabilities - *Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree and Strongly Disagree*. Mahat (2008) asserted the Item Separation Index with MATIES has values close to 1.0 for each of the subscales signifying that the items are separated appropriately for the variable being measured. Furthermore, the Teacher Separation Index delivered adequate indication of the capacity of the subscales to distinguish between opposing levels of teachers' attitudes. The Cronbach reliability for each subscale was significant with alpha coefficients between 0.77 and 0.91 (Mahat, 2008). MATIES can be considered a valid, reliable multi-dimensional tool in determining educators' attitudes towards inclusion. In addition to the MATIES was a questionnaire inquiring about the participants' years in education, extent of background in special education, and rating of level of support they feel they receive from their administrators. A copy of the survey is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MATIEST3>

### **Procedures**

After receiving IRB approval, an email was sent from the researcher's dissertation advisor to all the district teachers and principals from the selected school district inviting them to

participate in the researcher’s study to determine if there were relationships that existed between perceptions of inclusion and years of educational experience, background in special education, and level of administrative support. A link in this email opened a survey and questionnaire through Survey Monkey. A deadline of data collection was noted in the email. A follow-up email reminder was sent by the researcher’s dissertation advisor one week prior to the deadline. Once all participants’ surveys and questionnaires were submitted, the researcher input data into SPSS for analysis.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The levels of teachers and principals were broken into three categories. The categories were those in grade levels PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade, and 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Table 2**

*Frequency and Percentages of Teachers and Principals by Level*

Level	Frequency	Percent
PreK-2 <sup>nd</sup>	22	28.6
3 <sup>rd</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	32	41.6
9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	23	29.9

As evidenced in Table 2, Grades 3-8 represented the highest frequency of respondents. Grades PreK-2 represented the least frequency of respondents. The actual population includes 31 (71% participation) individuals in Grades PreK-2, 46 (69.6% participation) individuals in Grades 3-8, and 37 (62.2% participation) individuals in Grades 9-12. In total, 77 individuals completed the survey out of a possible 114 respondents. This yields a 67.5% participation rate.

The grade span with the highest percentage of participation was PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and the lowest percentage was 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades. The frequencies and percentages of teachers and principals by role were broken down in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Frequency and Percentages of Teachers and Principals by Role*

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Role	Frequency	Percent
Teacher	72	93.5
Principal	5	6.5

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As noted in Table 3, 72 teachers responded to the survey (93.5%), and 5 administrators responded (6.5%). There are 109 teachers total in the district. Therefore, 66.1 % of teachers participated. There are five principals in the district; 100% of principals participated in the investigation.

The average reported years in education were 17.43 (SD = 7.40). The years reported were broken down into quartiles, with the first quartile including up to 12 years, the second quartile including up to 17.5 years, and the third quartile being 21.75 years. The minimum years of educational experience were one and the maximum was 35.

Table 4 depicts the level of support teachers at each grade range felt from administrators.

**Table 4**

*Level of Support from Principals*

Level	No support	Minimal	Average	Fair	Exceptional
PreK-2 <sup>nd</sup>	0	1	7	6	7
3 <sup>rd</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	2	8	9	4	7
9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	1	3	10	4	3

PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade staff had the least number of respondents with no support (0). Third through eighth grades had the most individuals indicating no support (2). PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade staff and 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade staff had the same number of respondents indicate exceptional support (7).

**Preliminary Analysis**

Reliability estimates were computed based on the guidelines reported in Mahat (2008). The results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 4**

*Reliability Estimates*

Factor	Cronbach's $\alpha$	N of Items
Cognitive	0.721	6
Affective	0.793	6
Behavioral	0.855	6

As indicated above, all reliability estimates exceed .70, which is considered an acceptable level according to Field (2017). Since the reliability of the factors was found to be acceptable, factors were constructed by aggregating the mean responses for the six items associated with

each factor. Item numbers 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 were recoded prior to the construction of the factors since these were negatively worded.

Table 6 displays the relationship between the respondents' roles and their factor responses of cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

**Table 6**

*Relationship between Role and Factor Responses*

Factor		Teachers	Principals
Cognitive	Pearson Correlation	-0.199	-0.553
	Sig.	0.097	0.334
Affective	Pearson Correlation	<b>-.239*</b>	-0.431
	Sig.	0.045	0.469
Behavioral	Pearson Correlation	<b>-.315**</b>	-0.734
	Sig.	0.007	0.158

Note: \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level: \*\* at the 0.01 level.

