Attitudes of Special Education Directors Toward Inclusion/Least Restrictive Environment For Preschool Students with Disabilities

Ruth Schuster
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ATTITUDES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS TOWARD INCLUSION/LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR PRESCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

BY

RUTH SCHUSTER

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Education
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OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, Ruth Schuster, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Spring Semester 2008.

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ABSTRACT

ATTITUDES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS TOWARD INCLUSION/LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR PRESCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The purpose of this study was to investigate attitudes of Special Education Directors/Supervisors in New Jersey Elementary Public School Districts toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. The researcher assessed whether significant relationships exist between the attitudes of Special Education Directors and the following demographic factors: socio-economic factor grouping, years of experience, litigation within the district, receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid and percentage of preschool students with disabilities included in general education in the district. Federal law (IDEA) and New Jersey Administrative Code require students be provided a “free and appropriate education” in the “least restrictive environment.” Students with disabilities should be educated with typically developing peers, unless the student’s Individualized Educational Plan demonstrates a more restrictive program is required. Comparison of federal and New Jersey special education data indicates that while school-aged students with disabilities have been included at a rate comparable to the national average, preschool students with disabilities have been included at a rate of thirty percent compared with the national average of forty-two percent. Unlike developing inclusive programs for school-aged children in public schools where general education is mandated and classes are readily available, only twenty-five percent of the state’s poorest districts
are mandated to provide public early childhood programs. For remaining districts, general education for preschool students is offered at the discretion of the district, often the result of special rather than general education mandates. This study employed quantitative survey analysis and qualitative and qualitative interview analysis. Consent requests were mailed to 282 Superintendents; based on their responses, surveys/informed consents were mailed to eighty-two Special Education Directors. Survey response rate was eighty-four percent (sixty-nine completed surveys). Eight Directors, selected from twenty-three volunteers across New Jersey were chosen for telephone interviews. Although the researcher was unable to conclude that director's attitudes were significantly related to any of the predetermined variables (socioeconomic state, director's experience, litigation experience, Early Childhood Program Funds, or percentage of preschool inclusion in the district), valuable information was reported regarding director's attitudes, the status of preschool inclusion and barriers to implementation.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Bear in mind that the wonderful things you learn in your schools (and in your life) are the work of many generations. All this is put in your hands as your inheritance in order that you may receive it, honor it, add to it, and one day faithfully hand it on to your children.”

Albert Einstein

Life is a journey – a series of experiences, crossroads, choices and challenges.… My personal and professional journey set me on a unique career path, from social worker, special educator to educational leader. Many along the way have influenced my growth and development. While life rarely presents smooth, unbroken paths, the bumps in the road often lead us to meet new and sometimes unanticipated challenges. I have found the innovative social work training at Case Western Reserve University and my educational leadership studies at Seton Hall University, share more commonalities than differences. To my professors and classmates, I appreciate your openness to a professional who tends to bring a different perspective to our discussions. Dr. Colella, you have been a patient and supportive mentor, helping me to meld my passion and interests with a functional research design. Dr. Osnato and Dr. Connelly, thank you for being my teachers, and sharing in my journey as members of my dissertation committee. Dr. Laura Weitzman, a very special thanks to you! Your dissertation has served as a model for my investigation of preschool inclusion. With no prior connection to me beyond a good word from Dr. Colella, you
literally and figuratively opened your door, shared your experiences, and gave generously of your time.

A special thanks to the special education directors who shared their time and experience through participation in survey completion and telephone interviews at crazy hours of the day and night.

My family has demonstrated love, support and confidence in my ability to meet this ultimate challenge, completing doctoral training at this stage of my life. My husband and children have each offered their unique encouragement and inspiration. Thank you for all you have taught me – I couldn’t have reached this point without having you in my life. My husband has urged me to undertake this major endeavor, assuming many household responsibilities to allow me time for classes, research and writing, proud to add another “doctor in the family.” Parenting is enriching as well as humbling. I have learned much through this process; my adult children demonstrate pride in their mom’s willingness to take personal and educational risks, returning to school to “not only talk the talk,” with advice about their school, career choices and study strategies, “but walk the walk,” as I complete my doctoral studies.

My colleagues, particularly from Cedar Grove, I value our work together. Dr. Betsy Harrison, you continue to be my model for ethical, collaborative and effective leadership. I miss your daily mentorship, but your standards remain a part of me. My fellow child study team members, past and present, you have enriched me through our mutual efforts and on-going friendship.
My friends offer a shared history, which keeps both grounds and elevates me; your encouragement and confidence that I can reach this goal, even in the face of adversity, have meant the world to me.
DEDICATION

To my parents who encouraged me to try my best and value education, you had the knack of making little demands and accepting joyfully all accomplishments. To my sister, I miss you and wish all of you were here to read this study. My husband’s parents have embraced me as “one of their children,” taking pride in my efforts. Collectively, you’ve helped shape me and share in my accomplishments.

To my husband who supported and encouraged me to take the financial, professional and personal efforts and risks to join the other doctors in my family; thanks for seeing me through this process. To my son, David, you’ve completed the process of writing your own dissertation in physics, a language I will never understand - we now share a common path; I’m so proud to follow you in the completion of our degrees. To my daughter, Iiana, I’m pleased to share the passion to be, not merely an effective educator, but one who enables each student to be the best s/he can be. To my daughter, Rachel, you have shown me the importance of finding your passion, believing in your strengths, facing and overcoming challenges and most importantly, the value of resilience. They say you learn by example - this is clearly a reciprocal process within my family. In my personal and professional life, you are among my best teachers.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION
Overview

Special Education Administrators face unique challenges in meeting federal and state special education requirements to provide services to preschool students with disabilities. A “free and appropriate education” in the “least restrictive environment” is mandated by federal law, “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (IDEA) and further defined by the New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6A: 14.). “LRE” refers to the education of students, as close to home as possible, in the same educational setting as their non-disabled peers. In other words, in New Jersey, as in all states, students with disabilities should be placed in a general education setting, for all or part of the student’s school day.

Initial special education laws were passed in 1975. At that time, mandates sought to provide for equality in education; students with handicapping conditions could and were often left home, at the discretion of their home school, without benefit of public education services. Therefore, early entitlement laws established special education, as the opportunity to provide students with specialized instruction, often in segregated settings. Then the expectation was to return students to “regular education” to learn along side their typically developing peers, only after their skills had sufficiently improved to function in the classroom with little to no modifications to their instruction. Segregated, special education settings including resource rooms, self-contained classes as well as
separate schools were considered most appropriate. For many students, a decision for placement in special education lasted throughout their school career.

The implementation of special education laws have been subject to legal challenges and court review on a local, state and federal level. Over the years, our special education laws, known as “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,” abbreviated as IDEA, have undergone a process of significant change. A National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS1- 1993) focused on student participation in general education and their post-secondary school outcomes. The findings indicated that special education students, particularly those educated in separate settings, did not achieve as well as their non-disabled peers. “A disproportionate number of students with disabilities (38%) dropped out of school as compared with the general population. In some locations, as many as 85% of the students with disabilities, dropped out of school. Before dropping out of school, these students showed a broader array of performance and adjustment problems than students in the general population including higher rates of absenteeism, lower grade point averages, higher course failure, more feelings of poor self esteem and higher rates of inappropriate social behaviors. Predictably, only a small minority of these individuals (approximately 25%) pursued postsecondary education.” NLTS2 is in the process of completion, as part of the national assessment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 1997). Thus far, “findings indicate increased inclusion in general education as well as teacher expectations. Despite this, the success of students with disabilities in high school and beyond still fall short of the hopes of educators, parents of students with disabilities and the students themselves” (Dreshler, Schumaker, 2005, p.1). These studies, along with the growth in specialized advocacy groups contributed to the
change in the underlying assumption that education, delivered to students in segregated settings, offer students equal or adequate access to the educational, social and functional benefits, equal to their non-disabled peers. Subsequent reauthorizations of IDEA, along with litigation filed in state and federal courts, led to the present perspective: that the general education setting must always be considered first, and the most appropriate. This decision-making process, including consideration of the necessary supports and services for success in general education settings, must be documented in each child’s “Individualized Educational Plan” (IEP), before more restrictive placements can be implemented. Local Education Agencies/schools districts (L.E.A’s) are required to maintain a full continuum of service options for students with disabilities, ranging from full inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the same setting as their non-disabled peers for the entire day) to more specialized, segregated special education settings, (full or part-time), based on student needs.

The general education classroom must always be available for consideration for special needs students, including those of preschool age. For students of school age, New Jersey school districts are mandated to provide education to all general education students beyond kindergarten eligibility; therefore, at the least, the general education classroom is always available for consideration for school-aged children with special needs. School administrators of special education and general education programs are required to engage in creative problem solving to offer a variety of supports and accommodations to students with disabilities, related to class placement, academic and social participation, seating, assessment, etc. Only after considering all general education options can special education be offered outside of the student’s grade level classroom. Special education
and related services can be offered in the resource center, therapy room, self-contained classes, or more specialized, public or private school settings only when the IEP team, (including the parents and required school staff) agree that less restrictive settings are not appropriate.

The same expectation is maintained for the inclusion of preschool students, ages three to five, according to the federal and state special education laws, the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” and New Jersey Administrative Code. In New Jersey, the legislature was directed by the courts to provide educational equity in funding and opportunity to level access between students attending poor urban or rural schools and more educationally enriched, affluent suburban districts. As a result of the series of Abbott vs. Burke court decisions, initiated in 1990, approximately 25% of New Jersey school districts receive Early Childhood Program Aid funds specifically designated for the development and maintenance of general education programs for this age group. Therefore, early childhood programs are mandated and funded in the state’s poorest urban and rural districts only (Coffman, J., 2002). For the remaining 75% of New Jersey school districts, irrespective of size, or socio-economic status, a “free and appropriate” preschool education is only required for preschool students with disabilities, those who have been determined to be eligible for special education and related services.

Special Education Directors responsible for planning program options for students of preschool age group face a crucial difference. As a result of discrepancies in funding and expectations, publicly funded preschool programs are often not offered to typically developing children in a majority of school districts in the state. Based on the need to provide eligible special education to students with disabilities, many districts have
established self-contained, preschool disability classes to offer special education to their students. While these segregated settings have provided quality services to preschool students with disabilities, such special education programs do not meet federal and state mandate to offer special education to students in the least restrictive environment (within a general education setting for all or part of the child’s school day).

A review of statewide and national special education data for the years 2002 through 2005 indicate that New Jersey public school districts still do not offer inclusive settings to preschool students at the same ratio as their school-aged students with disabilities. In fact, while the rate of inclusion of school aged students with disabilities in general education settings more than 80% of the day in New Jersey school districts is consistent with the national average, the rate of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in New Jersey is well below the national average.

This expectation for providing services to preschool students in the least restrictive environment has been fortified by the reauthorization of federal law, known now as the “Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act” (2004), and subsequent changes in New Jersey Administrative Code. New language includes additional options for LRE for preschool students (N.J.A.C. 6A: 14-4.3 (d) – September 2006).

