Perceptions of the Principal’s Role in Creating a Successful Inclusion Program at the High School Level

Kathryn Duggan

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL’S ROLE IN CREATING A SUCCESSFUL
INCLUSION PROGRAM AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

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

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the Department of

ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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Date Submitted ___02/20/20___

Date Approved ___02/20/20___

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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL’S ROLE IN CREATING A SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION PROGRAM AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

Kathryn Duggan

When a school includes special education students in the general education classroom, it impacts all staff, teachers, and students. The purpose of this study was to consider inclusion of high school special education students in general education classrooms from the perspectives of principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. From these perspectives, best practices for inclusion, supports and barriers to inclusion, and the principal’s role as a change agent when implementing inclusion was investigated.

Forty two high schools following a 9-12 grade configuration in Long Island, New York were surveyed. Surveys were sent to the principal, general education teachers, and special education teachers at each of those schools. The surveys collected demographic data and addressed the four constructs that are measures of a successful inclusion program: (1) Principal’s Role, (2) Organizational Support, (3) Best Practices and (4) Barriers.

SPSS software was utilized to compute the data collected from the surveys. Using a factorial ANOVA differences in the perceptions of the three groups (i.e: principals, general education teachers and special education teachers) were examined with regards to
the four dependent variables: (1) Principal’s Role, (2) Organizational Support, (3) Best Practices and (4) Barriers.

All three groups were in agreement regarding best practices and barriers; however, neither teacher group was in agreement with the principals group with regards to the principal’s role and organizational support.
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CHAPTER 1

In 1970, U.S. schools educated only one in five children with disabilities, and many states had laws excluding certain students from school, including children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or mentally retarded (Rhodes, et al., 2007). A turning point occurred when Public Law 94-142 was passed as a response to Congressional concern for two groups of children: the more than 1 million children with disabilities who were excluded entirely from the education system and the children with disabilities who had only limited access to the education system and were, therefore, denied an appropriate education. This latter group comprised more than half of all children with disabilities who were living in the United States at that time (Rhodes, et al., 2007). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) mandated that students with disabilities be provided access to general education services.

The inclusive approach to special education has continued to evolve even further. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) mandates that a free appropriate public education is provided to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children in the least restrictive environment. Least restrictive environment (LRE) is not a place, but a principle that guides a student’s special education services, meaning that “to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions, be educated with children who are not disabled” (IDEA, 2004, p. 118). These students will be educated with their non-disabled peers, to the maximum extent possible, and the school system will provide supports and modifications to make this happen. This law increased the leadership responsibilities of principals to ensure inclusive education for
students with disabilities be provided in the general education classroom. As a result, principals must continue to develop and create an environment that values inclusion and promotes a school culture where everyone matters, everyone learns, and everyone cares.

**Purpose of the Study**

Federal legislation has addressed the issues of physical and academic inclusion; however, the development of a successful inclusion program relies on a leader who is dedicated to creating change. Creating a successful inclusion program for students with special needs is a fundamental change that impacts all staff and students within a school. Principals play a critical role in shaping a climate that promotes an inclusive culture. Probably the most important job of the school-based leader is to change the prevailing culture of a school (Barth, 2013, p. 200). Research has demonstrated that principals who focus on instructional issues, demonstrate administrative support for special education, and provide high-quality professional development for teachers produce enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities and for others at risk for school failure (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). Students and staff depend on successful leadership to help cross the invisible line that too often separates those with disabilities from those without. Various factors may contribute to a successful inclusion program, including organizational support, breaking down barriers, staying up to date on best practices and successful leadership. In every school, leaders should be taking the pulse of their building, systematically gathering perceptions of stakeholders regarding the current performance and what steps need to be taken to continuously evaluate and improve upon the culture and functioning of a school. If the perceptions of stakeholders do not align they are unable to work together to create a
culture that supports successful inclusion for students with special needs. What are the perceptions of teachers and leaders regarding the barriers, best practices, and organizational structures needed to create an inclusive culture?

**Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The culture of an organization is comprised of all the beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and symbols that are characteristic of an organization. More specifically, organizational culture is defined as shared philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, expectations, attitudes, norms, and values (Schein, 2010). When examining school culture it is essential to make sure all students are a part of the community. In a literature review conducted by Osterman (2000), she found that a number of studies show that strengthening students’ sense of community in school produces a wide range of desirable effects, including increased academic motivation, social understanding and competence, altruistic tendencies, appropriate conduct in school, and trust and respect for teachers (Osterman, 2000). It is important to continuously evaluate and keep track of the culture of a school in order to understand how and when you need to make changes to strengthen and continually improve upon the components of successful inclusion program. Supportive relationships are the foundation for creating a positive school environment, and all students should feel supported despite any differences. Ultimately, a successful school is one in which students are learning to their fullest potential. Leaders play a critical role in creating and maintaining a school’s culture where all students are learning to their maximum potential.

When a school culture is inclusive and engaging everyone within its community benefits. Schein (2010) defines three levels of culture depicted below in Figure 1.1. Level
one is comprised of artifacts and is at the surface; these include all the visible parts of the organization. Level two consists of the organizations’ espoused beliefs and values, including ideals, goals, values, aspirations, ideologies, and rationalizations that are explicitly articulated. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the espoused values and beliefs within an organization, one must understand level three, basic underlying assumptions. Leaders must continuously evaluate the culture of a school and support the vision. Deal and Kent (2003) recommend that principals first read the culture of the school and understand the deeper meanings of the culture before trying to reshape it. In order to do so principals must uncover and articulate core values before working to create an inclusive school; reinforcing cultural elements that are positive and modifying those that are negative and dysfunctional are crucial.

![Figure 1.1: Edgar Schein Levels of Culture (2010)](image)

When evaluating barriers, best practices, organizational supports, and the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program; assigning one of the three
levels of culture can aid stakeholders in better understanding what needs to happen in order to break down the barriers, increase the use of best practice, and put positive organizational supports in place. Various components of a successful inclusion program were considered based on current literature and research. The researcher developed a conceptual framework, *Organizational Culture for a Successful Inclusion Program* (Figure 1.2) in which components of a successful inclusion program were assigned a level of culture based on Edgar Schein's model.

**Figure 1.2**
*Organizational Culture for a Successful Inclusion Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Artifacts</strong></th>
<th><strong>Resources that support inclusion</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Professional Development for Staff</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Planning time for general education and special education teachers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Supports for successful inclusion strategies or models</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Espoused Beliefs</strong></th>
<th><strong>On-going collaboration</strong></th>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Inclusive Vision</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Continuum of Services</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Involve all stakeholders in decision making</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Underlying Assumptions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Principal supports inclusion</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Climate that fosters support for all students</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Conceptual Framework (Duggan, 2019)*

By assigning components of a successful inclusion program to the three levels of culture depicted in Schein’s model, leaders can evaluate and assess what components of a successful inclusion program need to be addressed and improved upon. Understanding
the level of culture will allow leaders to fundamentally address how to make these changes and incorporate what is missing or focus on what needs to be improved. If artifacts are lacking or missing from a building then leaders can improve on the organizational structures in place. If there are misconceptions or differences in how espoused beliefs are perceived, leaders can develop an action plan and professional development to improve the goals and philosophies that support successful inclusion within their building. Finally, if there are differences in the perceptions regarding the espoused values, leaders must engage in self-reflection and evaluate how these taken for granted beliefs need to be more clearly articulated and modeled to stakeholders.

Evaluating the conceptual framework with an organizational culture lens will highlight the importance of recognizing a school’s artifacts, espoused values, and the underlying assumptions in order to create a successful inclusion program for students with special needs at the high school level. Understanding if differences in perceptions exist between leaders and teachers can open the door for a principal to be the change agent in improving these inconsistencies and get to the heart of breaking down barriers, implanting best practices, and providing organizational supports to improve inclusion programs at the high school level.
Significance of the study

Peterson and Hittie (2003) state, “The most important research questions for the future are not whether we should seek to build inclusive schools, but how we may do so well” (p. 42). This study is significant in the implementation of successful inclusion programs for students with special needs. Specifically, this study examined the perceptions of teachers and principals with regards to their shared values and beliefs when it comes to successful inclusion. Ultimately, stakeholders must be collaborating and similarly perceive what matters most so that they can work together in creating a culture that supports inclusion. Investigating the differences in the perceptions of leaders and teachers will highlight the changes a leader must make in order to foster an environment that supports the creation of a successful inclusion program. This study is important because federal legislation requires that all students have access to a free and appropriate public education (Villa & Thousand, 2005). Furthermore, school principals are responsible for the success of all students and are expected to exemplify the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) which embody a research and practice-based understanding of the relationship between educational leadership and student learning. These standards require Educational Leaders to “develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Principals are primarily responsible for cultivating an inclusive, caring, and supportive school culture that promotes the success of all students and for building a professional community that develops and supports the professional capacity of their staff. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the perceptions of school principals and staff
that are responsible for the success of inclusion programs. Federal laws require that leaders and teachers are fostering an inclusive environment for all students. The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference among principals, special education teachers, and regular education teachers with regards to best practices for inclusion, barriers and supports to inclusion, and the principal’s role as change agent when moving a high school towards an inclusive school culture for students with special needs.

Results of this study will be shared with administrators and other key stakeholders to demonstrate the need for ongoing communication and collaboration about the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program. Administrators have the opportunity to understand the importance of their role in facilitating and establishing a school environment that embodies successful inclusive practices.