As indicated in Table 6, there is a statistically significant, small negative relationship between years teaching and responses on the affective factor. There is also a statistically significant, small negative relationship between years teaching and responses on the behavioral factor.

Table 7 provides the correlation between the three computed factors.

**Table 7**

*Pearson's Zero-Order Correlation between Factors*

	Cognitive	Affective	Behavioral
Cognitive	-	.579**	.750**
Affective		-	.693**
Behavioral			-

Since the factors are highly correlated, a MANOVA was determined to be the best analysis to address the three research questions.

*Research Question Two*

Research Question Two asked: Is there a relationship between teachers' and principals' perceptions of inclusion and their years of educational experience? Table 8 provides the results of the MANOVA between years and role on factors.

**Table 8**

*Results of MANOVA between Years and Role on Factors*

Source	Dependent Variable	F	Sig.
Years	Cognitive	4.44	0.038
	Affective	4.78	0.032
	Behavioral	11.63	0.001
Role	Cognitive	3.17	0.079
	Affective	1.73	0.192
	Behavioral	0.01	0.925

Results of the MANOVA indicate that Box's M Test ( $F = .048$ ) and Levene's Test of Homogeneity ( $p > .05$ ) were tenable. The Multivariate Test indicates that both Years,  $F(3,71) = 3.94, p = .012$ , and role,  $F(3,71) = 2.97, p = .037$ , were significant. The Between Subjects Tests indicates that these differences exist across all factors for Years, but only exist marginally for participants role (teacher or principal) on the cognitive factor.

**Figure 1**

*Average Response on Each Factor by Role*

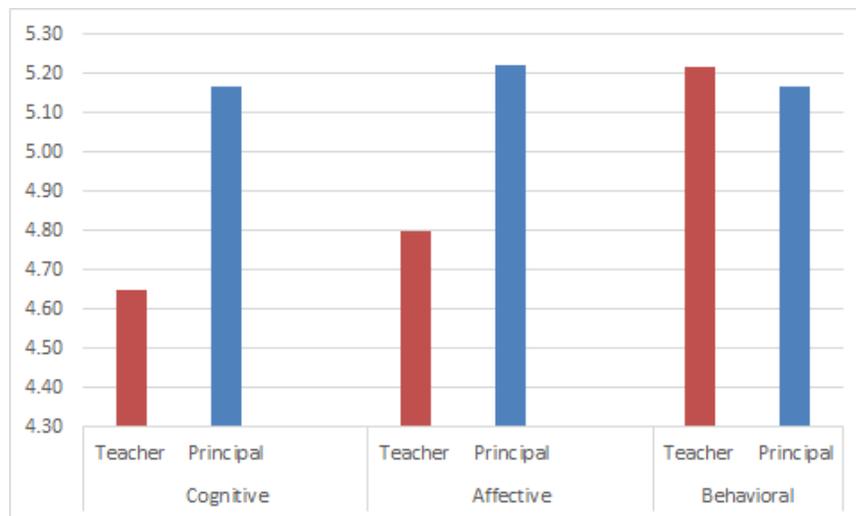


Figure 1 provides a graphical depiction of the average response on each factor by role, showing a trend between the roles of respondents and the cognitive factor. There is no significance between roles of respondents and affective nor behavioral factors. Table 9 provides the mean responses on each factor for the teachers and the principals.

**Table 9**

*Average Response on Factors by Role; F Test*

Factor	Role	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Cognitive	Teacher	4.65	0.69	2.54	.116
	Principal	5.17	0.92		
Affective	Teacher	4.80	0.82	1.24	.270
	Principal	5.22	0.67		
Behavioral	Teacher	5.22	0.59	.039	.845
	Principal	5.17	0.90		

As indicated above, the results of the F test reveal no significant differences between the average response of teachers and principals on each of the factors.

*Research Question Three*

Research Question Three asked: Is there a relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusion and the level of support they receive from administrators? Table 10 provides the results of the MANOVA for teachers' reported level of administrative support.