(d) A preschool age student with a disability may be placed by the district board of education in an early childhood program operated by an agency other than a board of education according to the following: 1. Such early childhood program shall be licensed or approved by a governmental agency; 2. The district board of education shall assure that the program is nonsectarian; 3. The district board of education shall assure the student's IEP can be implemented in the early
childhood program with any supplementary aids and services that are specified in the student’s IEP; and 4. The special education and related services specified in the student’s IEP shall be provided by appropriately certified and/or licensed personnel or by paraprofessionals (N.J.A.C. 6A: 14-3.9a or 4.1e).

As general education programs for preschool students are often initiated by special education rather than general education mandates, a district’s Special Education Director plays a critical role in the development of inclusive opportunities. Knowledge regarding the attitudes toward the least restrictive environment for preschool students with disabilities maintained by Directors, is essential to the understanding of the status of inclusion at a preschool level in New Jersey. While much has been written regarding the inclusion of school aged students in New Jersey, including several Seton Hall University dissertations, the current study is focused on the inclusion of preschool children with disabilities, three to five years of age. Consistent with the previous research, this study is also designed to investigate the relationship between other demographic factors that may impact the attitudes of special education administrators.

For purpose of this study, the term director will also refer to supervisors or coordinators responsible for special education services.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of Special Education Directors/Supervisors in New Jersey Public Schools in relation to inclusive preschool education. The researcher will also assess if a significant relationship exists between the attitudes of the special education directors and the following demographic factors: socio-
economic grouping of the district, the director’s years of experience, recent litigation within the district, the district’s eligibility status for receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid and the percentage of students included in general education (using data generated required district reporting on the Special Education Annual Data Report, completed as of December 1, 2006). Based on the previous research by Seton Hall Doctoral Students, including Frank Inzano (1999), Sharon Maricle (2001) and most prominently, Laura Weitzman (2000), this researcher can contribute to the established body of knowledge regarding the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment/inclusion as it pertains to preschool students with disabilities.

Research Questions

This researcher will survey and interview Special Service Directors in elementary school districts in New Jersey, responsible for educating preschool students with disabilities.

1. What is the diversity of attitudes among special education directors toward including preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? As in the study by Weitzman (2000), question 1 is included to enhance understanding and interpretation of the data; no hypothesis is included for statistical analysis to determine significance.

2. Is there a significant difference in the local district factor group with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs?
Hypothesis for Question 2

The hypothesis for this question is stated in null form and states that there is no significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities between schools from difference factor groups. If the null hypothesis is rejected and H₁ is accepted, this would mean that there is a significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of special education students between schools from difference district factor groups. The .05 alpha level of significance is used for determining rejection of H₀ and acceptance of H₁.

3. Is there a significant difference in the years of experience of the director with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs?

Hypothesis for Question 3

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to director’s varying years of experience. If the null hypothesis is rejected and H₁ is accepted, this would mean that there is a significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities between director’s varying years of experience. The alpha level of significant is .05.

4. Is there a significant difference in the amount of litigation in a district with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs?
Hypothesis for Question 4

The null hypotheses states that there is no significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to schools having no litigation and those having some litigation with respect to special education students. If the null hypothesis is rejected then the alternate hypothesis will be accepted, which states that there is a significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to schools having had no litigation and those having some litigation. The alpha level of significant is .05.

5. Is there a significant difference between the director’s attitude as measured in the enclosed survey and the district’s receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid from the New Jersey Department of Education?

Hypothesis for Question 5

The null hypotheses states that there is no significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to districts receiving no Early Childhood Program Aid and districts receiving Early Childhood Program Aid. If the null hypothesis is rejected, then the alternate hypothesis will be accepted, which states that there is a significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to districts receiving no Early Childhood Program Aid and districts receiving Early Childhood Program Aid. The alpha level of significant is .05.

6. Is there a significant difference between the director’s attitude as measured by the enclosed survey and the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who participate in general education more than 80% of their school day?
Hypothesis for Question 6

The null hypothesis states that there is no linear correlation between director's attitudes and the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who participate in general education greater than 80% of the school day. If the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis \( H_1 \) is accepted, then there is a linear correlation between director's attitudes and the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who participate in general education more than 80% of the school day.

Table 1 provides a matrix for how the study will address the research questions.

Table 1

Research Question Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>How Will Results Be Obtained?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1: What is the diversity of attitudes among special education directors toward including preschool students with disabilities in general education programs?</td>
<td>Survey Questions 1-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 2: Is there a significant difference in the local district factor group with respect to the director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? | Demographic Information: Question 2 |

Survey Questions 1-10 | Interviews
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>How Will Results Be Obtained?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the years of experience of the</td>
<td>Demographic Information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>director with respect to the director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool</td>
<td>Question 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students with disabilities in general education programs?</td>
<td>Survey Questions 1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 4: Is there a significant difference in the amount of litigation in a</td>
<td>Demographic Information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>district with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool</td>
<td>Question 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student with disabilities in general education programs?</td>
<td>Survey Questions 1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: Is there a significant difference between the director’s attitude and</td>
<td>Demographic Information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the district’s eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid?</td>
<td>Question 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey Questions 1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 6: Is there a significant difference between the director’s attitude and</td>
<td>Demographic Information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who participate in general</td>
<td>Questions 3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education more than 80% of the school day?</td>
<td>Survey Questions 1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rationale

The requirement for providing students with disabilities a “free and appropriate education” in the “least restrictive environment” has been included in federal and New Jersey special education laws for many years. Prior research by Seton Hall University doctoral students, Inzano (1999) and Maricle (2001) and Weitzman (2000) have focused on inclusion of school-aged students from the perspective of the elementary school principal, secondary school principal and special education director respectively. Special education codes have been developed for all students with disabilities, ages three to twenty one, thereby including students with disabilities of preschool age. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education with the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) and the subsequent adoption of NJAC 6A: 14 (2006) both include specific language, placing increased emphasis on first consideration of the general education environment for preschool students with disabilities. The current researcher’s review of national and state special education data available on the federal and state websites reveals that New Jersey school districts have not implemented inclusive settings for preschool students with disabilities at the same rate as the national average, nor at a rate, consistent with New Jersey school districts’ inclusion school-aged students with disabilities. Table 2 compares federal and New Jersey special education preschool data for the Year 2002.
Table 2

*Comparison of Federal and NJ Preschool Inclusion Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Part-time Gen. Ed./Spec. Ed.</th>
<th>Total of students included in Gen. Ed. (Column 1 + Column 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>7.415</td>
<td>42.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NJ</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of the same data.
Figure 1

Comparison of Federal and NJ Preschool Inclusion Data
Wolery and Oden, in their on Manual on Preschool Inclusion (2000), reveal several underlying reasons for this discrepancy, most significantly, the lack of public funding and contrasting legal mandates for the general education of preschool children. The current researcher completed an analysis of public funding for general education at a preschool level for the state of New Jersey, based on data available on the New Jersey Department of Education website. Of a possible 503 public school districts, only 102 school districts receive public funds, in the form of Early Childhood Program Aid, to develop preschool general education programs. The remaining seventy five percent of New Jersey school districts are left to use local funds for general education early childhood programs, if the district chooses to develop a preschool program. Therefore, in the majority of New Jersey school districts, ineligible for public preschool general education funds, general education preschool requirement is initiated by special education rather than general education mandates. As a result, the Special Education Director is most likely to be knowledgeable and accountable for the implementation of inclusive programs (Weitzman 2000). In order to improve implementation of federal and state mandates, a better understanding of the attitudes of special educators regarding the inclusion/least restrictive environment for preschool students with disabilities is needed.

Significance of the Study

The proposed study will have the following significance: (a) increased knowledge regarding inclusion of New Jersey preschool students with disabilities in general education programs; (b) insight regarding the relationship between the attitudes of Special Education Directors and the following demographic factors: socio-economic
status of the district, years of experience of the Director, recent litigation within the
district, the district’s eligibility for receipt of Early Childhood Program Funds supporting
general education preschool programs and the district’s percentage of inclusion of
preschool students, based on required special education reporting (the December 1 count
submitted by each district annually). Assessment of the attitudes of Special Education
Directors toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities is essential to the
implementation of federal and state mandates, (c) application to practice for university
professors and New Jersey special/general education administrators at a state, county and
district level. Enhanced understanding regarding the implementation of federal/state
mandates for preschool inclusion can enable stakeholders to better evaluate current
programs and determine the need for innovative programs.

The timeliness and pertinence for the focus of this study is supported by recent
changes in IDEA (2004), and the newly adopted, NJ A.C. 6A: 14 (effective September,
2006). Beginning in 2006, the federal government established the same criteria for
collecting data on inclusion of students with disabilities of preschool and school age, the
first time that preschool outcome data has been required. This change points to
governmental intent – increased inclusion of preschool students with disabilities.

Review of national and state special education data indicate that New Jersey
school districts have not been implementing inclusive settings for preschool students with
disabilities at the same rate as the national average, nor at a rate of inclusion, consistent
with their school-aged students with disabilities.
Limitations of the Study

Limitations to the study include the following: (a) the number of respondents and type of responses structured by the survey tool utilized for gathering data; (b) the number of survey participants, special education directors, was limited to the districts whose superintendents granted prior written permission to conduct research; (c) the survey of only one set of stakeholders - special education directors; (d) interpretation of data and the skills of the researcher; (e) the data is specific to the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in New Jersey and cannot be generalized to the attitudes of special education directors in other states, the attitudes of special education directors in planning programs for older students with disabilities or the attitudes of general education administrators; (f) the study does not assess the interaction among the factors that influence the director; (g) the study is limited by the openness that directors felt in addressing their attitudes regarding federal and state mandates for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities.

Definition of Terms

*Abbott School Districts:* Districts that have been designated by NJ Supreme Court rulings collectively known as “Abbott vs. Burke” decisions, finding the education provided to urban school children to be inadequate and unconstitutional. The court ordered that: “The State must assure that these children receive an adequate - and constitutional - education through implementation of a comprehensive set of programs and reforms, including
standards-based education supported by parity funding; supplemental programs; preschool education; and school facilities improvements (Frede, 2005).

*Attitude:* Non-cognitive or affective traits indicating some degree of preference toward something (McMillan, 1992).

**District Factor Group (DFG):** The DFG is a composite statistical index of socio-economic status that is created for all school districts in New Jersey, using data for seven indicators (percent of population with no high school diploma, percent with some college, occupation, population, density, income, unemployment and poverty) available in the decennial census of population. DFG was developed in 1975 for the purposes of comparing student performance in statewide assessment across demographically similar school districts. Besides analyzing test results, the district factor group designated the socio-economic status of the 40 poorest districts as Abbott School districts, based on the series of court rulings collectively known as Abbott vs. Burke. “A” represents the lowest socio-economic level and “J” represents the highest (New Jersey Department of Education, 2005).

*Early Childhood Program:* A general education program for students, ages three through five operated by an agency other than a district board of education. The early childhood program shall be licensed or approved by a governmental agency (N.J.A.C. §§ 6A: 14 - 1.3, September, 2006).