**Connection with Social Justice and Vincentian Mission in Education**

Inclusion of students with special needs in general education classrooms is an important movement that will continue to change and develop the public education system. How can we create an environment in schools that will celebrate differences and provide equitable education to all students? Inclusive classrooms can help us challenge exclusion. “When one person is oppressed, no one is free. When one student is not a full participant in his or her school community, then we are all at risk. By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world that is fit for all” (Sapon-Shevin, 2003, p 28). According to the mission statement, St. John’s University is a Vincentian university that strives to provide excellent education to all people. The research in this study aims to provide information that will improve upon inclusive practices in order to provide excellent education to all students.
Inclusive education is important because it aims to ensure that all students have access to quality education and advances us further as a society. Creating a truly inclusive environment requires a change in culture. Leaders have a direct influence on shaping and creating the culture of a school. To ensure inclusion and achieve social justice for students with special needs, administrators must make active decisions to support inclusion and continue to develop and support teachers during the process.

**Research Questions**

1. Are there differences among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

2. Are there differences among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the organizational factors that support creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

3. Are there differences among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of best practices to consider when creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

4. Are there differences among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the barriers that inhibit creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

**Definition of Terms**

*Free and Appropriate Public Education*: education at no cost to a student with a disability designed to meet the student’s individual needs to the maximum extent possible (U.S Department of Education, 2019).
**General Education or Regular Education:** The set of integrated learning experiences structured across subject areas to provide the skills and knowledge needed for all students to function in society (Berry, 2010).

**Inclusion:** The exclusive placement of special education students in the general educational setting with appropriate support provided in the classroom to allow students to achieve the same level of success as their nondisabled peers (Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2008).

**Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA):** is the primary law governing the treatment of students with disabilities in the K-12 education system.

**Individual Education Plan (IEP):** Each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Each IEP must be designed for one student and must be a truly individualized document. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child with a disability.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** The requirement in federal law that students with disabilities receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers and that special education students are not removed from regular classes unless, even with supplemental aids and services, education in regular classes cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [20 United States Code (U.S.C.) Sec. 1412(a)(5)(A); 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Sec. 300.114.] (IDEA, 2004).

**Principal:** The lead building level administrators who are responsible for staffing, financial management, and instruction; individuals who are certified in curriculum and instruction or educational administration whose role is to lead, mediate, and collaborate
with teachers, parents, and community stakeholders to ensure student success (Gous, Eloff, & Moen, 2013).

**Special Education:** Classes or instruction that is offered at no cost to parents or guardians, to meet the unique needs of a child with learning, physical, or emotional disabilities (Berry, 2010).

**Students with Disabilities:** For the purpose of the Institute's special education research programs, a student with a disability is defined in Public Law 108-446, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), as a child "(i) with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this title as ‘emotional disturbance’), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and (ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services" (Part A, Sec. 602)

**Summary**

Federal laws and legislation have addressed the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings. Educators must ensure that all students are being provided with equitable education. A part of facilitating successful inclusion falls on the principals. It is the principal’s responsibility to ensure that the culture of their school promotes successful inclusion. It is necessary to examine the differences in perceptions of the stakeholders; in order to evaluate and address changes that can be made to better support our students with differences.
Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Organizational culture “refers to a set of common values, attitudes, beliefs and norms, some of which are explicit and some of which are not” (Brown, 2004, p. 4). The theoretical premise of this study states that principals set the tone for developing the organizational culture of their school. Principals play a critical role as leaders to motivate, inspire, and model for teachers positive attitudes toward inclusion. Organizational culture can be found in shared relationships among colleagues, norms within the school environment, student and teacher relations, and sharing experiences (Haberman, 2013). In a recent international literature review that examines the effectiveness of school actions in promoting inclusion (Dyson, Howes, and Roberts 2002; Dyson et al. 2004), the authors found that schools with inclusive cultures are also likely to be characterized by the presence of leaders who are committed to inclusive values and to a leadership style which encourages a range of individuals to participate in leadership functions. This indicates that school leaders should be selected and trained in the light of their commitment to inclusive values and their capacity to lead in a participatory manner (Ainscow & Sandhill, 2010). Therefore, school districts must be mindful of the educational leadership in their organizations. Schein (2004) suggests that cultures are about the deeper levels of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, operating unconsciously to define how they view themselves and their working contexts. The extent to which these values include the acceptance and celebration of differences and a commitment to offering educational opportunities to all students, coupled with the extent to which they are shared across a school staff, relate to the extent to which students are enabled to participate (Kugelmass 2001).
In order to establish a positive school culture both administration and teachers must work together to promote collaborative decision making, display high professional standards, and promote the success and inclusion of all students. Research demonstrates the importance of understanding organizational culture in schools as a vehicle guiding the determination of school success. For example, Wang and colleagues found that “school climate and culture were among the top influences in affecting improved student achievement” (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009, p.75). It is the principal's role to ensure that all students are included in academic achievement and that they create an environment that is capable of supporting diverse learners. Key to the development and maintenance of organizational culture is the need for school administrators to be skilled leaders who purposely engage in the development of programs and practices that direct school culture in certain ways (Bush, 2015). As a result of a six year research project on leadership, Louis et al. (2010) offered a definition of “leadership” that was built based on their findings: “Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions” (pp. 9–10). Therefore, school administrators must continuously evaluate the three levels of culture in their “organization” in order to be successful in creating and maintaining an environment that supports the success and inclusion of all students.
Review of Related Literature

History of Special Education Students in the Classroom

Over time, leaps and bounds have been made in what education looks like for students with disabilities. It was not always a legal requirement to educate students with disabilities in public schools. Prior to the 1970s, students with disabilities were educated outside of the general education classroom (Horrocks, White, & Roberts, 2008). Furthermore, prior to 1975, approximately 4 million students with special disabilities were denied educational support solely based upon their exceptional needs (Frost & Kersten, 2011). Millions of children with disabilities were either refused enrollment or not properly served by public schools.

A true turning point occurred with the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (also known as Public Law 94-142). This law was meant to ensure that special education services are available to children who need them and guarantee that decisions about services to students with disabilities are fair and appropriate.

The four purposes of the law articulated a compelling national mission to improve access to education for children with disabilities: (1) to assure that all children with disabilities have available to them … a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, (2) to assure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents … are protected, (3) to assist states and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities, (4) to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities (USDOE, 2010).
The purpose of the law was to improve how children with disabilities are identified and educated, to assess the success of these efforts, and to protect the children and their families. The law supported more than 1 million children with disabilities who had been excluded entirely from the education system. The law also supported children with disabilities who had had only limited access to the education system and were therefore denied an appropriate education (USDOE, 2010).

Over the years, this mandate has been strengthened through reauthorizations of Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004), the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015) to create equality in the classroom and a movement towards educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Specifically, providing these students with access to the general education curriculum, and ensuring that they make progress in learning that curriculum. The following federal laws have established the legal framework and the premise for inclusion of students with disabilities; thereby increasing the responsibilities of educational leaders to create a school culture that promotes the success of all students.

**Federal Laws**

*The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA) of 1975 (PL 94-142)* provided protection against any infringement of the educational rights of students with disabilities (EHA, 1972). The law legislated grants to states specifically for the education of children with disabilities. The EHA (1975) was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990. (USDOE, 2010)
Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA): The law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. In 1990, IDEA was revised and is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004. (USDOE, 2010)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): This law was passed in 2001 and aimed to improve the academic achievement of all students. This policy set a high standard and quality for instruction and instructional delivery. The law increased the level of accountability at the local level. Schools are required to be more accountable for student achievement, including the achievement of students with disabilities. When academic achievement falls below the standard set by NCLB (2002), school districts and individual schools are held accountable and monitored closely to ensure that students with special needs are appropriately placed and not underserved. (USDOE, 2010)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA): The primary goal of IDEIA (2004) is to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. The law accomplishes this in a number of ways: including emphasizing the substantive requirements of the special education process, aligning IDEA with NCLB ’s provisions such as adequate yearly progress (AYP), employing highly qualified personnel, implementing evidence-based practices, and altering
eligibility requirements. Finally, in IDEIA, Congress made important changes to the IEP, the disciplinary process, and the dispute-resolution system. (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyanni, 2006).

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):* The purpose of this act was to replace and update the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which was signed into law in 2002. According to the statement of purpose in ESSA, The purpose of this title is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.

These laws and mandates have put pressure on school leaders to be equitable and efficient in meeting the needs of all students. This legislation has been passed to ensure that all students have equal access to quality education; therefore, inclusion requires leadership that fosters an inclusive environment. It is imperative that school administrators identify and require a standard that reflects the belief that all children can learn and that all children have a fundamental right to be educated with their peers in the least restrictive environment (Fullan, 2003). Without leaders who value inclusion and who work to create an inclusive environment, students with learning differences and special needs will be negatively impacted and will not be set up for success in order to reach their full potential.
Inclusion

After IDEA was first introduced, schools generally interpreted the law to mean that they should mainstream students with mild disabilities, those with learning disabilities and those eligible for speech and language services, into classes where these students could keep up with other learners, supposedly with minimal support and few or no modifications to either curriculum or instruction (Villa & Thousand, 2003, p. 20). By the early 1980s, the least restrictive environment (LRE) became a dominant force in a move to include students with moderate and severe disabilities in the general education classroom. Then, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the move evolved into inclusion, “the principle and practice of considering general education as the placement of first choice for all learners” (Villa & Thousand, 2003, p. 20). Inclusion is an educational setting where students with disabilities learn in the general education classroom with their non-disabled peers (Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).