**Table 10**

*MANOVA Results for Levels of Support*

Source	Dependent Variable	F	Sig.
Support	Cognitive	1.38	0.250
	Affective	0.99	0.421
	Behavioral	2.12	0.087

Results of the MANOVA indicate that Box's M Test ( $F = .049$ ) and Levene's Test of Homogeneity ( $p > .05$ ) were tenable. The Multivariate Test indicates that level of support was not significant,  $F(3,65)=1.59, p = .124$ . The Between Subjects Tests indicates that these differences exist across all factors for Years, but only exist marginally for role on the cognitive factor.

Table 11 provides level of support across average factor score.

**Table 11**

*Level of Support by Factor Score*

	Cognitive	Affective	Behavioral
No	3.94	4.00	4.33
Minimal	4.45	4.87	5.33
Average	4.68	4.77	5.19
Fair	4.71	4.73	5.35
Exceptional	4.82	4.99	5.25

Table 11 demonstrates that the average response across all factors was similar. Therefore, the level of support that the teacher reported did not impact their responses to the inclusion factors.

Table 12 provides the average factor scores between role and level.

**Table 12**

*Average Factor Scores by Role and Level*

	Grade Span	Teacher	Principal
Cognitive	PreK-2 <sup>nd</sup>	4.79	6.00
	3 <sup>rd</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	4.47	4.17
	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	4.77	5.75
Affective	PreK-2 <sup>nd</sup>	5.01	5.00
	3 <sup>rd</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	4.77	4.85
	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	4.63	5.70
Behavioral	PreK-2 <sup>nd</sup>	5.37	6.00
	3 <sup>rd</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	5.19	4.25
	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup>	5.11	5.67

In Table 12, the largest difference for the cognitive factor was between teachers and principals in PreK-2. The largest difference between the affective factors was teachers and principals in Grades 9-12. The largest difference between the behavioral factors was between teachers and principals in Grades 3-8.

### **Discussion**

This study was conducted to glean the relationships that exist between teachers' and principals' perceptions of inclusion and their years of educational experience, and level of support felt by administrators.

Research Question One asked: What differences exist between teachers' and principals' perceptions of inclusion? Aligned with this, Research Question Two asked: Is there a relationship between teachers' and principals' perceptions of inclusion and their years of educational experience? The results suggest that there is a significant relationship between years of educational experience and teachers' and principals' perceptions of inclusion.

The average response for teachers on the cognitive and affective factors was lower than principals. This could be partially because of principals being further removed from the classroom when compared to a teacher. They are not in the trenches of planning instruction daily and differentiating for those with disabilities. Principals' responses were marginally lower than teachers on the behavioral factor. This can be explained by the wording of the behavioral questions. The questions were more geared toward teachers than principals.

When analyzing the role of the teacher and the principal across the affective, cognitive, and behavioral factors, a statistically significant, small negative relationship between the years teaching and responses on the affective and behavioral factors surfaced. MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013), had similar findings in that more seasoned teachers had more negative perceptions of inclusion.

There are a few possibilities as to why this study has demonstrated such results. Saloviita and Takala (2010) noted that when teachers have had experience with inclusion, their perceptions are more positive than the perceptions of those without this involvement. As a result, they are more willing to have students with disabilities in their classrooms. More seasoned teachers have likely had less experience with inclusion. Teachers with less formal experience have been taught in preservice education programs that focus on inclusion. Teacher-prep programs that advocate for students with disabilities to be separated from their nondisabled peers virtually no longer exist. Therefore, teachers with less experience have likely been educated in undergraduate and graduate courses promoting students being educated in their LREs with specially designed instruction and have had exposure to inclusive practices during their preservice education.

Likewise, Gaines and Barnes (2017) found that teachers with more than 10 years of experience had added negative views of inclusion. To the contrary, teachers with more years of teaching experience are more likely to have preservice experience at a time when inclusion was not at the forefront of special education. As a result, they may present more negative perceptions in the attitude and behavioral factors. These findings conflict with an earlier study by Barnes and Gaines (2015), where results noted that teachers with fewer years of educational experience tend to have more negative perceptions of inclusion. Although findings in this study and current research are mixed, Hwang and Evans (2011) demonstrated that years of experience does have an impact on perceptions of inclusion.