*Early Childhood Program Aid:* Aid provided to low-income districts (106 districts) to subsidize general education preschool programs. Comprehensive Education Improvement Finance Act (1996) provides New Jersey’s Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) offers 102 low income districts the opportunity to receive a high-quality
preschool education beginning at age, four. The purpose is to prepare these children to enter kindergarten with skills and abilities more comparable to those of their wealthier suburban peers. High-quality preschool programs can close much of the early achievement gap for lower income children. This substantially increases their school success and produces a host of life-long benefits, including increased school achievement and their social and economic success as adults. These goals can be reached through the creation and support of high-quality preschool programs for all eligible children (N. J. S. A. §§18A: 7G-2 (1996)).

*Elementary School District:* New Jersey Department of Education (2005) has assigned this designation for a K-6 or K-8 school district (NJDOE website).

*Free and Appropriate Education:* "FAPE" is defined in IDEA to describe “Special education and related services that: have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction and without charge; meet the standards of the state educational agency; include an appropriate preschool, elementary or secondary school education in the State involved; and are provided in conformity with the individualized education program (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1401, a, 18, C. F. R. Sec 300.8).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):* formerly known as Public Law 94-142. IDEA is the federal statute first passed by Congress in 1975 and subject to several reauthorizations, most recently in 2004. This law ensures the rights of students with disabilities to a public education in the least restrictive environment, forming the basis of inclusion.
Individualized Education Plan (IEP): An IEP is defined by New Jersey Administrative Code 6A: 14 as a "written plan developed at a meeting according to N.J.A.C. 6A: 14-2.3 (i) (2006) which sets forth present levels of performance, measurable annual goals and short term objectives or benchmarks and describes an integrated, sequential program of individually designed instructional activities and related services. The plan shall establish the rationale for the students' educational placement and serve as the basis for program implementation and compliance with the mandates set forth in this chapter."

Inclusive Education: In Planning for Inclusion, distributed by National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHEY). "The practice of providing a child with disabilities with his or her education within the general education classroom, with the supports and accommodations needed by that student. This inclusion typically takes place in the student's neighborhood school" (Kupper, 1995, p.3).

Interview: is a purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more, that is directed by one in order to get information from the other (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Least Restrictive Environment: New Jersey Administrative Code contains the following expanded operational definition of LRE in the recent changes to code. Specific reference to preschool students with disabilities, adopted in 2006 is included, as follows:

(a) Students with disabilities shall be educated in the least restrictive environment. Each district board of education shall ensure that:

1. To the maximum extent appropriate, a student with a disability is educated with children who are not disabled;
2. Special classes, separate schooling or other removal of a student with a
disability from the student's general education class occurs only when the nature
or severity of the educational disability is such that education in the student's
general education class with the use of appropriate supplementary aids and
services cannot be achieved satisfactorily;
3. A full continuum of alternative placements according to N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.3 is
available to meet the needs of students with disabilities for special education and
related services;
4. Placement of a student with a disability is determined at least annually and, for
a student in a separate setting, activities necessary to transition the student to a
less restrictive placement are considered at least annually;
5. Placement is based on his or her individualized education program;
6. Placement is provided in appropriate educational settings as close to home as
possible;
7. When the IEP does not describe specific restrictions, the student is educated in
the school he or she would attend if not a student with a disability;
8. Consideration is given to:
i. If the student can be educated satisfactorily in a regular classroom with
supplementary aids and services;
ii. A comparison of the benefits provided in a regular class and the benefits
provided in a special education class; and
iii. The potentially beneficial or harmful effects, which a placement may have on
the student with disabilities or the other students in the class;
9. A student with a disability is not removed from the age-appropriate general education classroom solely based on needed modifications to the general education curriculum;

10. Placement in a program option is based on the individual needs of the student; and

11. When determining the restrictiveness of a particular program option, such determinations are based solely on the amount of time a student with disabilities is educated outside the general education setting.

(b) Each district board of education shall provide nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities in the manner necessary to afford students with disabilities, an equal opportunity for participation in those services and activities.

1. In providing or arranging for the provision of nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities, each district board of education shall ensure that each student with a disability participates with nondisabled children in those services and activities to the maximum extent appropriate (6A: 14-4.2, September 2006).

**Natural Proportions:** Place students with disabilities in “mainstream” or general education in accordance with realistic population distributions (N.J.D.O.E, Preschool teaching and learning expectations, 2004).

**Neighborhood School:** The community school a student would have attended in his home community if he had not been identified for special education.

**New Jersey Administrative Code 6A: 14:** Refers to the state codes which specify state regulations for special education in accordance with the federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Act. This has been revised in 2005 in accordance with IDEA reauthorization.
Preschool child with a disability: (N.J.A.C. 6A: 14:3.7(3) September, 2006):

Corresponds to preschool handicapped (preschool disabled) and means a child between the ages of three and five experiencing developmental delay, as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the areas in (c) 10i through v below, and requires special education and related services. When utilizing a standardized assessment or criterion-referenced measure to determine eligibility, a developmental delay shall mean a 33 percent delay in one developmental area, or a 25 percent delay in two or more developmental areas.

i. Physical, including gross motor, fine motor and sensory (vision and hearing);

ii. Cognitive;

iii. Communication;

iv. Social and emotional; and

v. Adaptive

Related Services: The term "related services" means transportation, and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services (including speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, social work services, school nurse services designed to enable a child with a disability to receive a free appropriate public education as described in the individualized education program of the child, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services, except that such medical services shall be for
diagnostic and evaluation purposes only) as may be required to assist a child with a
disability to benefit from special education, and includes the early identification and
assessment of disabling conditions in children. (34 C.F.R. § 300.24/N.J.A.C. 6A: 14 1.3)

Special Education: Refers to "specially designed instruction at no cost to the parents, to
meet the unique needs of students with disabilities according to (34 C.F.R. § 300.26),
incorporated herein by reference, as amended and supplemented." (New Jersey

Special Education Administrator: Defined by Essex County Directors of Special Services
Association as a person serving a public school as Director or Supervisor of Special
Services, Coordinator or Child Study Team Chairperson, as defined by the individual
school district. This person may serve under a state certification as a Social
Administrator, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Principal, Supervisor, Child Study
Team member, (Learning Disability Teacher-Consultant, School Psychologist, Social
Worker) or as a Special Education Teacher. For purpose of this study, the term Special
Education Director will be used for all personnel responsible for special education
services within a school district.

Summary

Chapter I reviews background of the problem, purpose of the study, research
questions, limitations of the study, significance of the study and definition of terms.
Chapter II presents a review of related literature for the inclusion of preschool students
with disabilities. Chapter III describes the research methodology, including the design,
subjects, instruments, data collection and analysis. Chapter IV reports research findings.

Chapter V summarizes the research findings, conclusions and recommendations for further research. The final part of this research paper includes the list of references and appendices.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

The chapter begins with a review of relevant special education data for students of school and preschool age with disabilities. This data will provide background for the significance of studying the attitudes of Special Education Directors regarding the least restrictive environment, or in other words, the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. The literature review then goes on to highlight significant special education legislation and court decisions, serving as the basis for current interpretation for what constitutes effective special education in the least restrictive environment. In addition, the researcher includes a review of relevant research on the attitudes of general and special education administrators toward LRE/inclusion. Demographic factors, which may influence attitudes among New Jersey Directors of Special Education toward inclusion, are also discussed. Information specific to the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities is then offered to provide the reader with an appreciation for the current issues and challenges in the provision of services, specific to this age group.

The literature review offers the reader knowledge of the researcher's investigation of the attitudes of special education directors in relation to inclusive education of preschool students with disabilities. Four demographic factors will be assessed to determine if a significant relationship exists between each factor and the attitudes of special education directors. These factors include: the district's socio-economic grouping,
director's years of experience, recent litigation within the district, the district's status of eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid, supporting the development of general education programs, targeted to this age group and the percentage of students included in general education programs within the district. The Special Education Data Report, submitted on December 1, 2006, shall be used as the standardized measure for participation in general education. It is important to note that this is the first year the federal government is utilizing the same criteria for the collection of data on preschool and school aged students with disabilities. In a memo issued by Roberta Wohle, Acting Director of Special Education on October 13, 2006, new mutually exclusive categories were defined for the collection of special education data, defined as follows: the percentage of students "attending a general (early childhood) education program (a) for at least 80% or more of the school day, (b) 40-79 % of the school day or (c) less than 40% of the school day.

Comparison of Inclusion: Federal and New Jersey Special Education Data

For School-Aged Children

Since the completion of prior research studies at Seton Hall University by Inzano (1999), Weitzman (2000) and Maricle (2001), the New Jersey Department of Education's Special Education Statistics display fairly consistent rates for the inclusion of students of school age, between 2002 and 2005. In Table 3, the numbers shown in Column One indicate the percentage of students with disabilities, participating in general education settings more than 80% of the school day, the measurement used in government data
collection, and cited in these studies. Data for students attending segregated, public, private or residential settings have been excluded for clarity.

Table 3

*Percentage of NJ Classified Students, ages 6-21 Included in General Education Classes in 2002-2005*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>More than 80%</th>
<th>Between 40 and 80%</th>
<th>Less than 40%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (New Jersey Data for School Aged Students, Special Education Data, NJDOE)
Table 4

*Percentage of NJ Classified Students, ages 6-21, Included in General Education Classes in 2002*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>More than 80%</th>
<th>Between 40 and 80%</th>
<th>Less than 40%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (Federal Special Education Data for School Aged Children, 2002)

The comparison of state and federal data for 2002 is displayed in Table 5 below.

New Jersey’s percentage of inclusion of school-aged students with disabilities approaches the national average.

Table 5

*Percentage of Classified Students, ages 6-21 Included in General Education Classes in 2002*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>More than 80%</th>
<th>Between 40 and 80%</th>
<th>Less than 40%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (Federal Special Education Data for School Aged Children, 2002)
Figure 2

Comparison of Inclusion Federal And New Jersey Special Education Data

For Preschool Children

Note: (Federal Data Report – US Department of Education)
Comparison of Inclusion: Federal And New Jersey Special Education Data
For Preschool Children

The "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act," in concert with the New Jersey Administrative Code, maintain the same expectation for the inclusion of preschool students. Inclusion in general education has been measured somewhat differently for preschool students, three to five years of age. General Education/Early Childhood refers to students receiving all their instruction with non-disabled peers, with no pullout services. General Education/Special Education Early Childhood Setting refers to settings in which students receive instruction for at least part of the day with non-disabled peers, however some special education services are provided. Special Education/Early Childhood Settings refers to segregated or self-contained public school settings, most aligned with the description of school-aged students included less than 40% of the day. Table 6 reports New Jersey Data for preschool students for the years 2002-2005. However, even using the broader categories, statistics indicate a lower rate of inclusion for this age group.
Table 6

New Jersey Preschool Data in Percentage (2002-2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *(Column 1 + Column 3)*

Reporting for 2006 reflects the changes in federal and state reporting requirements, now aligned with reporting for school aged children. In light of this change in reporting, approximately 20% of reported children of the 12,000 children of preschool age attending school in New Jersey, attended school in general education settings more than 80% of the school day.