The term inclusion is actually not mentioned in any legislation, but it is implied as a means of meeting the terms of the LRE, the legal mandate that stipulates special education students should be educated in the educational setting that provides the greatest interaction with the general education students and exposes special education students to regular education classroom curriculum and instruction. The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion defines inclusion as:

The provision of services to students with disabilities, including those with severe impairments, in the neighborhood school, in age-appropriate general education classes, with the necessary support services and supplementary aids (for the child and the teacher) both to assure the child’s success—academic, behavioral, and
social—and to prepare the child to participate as a full and contributing member of society. (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996, p. 763)

In less than 40 years, United States schools have gone from completely excluding children with disabilities from public schools to the current situation in which all students receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and most spend a significant portion of their day in classrooms with their typical peers. As of 2016, 94.9 percent of students’ ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, were educated in regular classrooms for at least some portion of the school day. The majority (63.1 percent) of students’ ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, were educated inside the regular classroom 80 percent or more of the day. A total of 18.3 percent of students ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, were educated inside the regular classroom 40 percent through 79 percent of the day, and 13.4 percent were educated inside the regular classroom less than 40 percent of the day. Only 5.1 percent of students ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, were educated outside of the regular classroom in “other environments” (40th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2018, p. xxvii). With the legislative changes that have taken place and the increasing presence of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, it has become increasingly more important for educators and leaders to be on board with creating a successful inclusion program. Without the support of both leaders and principals, the success of inclusion will be severely inhibited.
The Teacher and Inclusion

Developing and implementing inclusive school programs is one of the most complex undertakings in schools today, and “the support of the teachers is crucial” (Waldron, 2002, p.66). As classrooms become more diverse, it is the role of the teacher to develop instruction that benefits and supports all students. The attitudes and beliefs that teachers and administrators hold toward inclusion influence the learning environment and the availability of equitable educational opportunities for all students. Research provides evidence that teachers' attitudes are crucial to the success of inclusion programs for children with special education needs (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Diken, 2006; Esposito, 2003). Positive attitudes toward students with disabilities and inclusion allows and encourages the establishment of policies that guarantee a Free and Appropriate Public Education is provided to students with disabilities (Alghazo, Dodeen & Algaryouti, 2003).

The successful implementation of inclusive education is dependent upon several factors, one of those being teacher beliefs about inclusion. Inclusion requires changes to the educational setting and presents challenges for the professionals who are responsible for implementing the practices in the general education classroom. Teachers are the key agents of change in inclusion. It is commonly accepted in inclusion literature that effective inclusion and teacher attitude are directly linked because what teachers do on a day-to-day basis makes a profound difference in the academic achievement of students who are placed in general education classrooms (Gaad, 2004). In order for inclusion to be effective, school personnel who are responsible for the successful implementation of inclusion must be open to the demands of working with a diverse group of students (Villa & Thousand, 2005). The degree to which a teacher believes in the philosophy of
inclusion and his/her ability to accommodate to meet the needs of included students impacts whether or not inclusion will be successful (Soodak, Podell & Lehman, 1998). Successful inclusion is dependent upon the teachers’ attitudes toward students with disabilities (Barker, 2000). Given that general education teachers are primarily responsible for students with disabilities who are placed in their classrooms, their attitudes and instructional choices are at the heart of a successful inclusion classroom (Hollander, 2004). Research clearly indicates that positive attitudes and beliefs regarding inclusion have a direct impact on student learning and the effectiveness of inclusion programs.

In order for teachers to be successful in implementing a successful inclusion program, not only do they need to have positive attitudes toward inclusion but they also need to be provided with the appropriate resources, be up to date with the best practices and be supported by administration. In a synthesis of the research literature, Bettini and colleagues (2016) found evidence that specific working conditions influence teachers’ instructional quality and student achievement, including (a) a school culture supporting high expectations and shared responsibility for student achievement, (b) administrative and collegial support that provides opportunities to collaborate with skilled colleagues to improve instruction, (c) useful and appropriate instructional materials, (d) appropriate instructional groupings, (e) adequate time for instruction, and (f) planning time to support improved practice. In order for teachers to provide successful inclusion for students with disabilities these working conditions must be met and implemented. When this is not the case, students with disabilities are being denied an appropriate education. In 2005 the Gaskin family, along with other families and self-advocacy groups filed a lawsuit on
behalf of “all school-age students with disabilities in Pennsylvania who have been denied a free appropriate education in regular education classrooms with individual supportive services, or have been placed in regular education classrooms without the supportive services, individualized instruction, and accommodations they need to succeed in the regular education classroom” (Public Interest Law Center, 2005). They sought to increase the number of children with disabilities educated with their non-disabled peers and to make sure schools provided real supports to ensure inclusion would work as required by the IDEA. The goal of these reforms are for local school districts to increase their capacity to provide supplementary aids and services in regular education classrooms that students with disabilities need to receive a meaningful benefit from education. These supports include specially designed instruction, related services, supplementary aids, staff training, and ongoing progress monitoring for special needs students (Rhen, 2005). In order for teachers to provide meaningful and successful instruction; they must be given the proper supports, professional development, and administrative guidance that values and promotes inclusion of all students. According to Sharpe and Hawes (2003), the greatest challenge to inclusion currently faced by general educators is maintaining high academic standards for all students while ensuring that the unique instructional needs of students with disabilities, as defined by their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), are being met. Teachers are the key to creating successful inclusion; therefore, administrators must support their teachers and continuously help them develop and grow so they can meet the needs of their students with special needs.

According to special and general education teachers, the degree of administrative support is a significant factor in teachers’ positive attitudes towards inclusion. Necessary
administrative support includes: 1) setting a vision, where there is a concern expressed, responsibility affirmed, and accountability accepted for all students; 2) organizing school in a way that supports and promotes effective inclusive education programs; and 3) providing financial resources to support inclusive classrooms (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). Another key component of a successful inclusion program is providing meaningful and appropriate professional development opportunities. True success of educators cannot be expected if teachers are not trained on various student needs, disabilities, special education law, and accommodations to help each student access the curriculum (Worrell, 2008). Recent studies on inclusion have included a focus on teachers' training of inclusion (Farley, 2002; Shier, 2002; White, 2007) and how the increase in training and professional development is directly related to the success of inclusion (LoVerde, 2007). If students are to be successful in inclusive settings, Vaidya (2000) asserts that they must receive the most recently recommended researched based practices of good teaching in which special and general educators continually collaborate and communicate with each other, each taking responsibility to provide a successful experience for the student.

In addition, teachers need to feel like they are a part of the decisions being made regarding inclusion and that they have the necessary support from administration in order to develop and implement successful instruction for a diverse classroom. Teachers are a key component in creating successful inclusion programs. A series of studies have indicated that schools that were successful in implementing inclusion programs had principals who employed collaborative decision making and shared a common vision of inclusion with their teachers (Salisbury, 2006). "Effective and meaningful collaboration is the glue that binds a successful inclusion program together" (Worrell, 2008, p. 46).
Collaborative professional development and having time for collaboration is another key component of a successful inclusion program. Teachers need to be provided with opportunities to work together as a team and learn from one another in order to best support students with diverse learning needs. The team may only consist of the special educators and general educators, or it may be as large as teachers and service providers. Fiori (2007) explained that a team of two or more persons should have specific goals and objectives that are the focus of the meetings and collaboration. Without proper training, professional development, and collaboration, a disservice is being done to the development of inclusion programs. Each of these pieces are needed for teachers to feel confident in their instruction and to be able to most effectively work together to meet the needs of all students. Friend and Cook's (2003) review of the research literature on collaboration between general and special education teachers working with students with disabilities is also useful. The results of the authors’ investigation imply that collaboration is a vehicle by which teachers can plan and carry out a variety of services for students with disabilities. Another study conducted by Voltz, Brazil, and Ford (2001), found that collaboration is an important element of shared responsibility for teaching students who are involved in inclusive education; general and special educators need to work together as a team to ensure that instructional strategies are employed. This collaboration should include regular dialogues on differentiating instruction through accommodations and adaptations for students, teaching strategies, and support for interpersonal and behavioral issues (Strosnider, Lyon, & Gartland, 1997). Hammond (2003) conducted a study investigating teacher attitudes toward inclusion. According to Hammond, the study also showed that teachers need adequate training, ongoing support
from administrators, and a voice in decision-making if inclusion is to be successful. Angelides (2004) emphasized the importance of collaboration between the regular and special educators, and how students with special needs "belong" to both teachers. With the absence of collaboration, the classroom can easily seem divided, as the students with special needs are placed solely under the instruction and watch of the special educator. In addition to the implementation of collaboration between or among educators, studies have shown that teachers are lacking enough time to collaborate, attend trainings, or plan (Mathis, 2007). Therefore, the administration needs to take into account the importance of this organizational support when schedules are being created. Support from administration is perhaps the most important factor when considering the success of the teachers in implementing successful inclusion. Principals set the vision of the school, create the culture, provide the necessary organizational support, and break down barriers to successful education of all students.

**The Principal and Inclusion**

Education research demonstrates that when most school variables are considered separately, they have, at most, small effects on learning and that the real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating these conditions under which successful inclusion can be achieved, is the job of the principal (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2). The job of principal continues to evolve and change over time. Prior to the 1970s, the principal’s job was primarily to be a building manager and student disciplinarian. Due to recent federal legislation, principals now play a critical role in developing and supporting inclusive schools that improve student outcomes for students
with disabilities (McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) and the latest reauthorizations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) expect that students with disabilities will be taught the same content and achieve the same mandated standards as all general education students. Although students with disabilities are being included to a greater extent (McLeskey, Landers, et al., 2012) and are making some improvements on state mandated tests (Thurlow, Quenemoen, & Lazarus, 2012), low levels of academic achievement and poor post-school outcomes for students with disabilities signal that more must be done to improve their learning opportunities (USDOE, 2013). Moreover, principals need to support general and special education teachers in developing more effective inclusive schools by increasing the use of evidence based practices that are effective in raising student achievement levels (Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Crockett, J. B. (2017). As research on effective schools continues to emerge, “principal functions were linked directly to student achievement,” (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003, p. 7) and principals were increasingly linked with terms like learning-communities, shared leadership, collaboration, and instructional leadership. Various research studies note that principals play a critical role in determining the success or failure of inclusion within schools. In an executive summary of a six-year research project on leadership, Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) found that, “leadership effects on student learning occur largely because leadership strengthens professional community; teachers’ engagement in professional community, in turn, fosters the use of instructional practices that are associated with student achievement” (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010, p. 10). Waters and Cameron (2007) conducted a meta-analysis focusing
on student achievement and leadership and found that “principal leadership is correlated with student achievement and that there were especially strong links between specific principal behaviors and student learning. One such behavior was the extent to which the principal “is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems” (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003, p. 4). Research has demonstrated that principals who focus on instructional issues, demonstrate administrative support for special education, and provide high-quality professional development for teachers produce enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities and for others at risk for school failure (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001). The school principal plays a critical role in shaping an educational climate that provides opportunities for interaction between non-disabled and disabled students.