An interesting discovery relating to question one is that the findings are evident in the teachers' role but not that of the principals. Perhaps in the Local Education Agency (LEA) representative role that administrators play at IEP meetings, they have further exposure to the benefits of inclusive practices due to the degree of exposure they experience in their respective roles. They see the triumphs of inclusive practices on a child and the IEP team. Therefore, regardless of their educational years of experience, they can observe and evaluate best practices in special education which may, in turn, lead to them having more positive perceptions of inclusion. Their role on the IEP team allows them to witness how different placement and specially designed instruction positively impact students' success. More research is warranted in this area.

### *Research Question Three*

Finally, the third research question asked if there a relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusion and the level of support they receive from administrators? The average response across all factors was similar regardless of level of support. Therefore, there is no

significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of inclusion and the level of support they receive from administrators.

Current research argues the importance of strong, well-versed leaders in special education. Principals having a knowledge base of special education is vital to the success of students with special needs in that principal's building (Grogan, 2013). To be proactive and competent in dealing with IEPs, 504s, due process hearings, and complying with IDEA, one must possess a deep understanding of both compliance issues regarding special education as well as appropriately servicing children with special needs within their LREs. Although the current study does not show a trend with administrative support impacting teachers' perceptions of inclusion, Fuchs (2010) found that lack of administrative support has shown to negatively impact the provision of inclusive practices.

### **Limitations**

A few limitations were evidenced in this study. Findings and recommendations can only be generalized to districts of similar demographics. Additionally, respondents to the survey may feel a need to answer in a socially desirable manner. Social desirability bias poses a validity concern in studies like those involving perceptions of inclusion; respondents tend to answer in a way in which they will be perceived positively (Lüke & Grosche, 2018).

An additional limitation to the study was the recent realignment of administrators within the district. Prior to the 2019-2020 school year, there was a PreK-5<sup>th</sup> grade principal, 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade principal, 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade principal, and assistant principal. There was also a superintendent and assistant superintendent in the district. As of July 1, 2019, there was a substantial shift in administration. The superintendent retired, and the assistant superintendent was promoted to superintendent. A position was created for K-12 Director of Special Education combined with

PreK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade principal. The former elementary principal became co-principal of Grades 3-8 along with the former middle school principal. In December of 2019, the high school principal resigned. The former superintendent stepped in as an emergency interim high school principal until the position could be permanently filled. As a result of all the changes, data were limited in that teachers' and principals' perceptions could not necessarily be tied to one specific administrator since all buildings in the district had recently experienced quite a change. Furthermore, many teachers work for more than one supervisor as they straddle multiple grade levels and, therefore, multiple principals.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Recommendations for further investigation would include expanding the study beyond the demographics of the small, rural district studied. In such a study of a higher magnitude, it would be interesting to see if the results vary significantly. The same study could be conducted in all districts in Beaver County, Pennsylvania.

In the current study, the researcher was the special education director for the district being investigated. A limitation of this would be that respondents may have felt they needed to answer a certain way, not only to be viewed in a more positive light, but also to appease their administrator with the knowledge that the administrator is their supervisor who evaluates them and has the authority to shape professional development based on research implications.

Another recommendation for the study would be to develop and utilize an instrument in which detailed scenarios regarding specific student needs are detailed. Informal feedback from teachers and principals with the study using the MATIES was that the statements were too broad in nature. They had difficulty rating statements when they might be answered differently based on the severity of various students' disabilities.

An additional study focus might be to investigate the attitudes of teachers and principals on various models of inclusion. The study at hand is broad in its discussion of inclusion; an important component of inclusion is what that service delivery looks like and how that ultimately benefits the students with disabilities, those without, and the teachers and principals involved in their schooling.

### **Conclusion**

The implications of this study provide districts with possible professional development needs in relation to special education, inclusion, and LRE. Because there is a small, negative relationship between higher years of teaching experience and lower levels of inclusion, the leadership team in this district should be analyzing professional development opportunities pertaining to areas of Dweck's (2016) growth mindset, special education law and history, co-teaching models, specially designed instruction, and supplementary aids and services. Ultimately, students with and without disabilities retain a right to be educated alongside one another; the responsibility of how to make this initiative successful lies with school leaders to ensure the appropriate training for staff members. Leithwood and Slegers (2006) found that a transformational leader can motivate staff to develop skill sets of new heights. Their transformational leadership can create the climate and culture within schools to allow students an immersive educational experience.

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