Direct comparison between preschool and school aged students with disabilities is limited, due to the distinct criteria established by the federal government for the gathering and reporting of statistical data. Using the broadest definition for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities, (those attending general education for at least part of their instruction), a simple comparison of the data from the most recent year, 2005, was completed. For students of school age, 40% of students with disabilities of school-age were included in general education settings greater than 80% of the day; an additional
28.7 (See Table 5) attended between 40-80% of their instruction in general education. In contrast, only 25.5 (See Table 6) percent of preschool students with disabilities attended general educations settings with non-disabled peers for any part of their school day. The percent of preschool inclusion for the 2005 school year is approximately 5 percent less than the total of 30.4 percent rate reported by the state for the 2002 school year. In other words, the rate of inclusion has decreased within the last three years, rather than increased.

A comparison between state and federal special education data in 2002, the most current federal data published regarding preschool inclusion reported in Table 7, 8 reveals the following:

Table 7

*Federal Special Education Data for Preschool Students in Percentage (2002)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>General Education</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Part-time General Ed./Special Ed. Early Childhood Setting</th>
<th>Total of students included in general education at least part of their instruction*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>7.415.1</td>
<td>42.815</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Column 1 + Column 3)*
Table 8

Comparison of Federal and New Jersey Preschool Data (2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>35.4</td>
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<td>NJ</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Column 1 + Column 3)*

The national average, combining data submitted by all states, reveals that a total of 42.815 percent of preschool students with disabilities were included in general education in 2002. In contrast, 30.4 percent of preschool students with disabilities in New Jersey were included in general education that same year.

Initiated December 1, 2006, new criteria were established by the federal government for special education data reporting. These criterions match those previously established for school-aged students, shown in Table 5. The following mutually exclusive categories have been established:

(Line 1) - 80% or more of the school day in the presence of general education students. (These are children who received special education and related services outside the regular classroom for 20 percent or less of the school day.)
(Line 2) - Between 40 – 79% of the school day in the presence of general education students (students with disabilities who are included in the general education setting from 40% to 79% of the school day, not including children who are reported as receiving education programs in public or private separate school or residential facilities) and

(Line 3) - Less than 40% of School Day in the Presence of General Education Students, (At least 61% of their special education and related services are provided outside the general education classroom. This category includes students with disabilities who are in out-of-district placements including public and approved private school programs that are operated in public school buildings with general education grades. Do not include children who are reported as receiving education programs in public or private separate schools or residential facilities) (NJDOE, – Instructions for ADR Report, Dec 1, 2005)

This change in criteria demonstrates federal and state government intent to increase accuracy in measurement of general education participation by preschool students with disabilities.

Special Education Legislation

The U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (2006) offers a history of IDEA, citing the following statistics regarding the availability of public education to children with special needs prior to the adoption of federal special education laws. “In 1970, only one in five children with disabilities were educated; many states had
laws excluding certain students, including children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded, from its schools...One million students were excluded from education while another 3.5 million children with disabilities did not receive appropriate services” (Para 5-6).

Early special education laws were formulated to grant equal access to public education for students with handicapping or disabling conditions. Entitlement laws structured special education as the opportunity for eligible students to receive specialized instruction, often in segregated settings. Based on a medical service model, separate special education settings were considered best to meet the needs of students with handicapping conditions until their skills were considered sufficiently remediated to learn at a rate and level of their typically developing peers. Separate education was considered more appropriate for the students in need, as well as less disruptive to the learning of their non-disabled peers (Walker & Ovington, 1998).

Public Law 90-538: (1968) established the Handicapped Children’s Early Education Program, authorized funds for the development, evaluation and dissemination of model programs for serving infants and young children with disabilities. Programs funded through this act were instrumental in developing knowledge about services for young children with disabilities. The law is currently known as the Early Education Program for Children with Disabilities (Wolery & Wilbur, 1994).

Public law 93-644 (1974) was based on previous Head Start Legislation and required that 10% of children served by Head Start programs must be children with disabilities,
establishing the first basis for the mainstreaming of young children with disabilities (Wolery & Wilbur, 1994).

*Public law 94-142 (1975)* was the first federal policy relating to special education in public schools. Though formulated with school-aged children as the target group, this act included provision for students of preschool age. Development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for each child eligible to receive special education services was also included (Wolery & Wilbur, 1994).

*Public law 98-199 (1983)* set forth funds for states to develop early intervention services for children from birth to five years of age (Wolery & Wilbur, 1994).

*Public law 99-457 (1986)* extended the early intervention requirements including the development of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for each child determined eligible for early intervention services, run through the department of health. This regulation also mandated special education services for students ages 3-5. Public law 101-575 (1990): The reauthorization of P.L. 94:142 was known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Wolery & Wilbur, 1994).

*Public law 101-336 (1990)*: This act renamed the above as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) as the law and subsequent reauthorizations in 1997 and most recently in 2004 are known, established the entitlement of students with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. No child could be denied a public education as a result of his or her disability. IDEA merged the service requirements for students eligible for special education services under Part B with
the early intervention service requirements for students ages 0-3 under Part C. The expectation for federal mandates which were incorporated into law by each state was established; while individual states could choose to exceed federal requirements, none could fail to incorporate IDEA requirements within their state administrative codes (Wolery & Wilbur, 1994).

Public law 108-446 (2004): The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA) includes changes that have strengthened aspects of LRE for preschool students with disabilities (Wolery & Wilbur, 1994).

Court Decisions Related to Least Restrictive Environment

Since the first special education laws have been enacted, special education mandates have been subject to legal challenges, with court reviews on a local, state and federal level. These laws have served to clarify the importance of providing services to students in the least restrictive environment. Court interpretations have been incorporated into the language of legislative reauthorizations to reinforce and strengthen the rights and entitlements of students with disabilities. As Brown v. Board of Education (1954), the famous Supreme Court decision established the principal that “separate is not equal” in education, the following legal decisions have supported the same principle with regard to the placement of students with disabilities in the “least restrictive environment.”

Brown v. Board of Educ., 347 U.S. 483 (1954): A landmark Supreme Court decision that established the principal of “separate is not equal.” This decision also clarified that the laws of individual states cannot counter rights established by the federal government.
through the constitution. The decision was based on the argument that "the segregation of white and Negro children in the public schools of a State solely on the basis of race, pursuant to state laws permitting or requiring such segregation, denies to Negro children the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment - even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors of white and Negro schools may be equal" (Thomson, 2006).

Rowley v. Hendrick Hudson Dist. Bd. Of Educ., 458 U.S. 176 (1982). This Supreme Court case supported a student's right to receive a "free and appropriate education" in the least restrictive environment based on the federal law, IDEA. The court upheld the process of developing an "individualized education plan" tailored to meet a student's special education needs. This program must be provided at public expense. In addition, a parent's right to exercise due process on behalf of their minor child was established. "The respondents, a child with only minimal residual hearing who had been furnished by school authorities with a special hearing aid for use in the classroom and who was to receive additional instruction from tutors, and the child's parents, filed suit in Federal District Court to review New York administrative proceedings that had upheld the school administrators' denial of the parents' request that the child also be provided a qualified sign-language interpreter in all of her academic classes. Entering judgment for respondents, the District Court found that although the child performed better than the average child in her class and was advancing easily from grade to grade, she was not performing as well academically as she would without her handicap. Because of this disparity between the child's achievement and her potential, the court held that she was not receiving a "free appropriate public education," which the court defined as "an
opportunity to achieve [her] full potential commensurate with the opportunity provided to other children" (Thomson, 2006).

_Tatro v. Irving Independent School Dist., 468 U.S. 883 (1984)._ The Supreme Court Case affirmed the student’s right to the provision of “related services” established by IDEA. Since the petitioner School District received federal funding under the Education of the Handicapped Act, the district was required to provide the child with "a free appropriate public education," which is defined in the Act to include "related services." In this case, specialized medical services were required to support a child with Spina Bifida within a public school setting “to assist a handicapped child to benefit from special education.” Pursuant to the Act, the petitioners developed an individualized education program for the child, but the program made no provision for school personnel to administer a procedure known as clean intermittent catheterization” (Thomson, 2006).

_Daniel R. v. El Paso Independent Sch. Dist. 874F.2d 1036 (5th Cir. 1989)._ The United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit determined that the appropriateness of placement in the regular classroom is not dependent on the student’s ability to learn the same things that other students learn in the regular classroom (Thomson, 2006). This case also established the legitimacy for the benefit from social interaction of the student with nondisabled peers that can be derived from placement in the regular classroom. In this case, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit determined that when the provisions of FAPE and mainstreaming are in conflict, the mainstreaming mandate becomes secondary to the appropriate education mandate. As a result of this decision, the precedent of a “Daniel Standard” has been used in considering when full-time placement:
in general education with supplementary aids and services is appropriate as well as when removal to a special education class is warranted. The standards specify that the school must attempt to meet the student's needs in the general education classroom, that the student must benefit from the education the school provides, and that the student's benefit may be academic or purely social. For the first time in this decision, guidelines were provided which not only reflects the needs of the special education student, but the needs of the general education student and of the educational organization; the general education teacher is not required to devote all or most of her or his time to the child with a disability and the general education program need not be modified beyond recognition. (National Study of Inclusive Education, 1994, p.8). The crucial considerations derived from this case can be summarized, as follows:

1. Will the child receive an educational benefit, both non-academic and academic, from the regular education placement?

2. What is the child's overall educational experience in the mainstream environment, balancing the benefits of regular and special education?

3. What effect does the special education child's presence have on the regular classroom environment and the education that the other students are receiving?

*Greer v. Rome City School: 967 F.2d 470, (1991).* “The US Eleventh Circuit Court offered parameters on LRE. If the costs of supplementary aids and support services significantly impact upon the education of other children in the district, a general educational classroom could be denied to the disabled student.” (National Study of Inclusive Education, 1994, p.9) The Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals stated that IDEA's presumption in favor of mainstreaming required placement of a Down's syndrome child in a general education program at her neighborhood school rather than a separate special
education class (p. 15). Applying the standard in Daniel R.R., the court held that the school district had not given adequate consideration to educating the child in the regular class with supplementary aids and services. The court used a four-part test to assess whether inclusion is required: compare academic benefits the child would receive in regular and special placements, compare the nonacademic benefits (social, language, and role modeling) of both settings, assess the effect of inclusion on other children in the regular classroom, and determine whether the costs of an inclusive program would be so great as to have a significant impact on education of other children. The court noted that if it were determined that the child would make significantly more progress in a special class and would likely fall behind in the regular classroom, full inclusion would not be appropriate (McCarthy, 2005).