A key component to building a successful inclusion program is providing meaningful and appropriate professional development to staff. Most general education teachers — about 70% — feel that they lack the expertise to address the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Waldron, 2011). McLesky and Waldron (2015) conducted a case study investigation of schools with successful inclusion programs to identify the factors crucial to developing and supporting effective inclusive schools. They found that in order for an effective inclusive school to be developed and maintained there must be a school-based system of learner-centered professional development to improve instruction. Such professional development was teacher-directed, involving collective participation, actively engaging teachers in learning opportunities for observation and opportunities for feedback and coaching. The researchers also found that inclusive
schools believed that providing a broad range of learner-centered professional
development tailored to individual teacher needs was one of their primary
responsibilities. Principals in high-performing schools actively participate in efforts to
promote teacher learning. “Instructional improvement requires continuous learning”
(Elmore, 2004, p. 67) and principals must “create the conditions that value learning as
both an individual and collective good” (Elmore, 2004, p. 67). Principals play a key role
in supporting and encouraging teachers’ professional development needs. Another
quantitative study conducted by Smith and Leonard (2005) found the necessity for
ongoing professional development and implementation of consistent practices by
administrators to oversee the strategies to make inclusion work. In another case study of
an effective inclusive United States school resulted in similar findings (McLeskey,
Waldron, & Redd, 2014) as the principal took on a leadership role in ensuring high
achievement expectations for all students and worked with teachers to provide the
necessary resources and improve teacher practice to ensure compliance.

Leaders also need to facilitate and create opportunities for collaboration and
planning time. Haager and Klingner (2005) identified collaboration as a key ingredient in
maintaining an inclusive community. Collaboration must take place between the staff,
administration, parents, and the community for successful inclusion of students with
disabilities (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). In the study mentioned previously, Smith and
Leonard (2005) also found successful collaboration not only involves collaboration
between the special and general education teachers but with the principal as well. Katz
and Sugden (2013) examined how one high school principal successfully implemented
inclusion. The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study; the findings indicated that
collaboration was one of the key components that made inclusion work in this case study. Teachers reported that collaboration increased their confidence and made them feel more prepared to provide (differentiated) instruction to both nondisabled and disabled students. Teachers also reported that the administrative support and focus on collaboration with the special education staff created a culture of acceptance and belonging.

Professional communities of teachers working in an environment of trust helps build teacher capacity because teachers learn together, address problems of practice, and share resources to enhance student learning (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). School leaders facilitate these relationships by working with teachers to establish expectations for collaboration and encourage teacher leadership. Professional learning communities (PLCs) allow special education teachers the opportunity to learn, plan, and teach together on grade-level teams with general educators and related service providers. Results of McLesky and Waldron’s (2015) case study also revealed that all the successful inclusive schools emphasized the collective participation of teachers in learning centered professional development but often as part of a professional learning community. Pierson and Howell (2013) described how principals helped with creating schedules to allow general and special education teachers to co-teach and plan weekly to jointly modify subject-specific pacing guides, curriculum, and common assessments to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

Not only do principals need to provide opportunities for collaboration and meaningful professional development; they need to work to break down barriers to special education and provide the necessary organizational support. To create opportunities for students with disabilities to learn in inclusive settings, principals must
work to confront barriers, such as resistance to inclusion, and facilitate the development of a collective sense of responsibility for students with disabilities, set high expectations for student achievement, and lead in ways that optimize instruction to improve outcomes.

Principal’s Role as a Change Agent

Inclusion is a reality of the 21st century and requires leadership that promotes the success of all students. Today, the emphasis on leadership is on activities that promote students’ learning by creating a learning culture and a strong instructional program (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Parker and Day (1997) note that inclusionary schools do not just happen, but rather they occur through purposeful leadership, creating a strong need for principals who are able to: clearly define and articulate a mission that incorporates the values of inclusion and inclusionary practices, foster a school climate in which all members share a clear understanding that the school stands for the success and achievement of all students, manage and coordinate resources for curriculum and instruction in ways that support inclusion, monitor and support each student’s development and progress, and model reflective practices and supervise teaching to continually encourage and strengthen the culture for inclusion of all (p. 83). The literature is indisputable about the importance of principal leadership for the success of each student, including those with disabilities and other struggling learners. The principal is critical to ensuring that schools are places for inclusive and effective student learning and engagement.

Leaders are the architects of individual and organizational improvement. Leaders must know what they value and lead accordingly. Educational leaders must navigate their schools and guide them in a positive direction, all while maintaining and building a
positive school culture. Fiori (2007) asserted that leadership cannot be done orally. Leaders need to lead by showing, and in doing so they are building the trust and confidence of the teachers they are supporting. Fiori stated, "Leaders cannot just state their beliefs and expect people to follow. Leadership is an art that requires them to work with their respective group and show them the importance of their message" (p. 239).

Without question the role of the principal continues to change. The profession of educational leadership has developed significantly. Research has helped develop a better understanding of how and in what ways effective leadership contributes to student achievement. A growing base of knowledge from both research and practice demonstrates that educational leaders influence student achievement through the creation of a challenging but also caring and supportive school culture conducive to each student’s learning. The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015) and Promoting Principal Leadership for the Success of Students with Disabilities (2015) were developed as a guiding force to provide district and school leaders guidelines to improve student achievement, meet new, higher expectations and provide actionable steps to promote practices and cultivate competencies for effective principal leadership under which each child has an equitable opportunity to succeed with a particular focus on students with disabilities. According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2015), perhaps no students benefit more from an effective principal than those with disabilities. When a principal cultivates a school environment where all students feel safe, supported, and included, students with disabilities and other struggling learners thrive. These standards set the stage for principals and provide them the guidance they need to be most
effective. Figure 2.1 demonstrates how the 10 domains exert a direct influence on student learning.

The ten domains include:

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
5. Community of Care and Support for Students
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
9. Operations and Management
10. School Improvement

Establishing an inclusive vision is critical in setting the direction for schools, providing a moral purpose, and serving as a catalyst for motivating teachers who support the vision and value this work (Fullan, 2007). Standard 1: Mission, Vision and Core Values states that “effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student” (PSEL, 2015). School administrators play a vital role in the process of fostering positive climates in schools that include students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Ball & Green, 2014). When principals lead schools where students feel safe, supported, and included, all students can learn and thrive—particularly
those with disabilities. Specifically, the CCSSO (2015) states, “Effective principals bring this mission and vision to life by working collaboratively with faculty to develop a shared understanding of and mutual commitment to mission, vision, and values, and to shape practice accordingly. The end goal is for principals to leverage this school-wide mission to create and lead environments where each child has an equal opportunity to succeed, and where the expectation is that students with disabilities will improve and succeed.”

The development of the Promoting Principal Leadership for the Success of Students with Disabilities (2015) demonstrates the significance and importance of principals recognizing the role they play as a change agent in creating a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for all students.

Figure 2.1: Relationship of School Leadership Work to Student Learning (PSEL, 2015)
The major function and continuing responsibility of school administrators is to “promote growth in student learning, manage their human capital, develop and support teachers, use data to drive student learning improvements, and build a culture of high expectations for the adults and students in the building” (Briggs, Cheney, Davis, & Moll, n.d., p. 15). Principals should strive to hire faculty who understand and can support an inclusive vision, have high expectations for students with disabilities, and view collaborative work as important to ensuring student success. At the same time, principals will likely need to work with current school staff to build commitment to an inclusive vision, establish a collaborative culture, and provide professional development opportunities to teach and practice effective instructional strategies. There is a general consensus among researchers that school leadership is arguably recognized as one of the most pivotal factors that determines the success or the failure of special education programs (Dyal & Flynt, 1996; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). As noted in implementing IDEA: A guide for principals (CEC & ILIAD, 2001), the principal’s values, beliefs, and personal characteristics inspire people to accomplish the school’s mission (p.19).

Principals’ attitudes toward inclusion were found to be a strong predictor of effective teaching (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Literature recognizes that principals provide many types of support as inclusive programs are developed and sustained (Salisbury, 2006). For example, they create and support relational networks that facilitate dialogue, build trust, and improve communication about effective ways to serve students (Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997).

Fullan (2003) identifies the principal of the future as the Cultural Change Principal. He or she must be attuned to the big picture, a sophisticated conceptual thinker
who transforms the organization through people and teams. In order to act as a change agent and move a school towards being an inclusive school, Cultural Change Principals must display palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope. In addition, five essential components characterize leaders in the knowledge society: moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to improve relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making. Probably the most important job of the school-based leader is to change the prevailing culture of a school (Barth, 2013). When transformational leaders see the need for change, they persuade key people in the organization of the seriousness of the need, involve key people in developing an inspiring vision of the future, and build commitment to the new vision (Ingram, 1997). The principal plays the most important role in creating an inclusive school culture and successful inclusion program for students with special needs. Bays and Crockett (2007) found that rural elementary principals dispersed the responsibility for special education among educators in the schools. This dispersion of responsibility generally weakened the instructional leadership for students with disabilities because the administration was minimally involved in the program planning for the special education students and had little interaction with their teachers (Bays & Crockett, 2007).