*Holland v Bd. of Educ.*, 14 F.3d 1398, 1404 (1994). The Ninth Circuit District Court defined “Least Restrictive Environment” as a strong Congressional preference. This opinion combined factors from several previous decisions to determine what the least restrictive environment is. Those factors dealt with educational benefits in a regular classroom, the non-academic benefits for the handicapped child in a regular classroom, the child's effect on the teacher and other children in the regular class, and the cost of supplementary aids and service to mainstream the handicapped child. The Court said cost is a factor, only if it will significantly affect another child in the district. (McCarthy, 1998). The Holland test forms a balancing test, based on four elements:

1. The educational benefits of full time regular education;

2. Non-academic benefits;
3. The effect of the child on the teacher and the children; and

4. The costs of mainstreaming the child

*Oberti v. Board of Educ.*, 995 F.2d 1204 (3rd Cir. 1993). This New Jersey landmark case was argued in the Third Circuit Court, which supported a student's right to placement in the least restrictive environment. “The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400-1485 (formerly the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975), provides that states receiving funding under the Act must ensure that children with disabilities are educated in regular classrooms with nondisabled children "to the maximum extent appropriate." This case was decided on behalf of the eight-year-old student with Down's syndrome, who was placed by the district in a segregated, special education placement and consequently removed from general education. The parents filed for due process citing the child's right to placement in the least restrictive environment, a general education setting with non-disabled peers. Critical to the provision of special education in New Jersey, this case formalized the process of decision-making, establishing the principles for consideration when developing an Individualized Educational Plan for each child with disabilities (Walker & Ovington, 1998). In defining placement in the least restrictive environment for all stakeholders on their website, the New Jersey Department of Education indicates the following:

The Oberti decision and its codification in the special education code require that consideration be given to the following factors, when making decisions regarding regular class placement: Whether the student can be educated satisfactorily in a regular classroom with supplementary aids and services; A comparison of the benefits provided in a regular class and the benefits provided in a special
education class; and The potentially beneficial or harmful effects, which a placement may have on the student with educational disabilities or the other students in the class. From these requirements, a sequential process can be constructed to assist districts in making placement decisions.

*Abbott vs. Burke V A-155-97 (1998)*. The case is one of a series of court cases determining the need for the New Jersey Legislature to provide equity of funding between poor urban and rural school districts and more affluent suburban districts. It followed a remand proceeding to determine necessary supplemental programs. In Abbott vs. Burke V, the Court ordered a series of entitlements for disadvantaged children, including whole school reform, full-day kindergarten, high-quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds to begin by September 1999, and a comprehensive state-managed and funded facilities program. This case recognized the benefit of early childhood programs (Coffman, 2002).

In summary, a review of legal decisions reveals that relationship between the District/Supreme Court cases and special education is analogous to the famous Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*’s impact on racial segregation in public education. “Separate is not equal.” The initial special education legislation was based on a “medical” model of special education; segregated settings and specialized instruction were determined to be best suited to identify, treat and if possible, cure the learning problem. Over time, assumptions underlying separate instruction have been set aside as government studies revealed increased, rather than decreased gaps in school achievement,
as well as post-secondary student outcomes between regular and special education students.

Reauthorizations of IDEA have reflected the advocacy of many parents, educators, professional and politicians who believe that “inclusion is a value, not a place.” This is the title of an introductory issue of *All Inclusive* (2001, p. 1), published as a collaborative effort between a collaborative of public agencies in Maryland, effectively describes the underlying philosophy.

The purpose of special education parallels the purpose of elementary and secondary education as a whole: to prepare children to lead productive lives as citizens and members of the community. Students who have disabilities often need special education services to develop skills for participating in the community as productive and contributing citizens and taxpayers. Participation as a learner, contributor and consumer in school lays the foundations for being a learner, contributor and consumer as an adult. The ‘neighborhood’ school is that school assigned on the basis of the student’s residence. Some school systems make exceptions for family concerns such as day care and system practices such as magnet school. The age-appropriate general education class in the neighborhood school is the first placement of choice for all students, including those who have been identified as needing an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

This philosophical change is reflected in IDEA’s more “educational” perspective, that placement in general education settings with non-disabled peers is the most
appropriate setting for all students and student instruction can be enhanced when needed to ensure maximum student benefit. Therefore, the decision-making process regarding student placement must be specifically documented in each child’s Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P.) when consideration is given for a child’s removal from the general education program. Students must be provided with a “Free and Appropriate Education in the Least Restrictive Environment.” Discussion must include a careful review of all possible accommodations and modifications, which could help to ensure the student’s success in less restrictive settings, prior to a placement in any part-time, or full time, self-contained special education settings. As specified in IDEA (1997) and affirmed in the new IDEA (2004), school districts are required to maintain a full continuum of service options for students with disabilities, including preschool students, ranging from full inclusion (educating students with disabilities in the same setting as their non-disabled peers) to more specialized educational settings, based on the student’s unique abilities and needs.

Literature on Preschool Inclusion

Special education legislation, litigation and literature have also led toward inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings. In their monograph, Wolery and Wilbur (1994) provide professionals and families with excellent background for the consideration. “As young children with disabilities represent a diverse population, problems often co-exist and few diagnoses present precise prescriptions for educational practices, the knowledge of both general and special education are needed” (pp. 8-11). The authors go on to write that the “benefits of preschool inclusion are well known,
families of children with and without disabilities appear to be positively disposed toward preschool inclusion and that many of the proposed benefits do not occur without purposeful and careful supports to promote them" (pp. 8-11). Table 9 includes their summary.

Table 9

*Proposed Benefits of Preschool Inclusion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipient of benefits</th>
<th>Description of Benefits</th>
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| Children with disabilities    | 1. Are spared the effects of separate, segregated education – including the negative effects of labeling and negative attitudes fostered by a lack of contact with typically developing children.  
                                | 2. Are provided with competent models that allow them to learn new adaptive skills and/or learn when and how to use their existing skills through imitation.  
                                | 3. Are provided with competent models with whom to interact and thereby learn new social and/or communicative skills.  
                                | 4. Are provided with realistic life experiences that prepare them to live in the community.  
                                | 5. Are provided with opportunities to develop friendships with typically developing peers.                                                             |
| Children without disabilities | 1. Are provided with opportunities to learn more realistic and accurate views about individuals with disabilities.  
                                | 2. Are provided with opportunities to develop positive attitudes toward others who are different from themselves.  
                                | 3. Are provided with opportunities to learn altruistic behaviors and when and how to use such behaviors.  
                                | 4. Are provided with models of individuals who successful achieve despite challenges.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipients of Benefits</th>
<th>Description of Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>1. Can conserve their early childhood resources by limiting the need for segregated,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>specialized program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Can conserve educational resources if children with disabilities who are mainstreamed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>at the preschool level continue in regular as compared to special placement during the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>elementary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families of children with disabilities</td>
<td>1. Are able to learn about typical development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. May feel less isolated from the remainder of their communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. May develop relationships with families of typically developing children who can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provide them with meaningful support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families of children without disabilities</td>
<td>1. May develop relationships with families who have children with disabilities and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>thereby make a contribution to them and their communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Will have opportunities to teach their children about individual differences and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>about accepting individuals who are different.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Despite the stated benefits of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in programs for typically development students, Wolery and Wilbur (1994) go on to describe a number of barriers. These include: 1) philosophical differences between general and special early education, 2) related services needs of students with disabilities,
3) statewide monitoring systems based on the responsibility to provide a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities 4) negative staff attitudes which may be based on lack of exposure, or education supports 5) emphasis on academic achievement and a de-emphasis on social outcomes 6) competition for shrinking fiscal resources.

Initially released in 1993, and updated in 2000, the Division for Early Childhood, part of the Council for Exceptional Children included the following statement as part of a position paper on inclusion:

Inclusion as a value supports the rights of all children, regardless of facilities to participate actively in natural settings within their community. Natural settings are those in which the child would spend time had he or she not had a disability. These settings include, but are not limited to home, preschool, nursery schools, Head Start programs, kindergarten, neighborhood school classes, child care, places of worship, recreational and other settings that all children and families enjoy...As young children participate in-group settings, their active participation should be guided by developmentally and individually appropriate curriculum. Access to and participation in the age appropriate general curriculum becomes central to the identification and provision of specialized support service.

To further support the roles of inclusion in our state, The New Jersey Department of Education developed a guide, "Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality," is readily available to the public on the NJDOE website (July
2004). With regard to the preschool students with disability, the intent for inclusion is clearly stated:

This document provides the focus for curriculum determination and instruction for all preschool children ages three and four. This population includes preschoolers with disabilities. Providing appropriate intervention services to these students is in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Act Amendments (IDEA) of 1997, which guarantee students with disabilities the right to general education program adaptations, as specified in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), after parental consent is granted. These federal requirements are intended to result in adaptations that provide preschool children with disabilities full access to the early childhood education program and the early childhood education curriculum.

Preschoolers with disabilities demonstrate a broad range of learning, cognitive, communication, physical, sensory, and social/emotional differences that may necessitate adaptations to the early childhood education program. Each preschooler manifests his or her learning abilities, learning style, and learning preferences in a unique way. Consequently, the types of adaptations needed and the program in which the adaptations will be implemented are determined individually within the IEP. Adaptations are not intended to compromise the learning outcomes. Instead, adaptations provide children with disabilities the opportunity to develop their strengths and compensate for their learning differences as they work toward the learning outcomes for all children. The
specific models used in addressing the adaptations can range from a fully inclusive classroom to a self-contained classroom, and is determined by the student’s need.

Childhood experiences can have a long-lasting implication for one’s future. The earliest years of schooling can promote positive developmental experiences and independence and encourage the uniqueness of each child. Preschool programs can be planned and structured so that all children develop the belief that they are “more alike than different.” Careful planning is needed to ensure the successful inclusion of preschoolers with disabilities in early childhood education programs. The focus should be on identifying individual student needs, linking instruction to the early childhood curriculum, providing appropriate supports and program modifications, and evaluating student progress (NJDOE, 2006)

Status of Preschool Inclusion in New Jersey

In New Jersey, 102 poor urban and rural districts are eligible for Early Childhood Program Aid, (ECPA), or approximately 25% of the total districts in the state (NJDOE website). With receipt of public funds, these districts are mandated and subsidized to develop and operate early childhood programs for general education students of preschool age. In contrast, for the remaining school districts, irrespective of size and demographics, a free and appropriate preschool education remains a mandate, only for preschool students with disabilities. Many non-ECPA districts, absent of designated
funding and responsibility, do not yet offer publicly funded general education programs to children younger than the age of kindergarten eligibility. In fact, the process of expansion from kindergarten as half-day, preparatory, play-based experiences to full day, academically rigorous kindergarten programs is still occurring among many districts in New Jersey, and across the nation (NJDOE, 2004).

For parents, the enrollment of typically developing, preschool children in an early childhood setting remains optional and in most cases, family financed. In more affluent communities, early childhood education is increasingly seen as essential for socialization, academic readiness and a smooth transition to kindergarten, as an academic program. For working parents, childcare for extended hours is another consideration. Without assess to district-funded preschool programs, parents choose from an array of community settings, organized by private, sectarian and non-sectarian organizations in addition to family-run child care. Operating outside the public sector, these nursery or day care settings utilize a wide variety of educational philosophies, facilities, instructional staff of varying backgrounds/certifications and offer diverse class size and student: teacher ratio. Community preschool directors may not view their programs as suitable for students with disabilities, mild or severe, particularly for students who present challenging instructional, developmental or behavioral needs. In addition, private programs, unsubsidized by public funds, are not subject to the non-discriminatory Section 504 regulations of facilities (Wolery & Wiibur, 1994).

In past years, most districts developed segregated, special education programs to meet the special education needs of a resident preschool student with disabilities, ages three to five. Lack of public general education preschools programs has been only one of
the considerations. As required, an "Individualized Education Plan, known as an I.E.P.", was developed for each child, based on their unique needs. IDEA’s specific requirements regarding maximum class size, staff certifications, student: teacher ratio, length of the school day and the provision of special education and related services, led many districts to establish their own, quality, special education programs for "preschool disabled students" placement, offered to preschool students, at district expense, exclusively to students eligible for special education. Many special education administrators, classroom instructional/related service providers and parents of special needs students developed confidence in the value and benefit of the "segregated, self-contained model" of service delivery. As with older students with disabilities, the segregated model for special education of preschool students as a sole option has come under scrutiny. The reauthorizations of IDEA and NJAC 6A: 14 both include language specifying the intent that self-contained settings should not be considered the most appropriate for the majority of preschool students with disabilities. This does not mean that specialized, separate programs are never suitable; however educating students in the least restrictive environment is the expectation for students with disabilities at any age (Wolery & Odom (2000).

The availability of literature including the above citations fueled the growth and strength of passionate public and private advocacy groups. Many parents of preschool students, including many whose children have severe disabilities such as Down’s syndrome and Autism approach the IEP process with a clear vision for their children. These parents clearly articulate their plan for their child to attend inclusive programs, district run, if available, or in a community setting, with all the supports and service
necessary, provided to the child, in the “early childhood program.” Without access to
district general education programs for preschool students, district special education
directors, find themselves facing a difficult dilemma, when confronted by assertive
parents, advocates, attorneys and state monitors, assessing compliance of their district’s
special education programs.

The challenge remains for special and general educators responsible for students
of preschool age to put these directives into practice within New Jersey and across the
nation. Wolery and Olam (2000) are among the researchers offering valuable information
regarding the philosophy, purposes and challenges, as well as the diversity of settings (in
public schools, community early childhood preschool and daycare settings, head-start,
etc) in which inclusion can be implemented for students with disabilities.

Woodward (1999) studied the relationship of early intervention to later inclusion
in elementary school. “The study examined the effects of early intervention factors, child
characteristics, and school district policies on elementary school placements of children
with disabilities. The study found that almost equal numbers of students were placed in
general and special education classes; that these placements were highly stable from
kindergarten to fourth grade; and that children from integrated preschool classes had the
highest rate of inclusion in elementary school. The study suggests that early intervention
factors, disability factors and school district policies regarding inclusion all play a role in
determining elementary school placements for children with disabilities” (pp. 83 – 90).
Recent Research on Administrative Attitudes Regarding LRE for School-Aged Students with Disabilities

Several Seton Hall dissertations address this issue from varying perspectives of school administrators. Frank Inzano (1999) explored the elementary school principals towards inclusion; Sharon Maricle (2001), replicating the design with secondary school principals, expanded on his study. Laura Bernstein Weitzman (2000) focused research on the importance of exploring the attitudes of special education directors in elementary school districts toward the least restrictive environment and the relationship between other factors including years of district type, experience, gender, litigation and implementation of inclusion as measured by students including in general education more than 80% of the school day.

For the school-aged population of special needs students, regardless of other obstacles within a district, at a minimum, the general education classroom, with non-disabled peers, is always available for consideration. At a minimum, special education/school administrators, have access to the general education population. Despite this, planning the appropriate supports and services for students and staff members within general education settings can be difficult, time-consuming and expensive. Federal and special education codes allow many accommodations can be made, for seating, assessment, student participation, staffing, equipment, etc. Special education, when needed, can be offered outside of the student's grade level classroom, in a resource center or self-contained class for all or part of the day, to the extent that specialized instruction is required.
Since the time of the aforementioned research studies, data maintained by the New Jersey Department of Special Education indicates fairly consistent rates of inclusion, close to national average rates compiled by the federal government. This data is gathered from districts on December 1st of each year and submitted to the US Department of Education for the distribution of federal special education revenues dispersed to the states. Table 1 displays a comparison of New Jersey with national averages. The most consistent measure of inclusion is participation in general education, more than 80% of the school day. In 2002, New Jersey’s rate of including students in general education approached the national average. In the years 2002-2005, New Jersey maintained a consistent percentage of special education student participation in general education settings (New Jersey Board of Education, Special Education Data).

As noted in the research by Dr. Weitzman (2000), special education administrators play an essential role in planning for the least restrictive setting for special education students. Only 102 school districts, of a total of 616 school districts in New Jersey are eligible to receive Early Childhood Program Aid. These are among the state’s poorest urban and rural districts. Public funding for these programs has been an outgrowth of court action and required legislative response to provide equity in educational funding and opportunity with more affluent suburban districts (NJDOE, 2005). These districts have general education classes available for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities.

The “Preliminary Report on Statewide Progress in Abbott Preschool Program Implementation,” following visits to select districts receiving funding for early childhood programs, indicated that such programs are expanding. “During the 2004-05 school year,
the 31 Abbott districts enrolled over 39,000 three-and four-year old children in preschool—compared to only 19,000 in the first school year of the program. The projected enrollment for the 2005-06 school year is over 43,000 children...as more districts have shifted their emphasis from finding places for children to be served to offering high quality learning experiences” (NJDOE website). Within the body of report, the following advances were reported in the self-assessment process. The Inclusion Component Score increased from 1.8 for the 2003-2004 school year to 2.38 for the 2004-2005 school year. This is broken down into the following areas being evaluated:

*Inclusion 1:* Children with disabilities are included in general education classrooms to the maximum extent possible (Mean = 2.3).

*Inclusion 2:* Integrated therapies are offered within the general education classes (Mean = 2.3)

*Inclusion 3:* Administrative supports are in place that facilitates inclusion. (Mean = 2.5) (Frede, 2005)

When funds and services are not mandated, as in the districts receiving Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA), general education preschool programs are not required by general education mandates. In such districts, special education director role can be crucial in informing school administrators of the importance of such programs in meeting the needs of preschool students with disabilities. This represents the remaining 83% of NJ school districts, not required and therefore many do not offer district operated “early childhood programs” which include typically developing students. In these districts, services are mandated only for the students with disabilities (NJDOE website, ADR 2003-2005).
Research Related to Study Variables

Brown (2005) studied the impact of preschool on middle-class children in a public inclusion program in suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The researcher focused on the academic and social impact on the typically developing students, attending an inclusive preschool setting vs. those identified through a lottery system and not accepted into the district run program. The researcher found “the treatment group had higher post-test scores on the Letter-Word Identification subscale of the WJ-III. No differences were found in social outcomes between the groups” (2005, pp. 121-133).

Inzano (1999) studied the attitudes of New Jersey elementary school principals in relation to the years of experience of the principal, geographic location of the school (i.e. urban, suburban or rural), percent of inclusion, the majority were in agreement that students with specific disabilities should be educated in general education classrooms and believe certain educational strategies, if used in their schools, to be effective in inclusive classroom settings. The research findings indicated that the relationship between years of experience and geographic location of the school and the attitudes of principals toward inclusion of students with specific disabilities were not significant (pp. 92-100).

Maricle (2001) replicated this design with New Jersey secondary school principals. The researcher’s findings were consistent with Inzano’s research that years of experience and school type (geographic location) were not significant factors impacting the attitudes of secondary school principal (pp. 120 – 121).
Weitzman (2000) researched the attitudes of special education directors in elementary school districts regarding their attitudes toward inclusion using a likert based survey instrument developed for the study. The following findings were reported: 81% of directors'/supervisors' attitudes ranged from somewhat supportive to supportive of inclusion, with a mean score of 32.4, which fell in the supportive range, consistent with follow-up interviews. No significant difference was found between the local district factor group, and the attitudes of special education directors, consistent with the findings related to New Jersey elementary and secondary school principals previously discussed. In addition, neither gender nor the amount of litigation experienced within the district revealed significant differences in the director's attitudes toward inclusion. However in this study, a significant difference was found with regard to years of experience with respect to a director's attitude using a one-way analysis of variance. Further analysis using a Scheffé Test revealed, 'Directors' attitudes with 6-10 years of experience were significantly more positive than directors with 1-5 years of experience. Directors who were interviewed were generally more experienced and were those who saw this as a civil rights issue, an issue of segregation and rights and not necessarily simply an educational issue" (pp.158-160).

Summary

Inclusion of students with disabilities of all ages, including preschool age, is mandated by federal legislature under the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) and New Jersey Administrative Code 6A: 14. A number of Supreme and District Court cases support a student's right to participation in the least restrictive environment.
defined as the general education a non-disabled child would attend. Comparison of federal and New Jersey Department of Education Data reveals that the percentage of preschool students attending general education settings in New Jersey is less than the federal average and also less that the percent of school-aged children included in general education greater than 80% of the school day. While in the past, the federal government had been using different measurement standards for preschool and school-aged children, special education data gathered this year, will for the first time, use the same criteria (included more than 80% of the school day, between 40-80% of the school day and less than 20%).

Inclusion is endorsed by the New Jersey Department of Education in “Preschool Teaching & Learning Expectations: Standards of Quality” (July, 2004). This document, distributed by the state department and posted on their website, strongly conveys the importance of including preschool students with disabilities in general education settings.

Since the requirements for placement of preschool students with disabilities in inclusive settings is the direct result of special education rather than general education mandates, the role of the special education administrator is crucial to the development and implementation of programs for students in this age group. The review of literature provides an appreciation for the importance of researching the attitudes of special education directors and related demographic factors, which may impact their attitudes, including their years of experience, geographic location, litigation within the district, and in the case of preschool students, the district’s eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid, distributed by the state.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Special Education Directors/Supervisors in New Jersey Public Schools in relation to inclusive preschool education. The researcher assessed if a significant relationship exists between the attitudes of the special education directors and the following demographic factors: socioeconomic factor grouping of the district, the director’s years of experience, recent litigation within the district, the district’s eligibility status for receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid and the percentage of students included in general education (based on the required district Special Education Annual Data Report, completed as of December 1, 2006).

The investigator assessed the relationship between director’s attitude and the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who participated in general education in 2006. In 2006, the federal government established new criteria for submission by districts as part of the required Dec. 1 (US Office of Education/New Jersey Department of Education, Annual Data, 2006). For the first time, a common standard for preschool and school aged student participation in general education participation was established. Thus the data gathered in the survey referenced the new criterion of 80% participation, in lieu of “participation in general education and/or part-time special education/general education data,” referred to in the introduction and literature review.
This research is an extension of previous research by Seton Hall Doctoral Students, including Frank Inzano (1999), Sharon Maricle (2001) and Laura Weitzman (2000). The current researcher planned to replicate the research design employed by Weitzman's study of "Attitudes of Special Education Directors in Elementary School District's Toward Inclusion/the Least Restrictive Environment" to the current study. Modifications to research design and research procedures were required for compliance with current IRB requirements.

Chapter III describes this study's research design, subjects, instruments, data collection and analysis.