Research literature indicates that education stakeholder groups exhibit a wide range of opinions toward the placement of students with disabilities in general education classes. The way administration supports teachers of inclusion is a critical aspect of the program's success or failure (Griffin, 2007). The key to successful implementation of inclusion is active administrative support. Worrell (2008) explained the importance of administration as the backbone of the school that has the ability to empower the faculty.
"To implement an effective and successful co teaching model [or any inclusion model], it is crucial to have the support of administration" (Doran, 2008, p. 25). Attitudes drive what people do and how they perceive their responsibilities. Thus it is important to understand the attitudes of educators as they attempt to accommodate and serve the ever-growing numbers of students with disabilities who enter school.

Principals’ need to be aware of the critical role they play in the success of inclusion programs and work with staff to break down barriers, implement best practices, provide organizational supports, and, most importantly, be involved in creating the change needed to implement successful inclusion.

Summary

The research and literature states the importance of the role both teachers and principals play when it comes to implementing successful inclusion. While the importance of successful inclusion is evident, there is a gap in the literature that determines and defines the role of the principal in creating successful inclusion at the high school level. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature and promote conversations that need to take place amongst stakeholders to improve the success of inclusion at the high school level.
Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

This section presents the overall methodology and procedures that were used to examine the perceptions of both teachers and leaders in regards to the barriers, best practices, organizational structures, and the principal’s role as a change agent in creating a successful inclusion program. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the limited body of research conducted on the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program for students with special needs at the high school level. This chapter will describe the methods and procedures used in this study.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

1. Are there differences among principals, special education teachers, and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

   \[ H_0:1 \] Principals’, special education teachers’, and general education teachers’ perspectives of the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level will not vary significantly.

2. Are there differences among principals, special education teachers, and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the organizational factors that support the creation of a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

   \[ H_0:2 \] Principals’, special education teachers’, and general education teachers’ perspectives of organizational factors that support a successful inclusion program at the high school level will not vary significantly.
3. Are there differences among principals, special education teachers, and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of best practices to consider when creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?
Ho3: Principals’, special education teachers’, and general education teachers’ perspectives of best practices that support a successful inclusion program at the high school level will not vary significantly.

4. Are there differences among principals, special education teachers, and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the barriers that inhibit creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?
Ho4: Principals’, special education teachers’, and general education teachers’ perspectives of the barriers that inhibit a successful inclusion program at the high school level will not vary significantly.

**Research Design and Data Analysis**

This study used a non-experimental, quantitative research design. Descriptive data was collected from *Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire*. Principals, special education teachers, and general education teachers were asked to respond to a questionnaire that provided information on the perceptions of these three groups related to the four variables: (1) principal’s role in the inclusion process, (2) best practices in inclusion, (3) organizational supports, and (4) barriers to inclusion.

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance was estimated in order to determine if there were overall differences across the three groups. Each Dependent Variable was further analyzed by running four univariate ANOVAs.
Procedures for Collecting Data

In order to collect data for this study, the researcher first sought to gain permission from Superintendents from the 84 districts that had high-schools that follow the 9-12 model. Superintendents were sent an email containing a letter (Appendix C) detailing the purpose of the research, the method of data collection, and the requesting for their permission to allow the researcher to send surveys to high school principals and randomly selected teacher participants. The researcher gained permission to send surveys to 42 of the 84 school districts. The principals from the 42 schools were sent an email and letter (Appendix D) containing a description of the purpose of the research and a link to the Inclusion in the High School Principal Questionnaire on Survey Monkey. General education teachers and special education teachers were randomly selected from a generated list of teachers in each school. The selected teacher participants were sent an email and letter (Appendix E) containing a description of the purpose of the research and a link to the Inclusion in the High School Teacher Questionnaire on Survey Monkey. The surveys were sent to up to ten randomly selected members in both the English and Special Education departments; if the building had fewer than ten teachers in either department, it was sent to all the teachers in that department. All participants were provided with a number code to fill in at the start of the survey.

The researcher sent the survey to 391 general education teachers, 361 special education teachers and 42 principals. Table 3.1 shows the return rate after the initial and follow up requests and the percentage of principals and teachers who included their assigned number. The follow up requests were sent three weeks after the initial email was sent.
Table 3.1  
*Survey Response Rate*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Request/Group</th>
<th>General Education Teachers</th>
<th>Special Education Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>3.58%</td>
<td>4.98%</td>
<td>30.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up</td>
<td>8.95%</td>
<td>12.74%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All principal and teacher participants within the same school were assigned a number; this was intended to allow the researcher to code for each school district and measure the perceptions that existed within each building. Many participants and superintendents communicated their concerns to the researcher that filling out an assigned number would jeopardize the anonymity of the responses. The participants were assured that the responses are anonymous and that the identity of the participants will be protected. In addition, it should be noted that many concerns were expressed by superintendents with regards to external emails. There have been numerous concerns regarding cyber security and many school districts communicate to their staff the belief that external emails should not be opened. This may have had an impact on the number of responses obtained by the researcher. Data was collected from the survey responses and imported into SPSS.

**Sample and Population**

High schools include a variety of grade configurations, including but not limited to grades 7 through 12, 8 through 12, and 9 through 12. This study was limited to schools that followed the 9 through 12 grade model. The population of this study consisted of high schools following the 9-12 model in Nassau and Suffolk County, New York. Using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and entering grade span 9
through 12 and public schools as criteria, a list of 84 schools districts was generated (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

The participants of this study consisted of three groups of school employees, including 35 general education teachers, 46 special education teachers, and 33 principals from 42 public high schools in Suffolk and Nassau County, New York. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the demographic variables, gender, age, and years of teaching experiences (Table 3.2). Based on the demographic information provided in this study, the majority of principals were more likely to be male (n=33, 89.7%) and older than forty-six years of age (n=33, 66.6%) when compared to both general education and special education teachers. There were no significant differences across the three groups in years of teaching experience.
Table 3.2  
Demographic Characteristics by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education Teachers</th>
<th>Special Education Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ (df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Male</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.85(6)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-35</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;55</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of Teaching Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10.74(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p < .001.*


**Instruments**

_Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire (see Appendix B)_ is a teacher and principal survey that was utilized and slightly modified with permission from the researcher, Dr. Sherri Mitchel, who created the original instrument utilized in a previous study titled, _Moving a Middle School Towards Inclusion: The Principal’s Role in Leading the Change Process to Ensure Program Success_ (2006). Each questionnaire consists of two sections. The personal demographic section variables include gender, age, years of experience, and area of certification. The second section addresses four theoretical constructs that were developed from a review of the literature and formatted using a Likert-type scale response. Three of those constructs, (1) Principal’s Role, (2) Organizational Support and (3) Best Practices, prompt the response choices that include strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The fourth construct, Barriers, has respondents’ rate specific barriers to inclusion on a scale of one to ten, with ten being very high and one being very low. The researcher utilized the _Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire_ during a mini-study; the Cronbach’s alpha was a 0.904 indicating strong internal consistency.
Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to consider the perceptions of the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level from the perspectives of principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. Best practices for inclusion, barriers and supports for inclusion, and the principal’s role in inclusion were investigated.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the four dependent variables by group (Table 4.1). The mean scores and standard deviations for both general education teachers and special education teachers were closer than the principal group with regards to Principal’s Role and Organizational Factors. The mean score for the dependent variable, Principal’s Role was calculated; general education teachers $M = 2.80$ ($SD = 0.62$), special education teachers $M = 2.91$ ($SD = 0.63$), principals $M = 3.53$ ($SD = 0.27$). The mean score for the dependent variable, Organizational Factors was calculated; general education teachers $M = 2.62$ ($SD = 0.56$), special education teachers $M = 2.69$ ($SD = 0.59$), principals $M = 3.12$ ($SD = 0.45$). There was less variability for the mean and standard deviations for the dependent variables, best practices and barriers. The mean score for the dependent variable, Best Practices was calculated; general education teachers $M = 3.37$ ($SD = 0.34$), special education teachers $M = 3.39$ ($SD = 0.37$), principals $M = 3.38$ ($SD = 0.33$).
Table 4.1  
*Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables by Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education Teachers</th>
<th>Special Education Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>M</em></td>
<td><em>SD</em></td>
<td><em>M</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal’s Role</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Factors</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Practices</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.*

As demonstrated in Table 4.2 there were sizable correlations among the dependent variables. The results of a Pearson correlation indicate a statistically significant relationship between principal’s role and organizational factors (*r* = .83, *p* = .001), principal’s role and best practices (*r* = .29, *p* = .01), principal’s role and barriers (*r* = .47, *p* = .001), best practices and organizational factors (*r* = .32, *p* = .01), principal’s role and best practices (*r* = .29, *p* = .01), organizational factors and barriers (*r* = .48, *p* = .001), and best practices and barriers (*r* = .23, *p* = .05). Further analysis was conducted to determine the differences among the three groups with regards to the dependent variables.
A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed in order to determine if there were overall differences across the three groups (i.e., principals, general education teachers, special education teachers) on the four dependent variables (principal’s role, organizational supports, best practices, and barriers) as a whole.