Comparison of Federal and State Statistical Data

Based on review of federal and state special education data reported in Chapter II, the discrepancy between the state and national averages for inclusion of school aged students with disabilities in general education programs has narrowed. As described in Chapter II, inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education previously used different criteria. In contrast, despite the same legal mandate, percentages remained noticeably less for the inclusion of students of preschool age than for students of school age for the same time period. This discrepancy existed despite the use of the broader category, combining data with special education/general education for full and part-time basis. Figure 3 depicts these differences. A comparison of Column 1 in the first graph with Column 3 in the second graph yields lower percentages for the inclusion of preschool inclusion than school aged children with disabilities in New Jersey. Similarly, the rate of preschool inclusion in New Jersey is lower than the national average.
Figure 3

Comparison of Federal/NJ Inclusion Data for Students of School/Preschool Age

Preschool
Research Design

The design for this study employed quantitative and qualitative analysis regarding the attitudes of the school personnel designated as Coordinators of Special Education, including Special Education Directors, Supervisors and Coordinators. "Directors" are responsible for providing "LRE" for preschool students with disabilities in elementary school districts. For the purpose of this study, in accordance with current IRB requirements, a request for permission was mailed to the superintendent for each public elementary school district in New Jersey. Letters of consent were received from 82 superintendents. Following approval by the university's IRB on 10/31/07, Surveys and Informed Consent Forms were then mailed to the special education directors in the districts for which written permission to conduct the research was provided.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Special Education Directors/Supervisors in New Jersey Public Schools in relation to inclusive preschool education. The researcher assessed whether a significant relationship exists between the attitudes of the special education directors and the following demographic factors: socio-economic grouping of the district, the director's years of experience, recent litigation within the district, the district's eligibility status for receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid and the percentage of students included in general education (using data generated required district reporting on the Special Education Annual Data Report, completed as of December 1, 2006). This research is based on the previous research by Seton Hall Doctoral Students, including Frank Inzano (1999), Sharon Maricle (2001) and most prominently Laura Weitzman (2000). For the purpose of this study, the term "director"
has been used to refer to supervisors, coordinators or district staff with responsibility for special education.

While the previous research investigated the attitudes by Special Education Directors and LRE for students with disabilities of school age (preschool – grade 8), the current research focused on students with disabilities of preschool age. Therefore, the survey and interview instruments were modified slightly to target inclusion of preschool students as well as to reflect current terminology, included in changes to federal and state special education codes. Two methodologies were employed. The written survey instrument, *Attitude toward Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students of Directors/Supervisors of Special Education (ATLREPSD)* and the interview format were both based on the instruments developed by the author of the Weitzman study (2000). Minimal changes reflected the targeted age group. In addition to the survey, interviews with *eight* directors were planned.

In their writing about Attitudes Surveys, Schulman and Presser (1996) note, "Despite repeated criticisms, polls and surveys continue to flourish in number and influence. The reason for their success is simple. They combine two things: the ancient, but extremely efficient method of obtaining information from people by asking questions; and modern random sampling procedures that allow a relatively small number of such people to represent a much larger population... Yet all the technical developments of sampling theory, computing and analysis are meaningful only as they facilitate use of inquiries not fundamentally different in nature from our most ordinary attempts to satisfy curiosity" (1996, 1-3). Their perspective supports the mixed-methods approach of this design. By combining a structured survey with a more opened ended interview of select
participations, it is possible to achieve both breadth and depth of understanding regarding the attitudes of Special Education Directors toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in early childhood programs.

Subjects

Of the total of 616 school districts, listed on the New Jersey Department of Education Website (2005, October), districts serving a high school population or exclusively special needs population have been eliminated from the possible sample group, as these districts do not provide public, general education services to students in the required age group (three through five years of age). To further focus this study, the subjects sampled were further stratified to include Special Education Directors in elementary school districts. This was defined by the NJDOE designation as a K-6, K-8 school district, and the same population used in the previous study by Weitzman (2000). This narrowed the subjects to a total of 281 elementary school districts. In the Weitzman study (2000), surveys were mailed to each of the Special Education Directors responsible for coordinating services in these districts.

Though the researcher had intended to replicate this design, changes in IRB requirements necessitated the following: letters of request to conduct the study mailed to the superintendents in 281 elementary school districts and submission of the written permission by the superintendent on district stationery. The researcher was granted written permission to conduct the study from superintendents in 82 districts. Consequently, Surveys and Informed Consent Forms were mailed to the Special
Education Directors in each of the 82 districts, along with copies of their superintendent’s consent.

While the required administrative consent limited the number of surveys that the researcher could send to special education directors, the inclusion of a copy of administrative approval to conduct the study was likely to increase the yield of completed surveys and volunteers for telephone interviews.

As in the previous study by Weitzman (2000), review of district information continued to reveal that school personnel listed with responsibility for “special education coordination” serve under a variety of titles including, Director of Special Services, Director of Special Education, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Supervisor of Special Services, Supervisor of Special Education Services, Supervisor of the Child Study Team or Special Services Coordinator. To serve in this capacity, school personnel serve under a variety of certifications including learning disability teacher consultant, school psychologist or school social worker, and/or special education teacher. Some carry coordination responsibilities while others also serve under supervisor and/or principal certifications. As a further point of clarification raised in the Weitzman study (2000) and confirmed by the current researcher’s review of designated personnel across the state, shared Special Education personnel continued to be employed among the smaller elementary school districts in the Southern and Western region of the state. In such districts, the principal or superintendent may be responsible for special education. While this could have potentially affected the survey return rate, this was not a problem within the previous study, upon which the current research is based, nor was it for this researcher.
For the qualitative portion of the study, as in the Weitzman study (2000), an interview with select participants was determined to provide enhanced understanding of the research questions in order to supplement the quantitative data yielded by structured survey tool. For the telephone interview, consideration was given to every survey respondent, returning the signed letter of informed consent. Of the possible 23 responses from Special Education Directors who expressed their availability for a follow-up interview, eight participants, representing different geographic areas and district types, were chosen by this researcher. The use of volunteers was determined to be appropriate. A potential bias of sample bias resulting from the use of volunteers, such as possibility that volunteers could be likely to express more positive attitudes than those who choose not to extend their involvement beyond the completion of the survey is acknowledged. As noted in the Weitzman study, “because of the nature of the directors’ roles within a district relating to LRE, only those directors who expressed a comfort level would be good subjects for the interview” (2000). If the researcher received too few positive responses indicating their willingness to be interviewed, the researcher would have been required to make alternate plans. Though the previous research study consent required only the return of a postcard the university’s IRB required a significantly more complex, 3-page Informed Consent Form for this study. Fortunately, the response rate ensured adequate choice on the part of the researcher.

Instruments

The survey instrument for this study was based on the Attitudes toward Least Restrictive Environment of Directors/Supervisors of Special Education. Weitzman (2000)
developed this instrument for the study of attitudes regarding inclusion of school-aged students in elementary school districts. The revised survey instrument, known as

*Attitudes of Directors/Supervisors of Special Education toward "Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities,"* will be referenced as ATLREPSD (Appendix H). In addition, the interview protocol was also based on the Weitzman study (Appendix I). Patton (2005) described the purpose of qualitative interviewing as to “allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective...The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (p. 341). Therefore any fault in the interview process, was assumed by this researcher, and was not attributed to the interviewees.

Validity and reliability of the instruments were established by the referenced study. Changes to the instruments reflected the focus on preschool students with disabilities. In addition, minor language changes reflected newly adopted laws including: “the term general rather than regular education, student with disabilities rather than special education student and the use of participation in general education more than 80%, rather than the removal less than 21% of the school day” (Annual Data Report, 2006). The researcher obtained written permission for use and modification of the instruments from the previous author (see Appendix A). Dr. Weitzman also served as a member of this dissertation committee to support proper application of the prior design and instruments.
Data Collection

The required letter of request for permission to conduct research (Appendix D) was mailed to the superintendents in the 281 elementary school districts in New Jersey. Written permission to conduct research was received from 82 school districts. Therefore, the survey, *Attitudes of Directors/Supervisors of Special Education toward “Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities,”* (Appendix H) was mailed out to 82 Special Educator Directors on November 3, 2007; three weeks were allocated for return of the surveys and informed consent form for directors willing to volunteer for further participation. A follow-up mailing was completed after three weeks (November 23, 2007). A final deadline of December 8, 2007 for all forms was specified.

The first mailing included a cover letter (Appendix D), a copy of the superintendent’s consent to conduct the study, an informed consent form with the IRB’s approval stamp (Appendix H), the survey with a self-addressed stamped envelope (Appendix G), and two self-addressed stamped envelopes for separate returns of the survey and informed consent to protect the identity of participants. The follow-up mailing was sent with a reminder letter (Appendix G), another copy of the survey (Appendix G), and a return envelope was mailed after three weeks. A second Informed Consent Form was not included.

Directions required that the signed Informed Consent Form be returned in its entirety. The final page included a check-off for the respondent to indicate their willingness to be interviewed with contact information if interested and a second check-off to request a summary of the research. When Informed Consent Forms were returned,
there was no way for the researcher to match the names on the forms with the return of
the Surveys because the two forms were returned in separate return envelopes.

Each ATLREPSD was coded, using a randomly assigned three-digit code,
developed for the sole purpose of tracking responses for follow-up, allowing reminder
letters to be mailed to those who did not respond by the requested date. This method
enabled the researcher to maximize resources of time and postage. This coding was not
used for data analysis. Recipients were informed of this method in the cover letter as well
as in the Informed Consent Form, as specified within the guidelines set forth by the IRB.
The codes for these surveys were kept in a secure location and not available to anyone
other than the research for the stated purposes. Following final analysis of the data, the
master key with the subject's name, address and code number will be destroyed.

Arrangements were made with the selected volunteers for the telephone interview
to be digitally recorded. All interviews were conducted between November 20, 2007 and
December 7, 2007. The interviews for this survey were conducted by telephone, as
specified on the Informed Consent Form. Interviewees were not given the names of
others interviewed for the purpose of this study.

Anonymity

In accordance with the University's IRB guidelines, anonymity of participants
was protected in the following ways: (1) No names or identifying data have been used in
reporting research. (2) Only the researcher has knowledge of the identity of survey and
interview participants.
Confidentiality

Confidentiality of all research data has been maintained in accordance with IRB guidelines.

*For Survey Participants:* The researcher exclusively maintained all data generated by the survey. A coding system, randomly assigning a numerical, three-digit code to each survey was developed. This coding was not be used for data analysis; its sole purpose was for tracking survey responses for mailing a reminder letter to Directors who did not return the survey by the initial deadline. A master key with the subject’s name, address and code number has been maintained, separate from where the actual data has been stored. The master key as well as the data obtained from analysis has been secured in a locked file cabinet. The master key will be destroyed, when final analysis has been completed and no further follow-up is required.

*For Interview Participants:* The researcher alone conducted, transcribed and coded each interview. The researcher completed training in “Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams.” Verbatim transcriptions, exclusive of identifying information, have been included in Appendix K.

All research data, including digital interview data and electronic data has been transferred onto a USB memory key and maintained in a locked, secure physical site; electronic data has not been maintained on the computer hard drive. As required, the researcher will retain all research data for at least three years following completion of the project.
Data Analysis

Survey analysis, based on the cited study by Weitzman (2000), incorporated current IRB requirements, "The logic and power of probability sampling derive from its purpose: generalization" (Patton, 2002, p.46). To this end, the research design was congruent with the previously noted study of Directors'/Supervisor's Attitudes with regard to inclusion of students of school age. The research questions posed were reflective of the current study's emphasis on inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. While further study of director's gender was not considered essential for this study, an additional research question, uniquely pertinent to inclusion of preschool students with disabilities was posed. This question attempts to assess the impact of the district's eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid, (Research Question 5).