The results of the MANOVA were statistically significant, indicating that there were differences across the three groups (i.e., principals, general education teachers, special education teachers) in at least one of the dependent variables (principal’s role, organizational supports, best practices, and barriers). The MANOVA results revealed significant differences across the dependent variables, Wilks’ Lambda $F (8, 216) = 4.739$, $p < .001$. As the MANOVA was statistically significant, it was necessary to conduct follow-up univariate analyses to determine on which dependent variable(s) the groups differed. Four separate univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted, corresponding to the four main research questions in this study, to determine if there was a significant group difference for each dependent variable.
**Research Question 1:** Are there differences among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

The results of the ANOVA for dependent variable one (Table 4.3) revealed that the three groups (i.e., principals, general education teachers, special education teachers) differed significantly with regards to principal’s role, $F(2,111)=17.335, p <.001$. Thus, the null hypothesis for question one was rejected. A Tukey pair-wise, post hoc analysis was conducted to investigate which of the group means differed. Regarding the perceptions of the principal’s role, the analyses revealed that principals differed from both general education teachers (mean difference = 0.7285, $p < .001$) and special education teachers (mean difference = 0.6183, $p < .001$). However, general education teachers and special education teachers did not differ from one another on this dependent variable (mean difference = 0.1102, $p = .65$).

**Table 4.3**
*Follow-up One-Way ANOVA Results: Dependent Variable One*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>10.638</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.319</td>
<td>17.335</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>34.057</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.307</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>474.548</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a further analysis, the total of responses for strongly agreed and agreed were combined and the responses for strongly disagree and disagree were combined to test for differences between principals, general education and special education teachers on each item, as shown in Table 4.4. With very few exceptions, the principals in the current study felt that they provide resources that support inclusion, address barriers to inclusion, support collaboration between general education and special education teachers, provide leadership based on an inclusive vision of the school and have the necessary skills to support inclusion within the general education classroom. However, the teachers did not agree so strongly about the effective performance of their principals.

Although both groups of teachers indicate that their principal “clearly supports inclusion and inclusionary practices” (80% general education and 91% special education), other statements with which they are less agreeable seem to contradict the principals’ support. For instance, there were more disagree markings by both groups of teachers for the principal “provides leadership based on an inclusive vision for the school,” “addresses barriers that may inhibit inclusive learning,” and “provides resources that support inclusion.”
Table 4.4
Principal’s Role Questions – Agreement Levels by Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education Teachers</th>
<th>Special Education Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>$\chi^2$(df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA/A</td>
<td>SD/D</td>
<td>SA/A</td>
<td>SD/D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My principal clearly supports inclusion and inclusionary best practices</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My principal fosters a school climate that supports the success and achievement for all students.</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My principal provides resources that support inclusion.</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My principal monitors and supports all student development and progress.</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My principal has the basic knowledge of special education and special education laws necessary to facilitate effective instruction.</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My principal maintains a discipline program that</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < 0.05$  
** $p < 0.01$
effectively addresses special education students’ behaviors.

7. My principal addresses barriers that may inhibit inclusive learning communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. My principal supports collaboration between general and special education teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. My principal provides leadership based on an inclusive vision for the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. My principal has the skills necessary to support inclusion within the general education classrooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SA/A = Strongly Agree or Agree percentage; SD/D = Strongly Disagree or Disagree percentage. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p < .001.

**Research Question 2:** Are there differences among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the organizational factors that support creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?
Principals, general education teachers, special education teachers differed significantly with regards to organizational support, $F(2,111)= 8.122, p < .001$ (Table 4.5). Thus, the null hypothesis for question two was rejected. A Tukey pair-wise, post hoc analysis was conducted to investigate which of the group means differed. Similarly to the findings for principal’s role, the analyses revealed that principals differed from both general education teachers (mean difference = 0.4965, $p < .001$) and special education teachers (mean difference = 0.4197, $p < .001$). However, general education teachers and special education teachers did not differ from one another on this dependent variable (mean difference = 0.0768, $p = .809$)

Table 4.5  
Follow-up One-Way ANOVA Results: Dependent Variable Two  
DV2: Organizational Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>4.926</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.463</td>
<td>8.122</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>33.661</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.303</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>592.801</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing the individual items (Table 4.6), principals perceived themselves as creating an environment where their school can overcome obstacles to inclusion, which includes general education and special education teachers in planning and decision making in regards to special education, that provides support for teachers to make inclusion more successful and that encourages on-going communication about inclusion in our school. Teachers were less likely to agree, indicating that they do not perceive their
school as being as supportive of inclusion. All three groups were less likely to agree that there school provides professional development that supports inclusion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.6</th>
<th>General Education Teachers</th>
<th>Special Education Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>$\chi^2$(df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA/ A</td>
<td>SD/ D</td>
<td>SA/ A</td>
<td>SD/ D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My school values inclusion.</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My school has the capacity to overcome most obstacles to inclusion.</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My school has a faculty that values and uses collaboration.</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My school provides staff development that supports inclusion.</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My school includes general education and special education teachers in planning and decision making in regards to special education.</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My school provides support for teachers to make inclusion more successful.</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My school encourages ongoing communication about inclusion in our school.</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: SA/A = Strongly Agree or Agree percentage; SD/D = Strongly Disagree or Disagree percentage. *$p$<.05, **$p$<.01, ***$p$ < .001.
Research Question 3: Are there differences among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of best practices to consider when creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

Results of the ANOVA for best practices (Table 4.7) revealed that the groups did not differ significantly, \( F(2,111)= 0.012, \ p = .987 \). The null hypothesis for Question 3 therefore failed to be rejected; all three groups are in agreement regarding best practices for successful inclusion. While this research question did not produce significant differences with regards to best practices to consider when creating a successful inclusion program; it provides important information regarding best practices to successful inclusion. All three groups were in some agreement with what components of a successful inclusion program are needed; such as on-going collaboration, the principal clearly communicating the importance of inclusion, and a continuum of services being available.

Table 4.7
*Follow-up One-Way ANOVA Results: Dependent Variable Three*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>13.790</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>313.472</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Research Question 4:** Are there differences among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to their perspectives of the barriers that inhibit creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level?

Results of the ANOVA for barriers (Table 4.8) revealed that the groups did not differ significantly, $F(2,111)= 2.63, p= .007$. Thus, the null hypothesis for question four failed to be rejected; all three groups are in agreement regarding the barriers that inhibit the creation of successful inclusion.

Table 4.8  
*Follow-up One-Way ANOVA Results: Dependent Variable Four*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Membership</td>
<td>15.673</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.837</td>
<td>2.630</td>
<td>.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>330.791</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>2.980</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4165.491</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the research data that were secured through a questionnaire entitled *Inclusion in the High School*. The results were compiled from the 112 responses generated from the surveys that were sent to high school principals, special education teachers and general education teachers in Nassau and Suffolk County, New York.
The data gathered in this study were analyzed to determine if there is a difference among principals, special education teachers and general education teachers with regard to best practices for inclusion, barriers and supports to inclusion, and the principal’s role as change agent when moving a high school towards inclusion. Because there was no significant difference in the responses of the three groups regarding best practices and barriers, the null hypotheses for research question three and four failed to be rejected, which means all three groups are in some agreement as to what best practices and barriers that inhibit inclusion are. Because there were significant differences in the responses of the three groups regarding the principals’ role and organizational support, the null hypotheses for research questions one and two were rejected. The three groups were not in agreement as to the principal’s role and organizational support. It was determined that the general and special education teachers were in more agreement with each other than either was with the principals. A discussion of the significance and implications of these findings will be presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

Discussion

Implications of Findings

Changes in legislation and policy mandates have provided opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated in general education classrooms with their nondisabled peers (Lashey, 2007; NCLB, 2001). These opportunities have placed additional responsibilities on school principals as they administer special education programs relative to inclusion (Praisner, 2003.) The primary purpose of the study was to consider inclusion of high school special education students in regular classrooms from the perspectives of principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers.

The research in the study indicates that the principal’s perceptions of his or her role as a change agent in the inclusion process do not align with teacher perceptions. While teachers believed that principals support inclusion and best inclusionary practices, they did not feel that principals play as strong of a role in creating an environment that promotes success of all students. When we examine the differences in perceptions with an organizational culture lens, it highlights the importance of leaders needing to be aware of the underlying current of their building and recognizing the artifacts and vision that needs to be clearly communicated to all staff and students. The underlying assumption is that principals do in fact support inclusion; however, there are many key elements that a successful inclusion program requires and principals and teachers perceptions do not align regarding how effectively they are being provided and implemented. While principals tend to strongly agree/agree that they are doing their part in playing a vital role in supporting inclusion, teachers did not agree as strongly with regards to the principal’s
role in (1) providing resources that support inclusion, (2) monitoring and supporting all student development and progress, (3) having the knowledge of special education laws necessary to facilitate successful inclusion, (4) maintaining an effective discipline program that addresses special education students’ behaviors, (5) addressing barriers that may inhibit inclusive learning, (6) supporting collaboration between general education and special education teachers, (7) providing leadership based on an inclusive vision for the school and (8) having the skills necessary to support inclusion within general education classrooms.

When evaluating the variance in perceptions among the three groups using the Conceptual Framework- Levels of a Successful Inclusion Program, it is suspected that key components to a successful inclusion program could be improved upon at the high school level. In order to successfully create a positive culture that supports inclusion, leaders should be aware of the three levels of culture (Shein, 2010) and continuously work towards creating and maintaining that organizational culture. Developing a healthy school culture is probably the most important job of a school leader. Roland Barth (2013) states that ultimately a school’s culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department of education, the superintendent, or the school board. As a school leader it is essential that one is committed to holding high standards and success for every child and is building a culture where all staff members understand that their goal is to help all students be successful. In order to do so this requires leaders to be self-aware. Research has demonstrated that being self-aware is one of the key factors in being a successful leader. Being self-aware is empowering because it makes
leaders more knowledgeable and enables them to make better decisions and choices when leading their team.

The first level of the conceptual framework is the characteristics of the organization which can be easily seen, heard, and felt by an individual; these are collectively known as artifacts. According to the research conducted in this study, principal and teacher perceptions did not align regarding certain artifacts being implemented or provided at the high school level that support inclusion. These included appropriate professional development for the staff, resources that support inclusion, planning time to support collaboration, and support for teachers to make inclusion more successful. Leaders must build the professional capital of their team. In order to do so leaders must be providing support for teachers to make inclusion more successful. In this study although 90% of principals strongly agreed/agreed that they were supporting their staff, only 40% of general education teacher and 56% of special education teachers believed their school provides this support. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (2012), professional capital is made up of three types of capital: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. The development of professional capital is a quest for a new “social cure” and will help transform teaching in every school. Culture shapes the experience that students and staff are likely to have in a school; Fullan and Hargreaves state that we must take a look at changing culture and developing professional capital so the school systems will flourish. They refer to “re-culturing” as how to re-culture the professional relationships of a school or a district in order to improve what educators do there. This can be achieved by providing appropriate professional development and providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate and work together. It is essential to create a
culture in which teachers are working together, learning from one another, pushing each other, and acting as a team. Peer coaching, mentoring, and professional learning communities bring teachers together and open up new possibilities. When teachers are working together, the chances for increasing professional capital significantly increases. Building a collaborative culture in school will increase professional capital and improve the inclusionary practices within the school. In this study only 66% of principals, 54% of special education teachers and 42% of general education teachers strongly agreed/agreed that they were providing professional development that supports inclusion. As demonstrated in the review of literature, collaboration and professional development are key components to successful inclusion. The data indicates that there needs to be a focus on providing more opportunities for professional growth. As supported by the Professional Leadership Standards (2015), it is critical to help staff to continuously grow and improve so they can provide the best services and meet the needs of all their students. This also includes providing resources and supports to inclusion. If teachers perceive their leader is not providing these elements, it can translate in their teaching methods and overall effectiveness, therefore, impacting the education of their students. This information is valuable to leaders; they can re-evaluate the artifacts that may be missing in their schools and work towards reshaping and building upon this level of culture.

The next level, according to Schein (2010) is the values of the employees; in this research study would include the values of the teachers and the principals. The values of the individuals working in the organization play an important role in deciding the make-up of the organizational culture and have a deep impact on how the organization is perceived. Espoused values of a successful inclusion program include an inclusive vision,
addressing barriers that may inhibit successful inclusion, ongoing collaboration, a continuum of services, and the involvement of all stakeholders in decision making. The research in this study indicates that teachers’ and principals’ perceptions do not align regarding the espoused values or the organizational supports necessary for successful inclusion. Current research and literature indicates that educators have come to recognize that the culture of a building has an important impact on student achievement. Setting a vision and motivating staff to continuously work together to achieve it is a priority. In order to achieve this mission and encourage your staff to promote successful inclusion, ongoing conversations need to take place. Missions cannot be achieved if no one is communicating about how to get there. Missions and visions are important and it is essential that principals have the language to describe where they are going.

In addition to establishing the vision, in order to achieve it, leaders must work to break down barriers that may prevent their staff from achieving their goal. The results of this study indicate that teachers perceived principals as not addressing barriers to successful inclusion. In this study, 90% of principals believed that their school encourages ongoing communication about inclusion; however, nearly half of the teachers agreed. In order to achieve successful inclusion, ongoing communication needs to take place. According to Barth (2013), leaders of a school need to identify and become aware of the culture that exists and they need to be ready to identify and face the “non-discussables.” Non-discussables are subjects that are significantly important and are talked about frequently but are so loaded with anxiety and fear that these conversations take place behind closed doors. In order to achieve successful inclusion, leaders are required to identify and address barriers to inclusion, talk about the non-discussables and
be prepared to replace the existing unhealthy components with positive supports and organizational factors that support inclusion. According to this study, one hundred percent of teachers and principals believed that collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers is necessary; however, perceptions did not align with regards to how collaboration is supported. This may indicate that principals are not breaking down barriers to provide common planning time and more opportunities for collaboration. While it appears collaboration among teachers and principals is an espoused value, organizational supports must be put into place to foster an environment that promotes and allows for collaboration to occur. In addition, principals need to recognize that literature supports the need to create teacher as leaders. Roland Barth indicates that teacher leadership is one of the most powerful tools in promoting profound levels of learning in a school. He states, “not only should principals support teacher learning and collaboration, but also empower and motivate all teachers to take on leadership and learning roles” (2013). Therefore, it is essential for both general education teachers and special education teachers to be involved in decision making. In this study 81% of principals believed that they include both general education and special education teachers in decision making; however, only 61% of special education teachers and 48% of general education teachers agreed. In order to create teacher leaders they must be involved in the conversations and decisions being made regarding inclusion. This is an espoused value that should be a part of every inclusion program. Not only will building teacher leadership benefit inclusion programs, but having a voice and a choice motivates people and increases buy-in.
The third level is the assumed values of the employees; while these cannot be measured, they make a difference in the culture of the organization. For a successful inclusion program this would include the belief that leaders support inclusion and value and create a climate that fosters support for all students. This study reveals that there were significant differences in perceptions of the principal’s role in supporting inclusion. Principals tended to strongly agree/agree that they were playing an active role in inclusion; however, teacher perceptions did not always align. Research demonstrates the importance of the principals in setting the tone and vision for inclusive schools. In order to successful achieve this, leaders need to be self-aware throughout the process. As leaders they have the ability to influence, motivate and inspire staff to have a positive attitude towards working with all students; especially students’ with special needs (Aincow & Sandhill, 2010). They have the ability to cultivate a culture that supports inclusion by addressing barriers and providing the necessary supports. While these assumptions cannot be directly measured, the variance in perceptions indicates that more conversations, collaboration and work need to be done in order to improve the success of inclusion at the high school level.

It is clear that supporting a successful inclusion program can be a challenging task. The results of this study illuminate the difficulties and challenges that may be faced when supporting and creating successful inclusion, whether real or simply perceived. For principals and teachers to have a better understanding of how the other perceives what is happening and to create change, conversations need to be taking place.
**Relationship to Prior Literature**

Prior literature emphasizes the role of the principal in creating successful inclusion; however, there is limited research on the importance of the principal’s role as a change agent in creating a successful inclusion program at the high school level. Research demonstrates the importance of the principal’s role in creating an environment where every student succeeds and the need for principals to provide opportunities for inclusion. A common belief in support of inclusion efforts was cited as significant to the success of inclusion for students with disabilities and supported by studies (DiPaola et al., 2003; DiPaola, et al., 2004; and Lillie & Lesane, 1992). Salisbury and McGregor (2002) found effective leaders for inclusion advocate for inclusive practices within their schools. Other authors (DiPaola, et al., 2004) found effective leaders of inclusion efforts understand the total school context and promote an inclusive school culture. Billingsley, et al. (1993) cited the ability to ensure inclusion opportunities for students as necessary to the success of students with disabilities. It is evident that principal support is essential to successful inclusion; however, more research needed to be conducted at the high school level.

This study demonstrated that while principals believed they support inclusion and are active in creating a successful inclusion program, the perceptions of the teaching staff were different in regards to the principal’s role as a change agent and the organizational factors that support inclusion. Changing a school to inclusive school practices often means changing the way the entire organization and its members view education. Inclusion necessitates a collaborative effort between both special education and regular education teachers, which, though working in the same buildings, in many instances,
considered themselves worlds apart. Teachers working alone cannot achieve successful inclusion. Literature demonstrates the value of collaboration and the importance of teachers having opportunities to work together and become members of a team. In order for principal’s to engage in better self-reflection and be more aware of teacher and student needs with regards to inclusion, more conversations should be taking place and opportunities for feedback should occur.

This research supports the findings of previous research. Meeting the needs of special education students in an inclusive setting requires ongoing collaboration between all stakeholders. The principals’ and teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and about meeting the needs of all students are critical to the creation of a successful inclusion program. The changes to inclusion place principals in a role in which they are responsible by federal law for the success of all students. High school principals, charged with leading the move to inclusion, must be aware of and understand how important their role really is. The principals’ leadership and support is a key element to building and maintaining successful inclusion programs. The principal must help the organization move towards its vision of creating successful inclusion for all students.

Limitations of Study

This study was limited by several factors. First, this study was limited to high schools in the Nassau and Suffolk County, New York region and to those high schools with a 9-12 grade configuration. Therefore, the results may not be fairly generalized to school districts in other geographic regions or with different grade configurations. The collected data was limited by the number of superintendents who gave permission to send
the survey to principal and teacher participants in their school district. Out of the 84 districts, approximately half of the superintendents gave permission. Many demonstrated concerns regarding the authenticity of online surveys and the threat they may pose to internet security.

Another limitation of this study may result from response bias. This study did not measure for the differences in perceptions within each building. While the researcher attempted to control for this bias by coding for school; many participants did not feel comfortable filling in the school code. Further research may want to consider perceptions that exist within buildings.

The study is further limited by the very nature of the topic of inclusion. The teaching profession is based on always doing what is best for students; therefore, teachers and administrators may be hesitant or reluctant to respond to questions in a way that might be thought of as negative or uncaring when it comes to supporting students with special needs. Though there were many potential limitations in this study, there is also the possibility that the results produced significant findings that can contribute to improving existing practices and the future practice of creating and maintaining successful inclusion programs.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research should target high schools that have successfully created effective inclusion. Schools that have successfully increased their special education students’ test scores through inclusion programs could be targeted. A case study approach might be an effective means of gathering the information necessary to improve inclusion
at the high school level. There are high school principals who are supporting all students and experiencing success with inclusion; a qualitative study may give us more insight into how they achieve their success. Future research may also want to consider the perspectives from stakeholders such as, students and parents.

Future research which focuses on high school principals leading inclusive schools and demonstrating high academic achievement for students with disabilities should be pursued through both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this study, high school principals perceived themselves as playing an active role in supporting inclusion. It would be interesting to examine the knowledge, coursework, training and experience of high school principals with regards to special education and how this impacts staff perceptions on the success of their inclusion practices and methods.

**Recommendations for Future Practice**

Effective inclusion does not just happen. This study supports the notion that conversations among stakeholders need to take place, as communication and collaboration are essential components of successful inclusion. Based on this study’s findings, there are important steps principals can follow to improve inclusion at the high school level.

1. Maintain and encourage on-going conversations with general education teachers and special education teachers.
2. Work with teachers to create an inclusive vision for the school.
3. Ensure teachers get ongoing professional development and support to achieve that vision. Monitor and evaluate professional development being provided.
4. Provide and schedule general education teachers and special education teachers with the necessary common planning time.

5. Monitor and assess constantly by being present in inclusive classrooms.

6. Empower and support the staff.

The principal is a key component in determining the culture of a school and the success of the inclusion program. He or she carries immense responsibility in the creation of an environment in which all students can be successful. Engaging in deeper self-reflection and as a leader being willing to have meaningful conversation, has the potential to have a truly positive impact on inclusion of students with special needs.

This study also has implications for positive social justice for students with disabilities and the school administrators who are responsible for ensuring equitable education to all students. Students with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive setting. As the instructional and cultural leaders of a school, principals set the tone for acceptance and inclusion.
References


Free Appropriate Public Education under Section 504. (n.d.). Retrieved March 8, 2019, from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html


Dear Kathryn Duggan:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRINCIPAL’S ROLE IN CREATING A SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION PROGRAM AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL.

Decision: Exempt

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data needs to be discarded.

Selected Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.
Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator
Appendix B
Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire

Principal Survey- Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire

Please respond to the items throughout this survey. All responses will be kept anonymous.

Gender: Male _______ Female: __________

Age: 22-35 _______ 36-45 _______ 46-55 _______ >55 ______

Area(s) of Teaching Certification: Special Education _______ Other ______

Years of Teaching Experience: <5 _____ 5-10 _____ 11-15 ____ 16-20 ____ >20 _____

Years as Principal (including assistant): <5 ___ 5-10 ___ 11-15 ___ 16-20 ___ >20 ___

Years as Principal in Current School: <5 ___ 5-10 ___ 11-15 ___ 16-20 ___ >20 ___

Have you Participated in training (other than college course work) related to educating students with disabilities? Yes ______ No ______

My level of special education expertise is: none ___ minimal ___ adequate ____ high _____

For the purpose of this survey inclusion is defined as the provision of services to students with disabilities in age-appropriate regular education classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal’s Role</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. As a Principal I clearly support inclusion and inclusionary best practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Foster a school climate that supports the success and achievement for all students.</td>
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<td>3. Provide resources that support inclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Monitor and support all student development and progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Have the basic knowledge of special education and special education laws necessary to facilitate effective instruction.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6 maintain a discipline program that effectively addresses special education students’ behaviors.

7 address barriers that may inhibit inclusive learning communities.

8 support collaboration between regular and special education teachers.

9 provide leadership based on an inclusive vision for the school.

10 have the skills necessary to support inclusion within the regular education classrooms.

Principal Survey: Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Support</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>My school values inclusion.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Best Practices</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All special needs students, regardless of their disability, should be included in the regular classroom.</td>
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should be used when implementing inclusion.

22 The format of a school’s inclusive program should be based upon that individual school’s specific factors.

23 Students with severe disabilities require various levels of self-contained programs, so a continuum of services should be available.

24 The principal is the change agent and should be responsible for leading the school towards inclusion- "the buck stops with the principal."

**Principal Survey: Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire continued.**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Not enough staff to provide an adequate inclusion program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Negative attitude of staff towards inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Not enough funding/money to support inclusion.</td>
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<td>B4</td>
<td>Not enough collaboration time between regular education and special education teachers.</td>
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<td>Not enough professional development to help faculty understand and implement best inclusionary practices.</td>
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<td>B7</td>
<td>Regular education teachers’ limited knowledge of and/or use of effective instructional strategies.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10</td>
<td>Lack of administration’s active and supportive role in inclusion.</td>
</tr>
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*Thank you for completing this survey.*
Teacher Survey- Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire

Please respond to the items throughout this survey. All responses will be kept anonymous.

Gender:  Male _______ Female: ____________

Age:  22-35 _______ 36-45 _______ 46-55 _______ >55 _______

Area(s) of Teaching Certification: Special Education ___________ Other __________

Years of Teaching Experience: <5 _____ 5-10 _____ 11-15 ____ 16-20 _____ >20 _____

Regular Education Teacher Only:  Grade(s) _______ Subject(s) _______________________

Are special education students included in any of your regular classes? Yes ____ No ____

If yes, is there a paraprofessional in the class? Yes _____ No ______
Is there a special education teacher in the class? Yes ______ No ______
My level of special education expertise is: none ____ minimal ____ adequate ____ high _____

Special Education Teacher Only: Grade(s) _______ SPED Area(s): ____________________

Do you teach self-contained classes? Yes _____ No _____
Do you co-teach in general education classes? Yes _____ No _____
Do you “assist” in general education classrooms? Yes _____ No _____

For the purpose of this survey inclusion is defined as the provision of services to students with disabilities in age-appropriate regular education classes.

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Thank you for completing this survey.
Dear Superintendent,

My name is Kathryn Duggan. I am a speech therapist at Great Neck North High School in Great Neck, New York, and also a doctoral student at St. John’s University. I am in the process of completing my research on “Perceptions of the Principal’s Role in Creating a Successful Inclusion Program at the High School Level.” The purpose of the study is to learn more about the inclusion of high school special education students in regular education classrooms from the perspectives of principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. From these perspectives, best practices for inclusion, supports and barriers to inclusion, and the principal’s role as a change agent when implementing inclusion will be investigated.

If you agree to allow your district to participate in this study please respond to the email that was sent to you. If you choose to provide your consent, principals and randomly chosen teacher participants will be sent the Inclusion in the High School Questionnaire. This questionnaire is anonymous and should take no more than 5 to 10 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will ask them about their background in education and about their perceptions of best practices for inclusion, supports and barriers to inclusion, and the principal’s role in creating a successful inclusion program. Participation in this study is voluntary, and all responses on the survey will remain confidential.

If you have any questions regarding the study please feel free to contact me. My school telephone number is 516-441-4757, and my email address is
kathryn.duggan17@stjohns.edu. Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley, my dissertation supervisor, may also be contacted at freeleym@stjohns.edu or at St. John’s University at (718-990-5537). If you have any questions about rights as a research subject, you may contact the St. John’s University Institutional Review Board by telephone at (718) 990-1440, or by email at irbstjohns@stjohns.edu.

Following completion of this research project, I would be pleased to share the findings with you. Please email me to request the findings. I want to thank you in advance for your help and timely response to this survey. Your participation is important to the overall success of this project.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Duggan
Appendix D
Letter to Principals

Dear Principal:

My name is Kathryn Duggan. I am a speech therapist at Great Neck North High School in Great Neck, New York, and also a doctoral student at St. John’s University. I am in the process of completing my research on “Perceptions of the Principal’s Role in Creating a Successful Inclusion Program at the High School Level.” The purpose of the study is to learn more about the inclusion of high school special education students in regular education classrooms from the perspectives of principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. From these perspectives, best practices for inclusion, supports and barriers to inclusion, and the principal’s role as a change agent when implementing inclusion will be investigated.

This questionnaire is anonymous and should take no more than 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is voluntary, and all responses on the survey will remain confidential. By completing the Principal Survey of short responses and completing a brief demographics page, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

If you have any questions regarding the study please feel free to contact me. My school telephone number is 516-441-4757, and my email address is kathryn.duggan17@stjohns.edu. Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley, my dissertation supervisor, may also be contacted at freeleym@stjohns.edu or at St. John’s University at (718-990-5537). If you have any questions about rights as a research subject, you may contact the St.
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Sincerely,
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Appendix E
Letter to Teachers

Dear Teacher,

My name is Kathryn Duggan. I am a speech therapist at Great Neck North High School in Great Neck, New York, and also a doctoral student at St. John’s University. I am in the process of completing my research on “Perceptions of the Principal’s Role in Creating a Successful Inclusion Program at the High School Level.” The purpose of the study is to learn more about the inclusion of high school special education students in regular education classrooms from the perspectives of principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. From these perspectives, best practices for inclusion, supports and barriers to inclusion, and the principal’s role as a change agent when implementing inclusion will be investigated.

This questionnaire is anonymous and should take no more than 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is voluntary, and all responses on the survey will remain confidential. By completing the Teacher Survey, of short responses and completing a brief demographics page, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

If you have any questions regarding the items on the survey or the purpose of the study, please feel free to contact me. My school telephone number is 516-441-4757, and my email address is kathryn.duggan17@stjohns.edu. Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley, my dissertation supervisor, may also be contacted at freeleym@stjohns.edu. If you have any questions
about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the St. John’s University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by email at irbstjohns@stjohns.edu or by phone; 718-990-1440.

Following completion of this research project, I would be pleased to share the findings with you. Please email me to request the findings. I want to thank you in advance for your help and timely response to this survey. Your participation is important to the overall success of this project.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Duggan
Vita

Name
Kathryn Duggan

Baccalaureate Degree
Bachelor of Science, Geneseo University,
Geneseo, NY
Major: Speech and Hearing Handicapped

Date Graduated
December 2010

Other Degrees and Certificates
Master of Science, Touro College
Bayshore, New York
Major: Special Education

Date Graduated
May 2014

Advanced Certificate, Educational
Leadership, LIU Post
Brookville, New York
Major: Educational Leadership

Date Graduated
May 2016