After the survey deadline of December 8, 2007, the researcher charted the data that was received. Each ATLREPSD was assigned a three-digit code number from 101-182. Then each survey was identified with an inclusion score. This score was obtained by adding the points for each of the 10-attitudinal items from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree. The lowest was possible score was 10; the highest possible score was 50. The following demographic factors were recorded: district factor group, litigation number (total number of times that the director reported district participation in resolution conferences, mediation, due process and court proceeding) and years of experience of the directors and receipt of Early Program Aid were also recorded. The percentage of students participating in early childhood programs more than 80% of their school day was then used as the measure of inclusion for preschool students with disabilities.
Special Education Data, available through the New Jersey Department of Education (2005), indicated that New Jersey School Districts vary significantly in size, from less than 400 to greater than 3500 students. Further review indicated that the special education coordination function might be shared by school personnel within the smallest districts in the southern and western counties in New Jersey. As in the study by Weitzman (2000), while question 1 was included to enhance the understanding and interpretation of the data, statistical analysis to determine significance was not completed for this question. For the purpose of this study the term director will refer to school personnel assigned responsible for special education within a given district.

Research Question 2 assessed the diversity of scores on an attitude scale. The score on the attitude scales was used to determine the individual’s attitudes. To interpret the total scores, the researcher charted the scores of the total responses in 5 categories and then found the percentages for each category. Descriptive statistics for the results, including means, have been reported.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if there is a significant difference in a director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to schools from different district factor groups.

Similar statistical analyses were applied to research question 3. An ANOVA was used to determine if there is a difference in a director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to varying years of experience of the directors of special education.

Research question 4 addressed if there was a difference in a director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to schools having
had no litigation and those having some litigation relating to special education. Two mutually exclusive categories were developed, “no litigation” and “some litigation.” A τ test was employed for statistical analysis of the data, as the appropriate statistical treatment when the “population standard deviation is unknown and must be estimated from the sample” (Witte & Witte, 2004, p.313). The level of significance was .05, the standard measure of significance used in social science research (Witte & Witte, 2004, pp.269-270).

Research question 5 used the same statistical analysis method as the previous question and sought to determine if there was a difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to the district’s eligibility status for receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid to support general education for this age group. Two mutually exclusive categories were used; districts receiving no aid and districts receiving aid.

Research question 6, sought to determine if there was a linear correlation between the director’s attitude and the percentage of preschool students with disabilities included in general education more than 80% of the school day. Table 1AA for the required Annual Data Report completed by the Director each year on December 1\textsuperscript{st} measures inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. The Pearson Product Correlation with a level of significance of .05 was used (Witte & Witte, 2004, pp.14, 184-190).

Survey responses represented 84% of the Special Education Directors to whom the surveys were mailed. While the Weitzman study utilized a random sample due to the large number of useable returns received, the current research, in consultation with the dissertation mentor, the researcher determined to utilize data obtained from all surveys.
The data was suitably large and use of all survey respondents would provide for the best understanding of the research questions. Current IRB requirements for use of the Informed Consent Form in lieu of the postcard as well as the requirement of written consent of the chief school administrator necessitated this change in the research population.

**Interview Analysis**

As noted in the previous study, "sampling is also a factor in interviewing" (Weitzman, 2000, p. 84). In contrast to the quantitative analysis of the survey responses, "the logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting 'information-rich' cases for study in-depth, from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002, p.46). Patton further describes sixteen types of qualitative sampling. Maximum variation sampling, or the purposefully picking of a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest, thus attempting to document unique or diverse variations that have emerged, identifying important common patterns that cut across variations" (Patton, 2002, p. 243).

Eight interviews, ranging in time from 30-42 minutes each, were analyzed to glean essential similarities and differences to supplement the qualitative analysis of the survey instrument.

Each verbatim interview transcription has been included in the Appendix K for reference. Only the names of districts and respondents have been omitted to protect
anonymity. Responses were organized in relation to the corresponding interview/survey questions has been included in Chapter IV. A comparative pattern analysis has been offered by the researcher to convey overarching themes. A comparison of quantitative and qualitative data responses to the research questions will be presented.

Summary

Following the approval of Seton Hall University's Institutional Review Board, the researcher made required changes to the design from a previous study of directors' attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities in elementary school districts in New Jersey (Weitzman, 2000). As a result, potential subjects for the current study were limited to Special Education Directors for districts in which superintendents granted prior written approval to conduct this study. This structure was applied to the more limited age group of preschool students, 3-5 years of age. With only minimal changes to the instruments used, reliability and validity of the instruments were established by the previous study; changes reflected the specifically targeted age group and updated terminology aligned with changes to special education code (New Jersey State Department of Education, 2005). A mixed methods design, combining quantitative analysis of the survey instrument and qualitative analysis of the interview instrument was employed to determine the attitudes of special education directors responsible for the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in New Jersey School Districts. The relationship between their attitudes and each of the four demographic factors was also considered, including: district factor grouping, years of experience of the directors,
litigation within the district and district's eligibility for receipt of NJ Early Childhood Program Funds. The researcher then investigated if a relationship exists between the director's attitude and the amount of inclusion in the district.

The ATLREPSD Survey was mailed on November 5, 2007; a follow-up letter and survey mailed on November 24, 2007. The deadline for completed surveys was December 8, 2007. Interviews were conducted between the dates of November 20, 2007 and December 7, 2007. Research results will be discussed in Chapter IV.
Chapter IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Special Education Directors in New Jersey Public Schools in relation to inclusive preschool education. Both quantitative and qualitative data was used to assess Director’s attitudes as well as if a significant relationship exists between the attitudes of the special education directors and the following demographic factors: socio-economic grouping of the district, the director’s years of experience, recent litigation within the district, the district’s eligibility status for receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid and the percentage of students included in general education (using data generated required district reporting on the Special Education Annual Data Report, completed as of December 1, 2006). For purposes of this study, the term director will be used to refer to directors, supervisors or coordinators with responsibility for special education programs in districts. The following research questions were used for analysis:

1. What is the diversity of attitudes among special education directors toward including preschool students with disabilities in general education programs?

2. Is there a significant difference in the local district factor group with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs?
3. Is there a significant difference in the years of experience of the
director/supervisor with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of
preschool students with disabilities in general education programs?
4. Is there a significant difference in the amount of litigation in a district with respect
to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in
general education programs?
5. Is there a significant difference between the director’s attitude as measured in the
enclosed survey and the district’s receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid from
the New Jersey Department of Education?
6. Is there a significant difference between the director’s attitude as measured by the
enclosed survey and the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who
participate in general education more than 80% of their school day?

The quantitative findings of this research have been presented first. The return
rate and comments from the *Attitudes of Directors Toward the Least Restrictive
Environment (ATLREPSD)* Surveys are discussed. Overall description of the results has
been presented.

Statistical analyses have been provided for each of the research questions.
Frequency and descriptive statistics, including means (X) address Research Question 1.
Analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical treatments were used to answer Research
Question 2 and Research Question 3, while t tests were used for Research Question 4 and
Research Question 5. A correlation analysis was used in determining a relationship
between attitude and number students for Research Question 6.
The qualitative data, interview transcriptions have been included in Appendix K. Specific responses to interview questions have been paired when possible with responses to survey questions and their quantitative analysis and organized in relation to the six research questions has also been included. The researcher identified four major areas asked during the interview and those being researched. A comparative chart has been included for evaluation of interview data (Reference Table). The chapter concludes with a comparison of the quantitative data and qualitative data.

Responses from Directors

In New Jersey, 281 school districts are considered elementary school districts (see previous definition). Based on the current requirements of the university’s IRB, letters seeking consent to conduct the study were mailed to the superintendents in each of the 281 school districts. The researcher received 82 letters of written consent from superintendents to conduct the study in their school districts.

Therefore 82 ATLREPSD Surveys were sent. Of this number, 70 completed surveys were returned. In addition, the researcher received 3 phone calls declining participation and 2 written responses indicated that they had an interim superintendent and/or director and the district’s participation would not be appropriate. One was voided due to incomplete responses; one was received after the deadline. Table 10 includes research responses. This represented a useable return rate of 84.2%. A survey response rate of 50% to 60% is satisfactory (Rea & Parker, 1997, p. 69). Questions were strongly worded to solicit agreement or disagreement through the use of unconditional words such as “all” “always” “never.” As anticipated, strong wording evoked thought; a number of
the surveys were returned with these words circled in reference to the answers given.

Interview participants made similar comments.

Table 10

Research Responses

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<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Total surveys returned</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>86.6%</td>
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<td>Total useable surveys</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
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<td>Total follow-up letters</td>
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<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total informed consent forms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total positive responses for interviews</td>
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<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total requests for research summary</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>67%</td>
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<td>based on return of consent form</td>
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Research Question 1: Range for Attitudes of Directors

The responses to the ATLREPSD Survey ranged from a possible low score of 5 points to a possible high score of 50 points. The actual response range was from 19 to 48 points. Table 11 reflects the breakdown of scores.
Table 11

*Frequency Distribution of Inclusion Scores*

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<table>
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<td>Total</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The research received useable, completed *ATLREPSD* surveys from sixty-nine directors. A bar graph for the attitude scores of directors appeared to represent a normal population distribution, as displayed in Figure 4.
Figure 4

Distribution of Attitude Scores
Table 12 reports descriptive statistics for the attitudes of special education directors on the survey instrument. Table 13 reports the frequency distribution for range of attitude rank among directors of special education; Figure 5 depicts a graph for the frequency distribution for experience rank.

Table 12

*Attitudes Regarding Inclusion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude_</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>33.8941</td>
<td>6.02821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13

*Range of Attitude Rank for Elementary Special Education Directors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Rank</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>valid</td>
<td>2.00 Somewhat supportive</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00 Supportive</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00 Very Supportive</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5

Graph of Rank of Attitude Scores of Elementary Special Education Directors
A comparison of attitude scores revealed the following: Only one response fell in the “unsupportive” range with a score between 10-19 points. This represented only 1.4% of the total responses. A total of 15 responses fell in the “somewhat supportive” range with a score between 20-29 points. This represented a total of 20.3% reflecting a cumulative percentage of 21.7. The majority of responses, 43 out of the total of 69, fell within the “supportive range,” with a score of 30-39 points. This represented 62.4 percent of the responses, reflecting a cumulative percent of 84.1. A total of 11 responses fell in the “very supportive” range with a score of 40-49 points. This represented 19.9 percent of the responses. Therefore 98.6% of scores were in the supportive range.

Based on this data, the answer to Research Question 1 was affirmative; there was a diversity of attitudes which exists among special education directors of elementary public school districts; the majority were supportive to the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs.

Research Question 2: Director’s Attitude Toward Inclusion of Preschool Students With Disabilities with Respect to District Factor Group

Research Question 2 posed the following question: Is there a significant difference in the local district factor group with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? Table 14 provides the breakdown of responses for the three designated district factor groups.
Table 14

Frequency Distribution for District Factor Groups of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>socio</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00 - LOW - A, B</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-INTERMEDIATE-CD, DE, FG</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00-HIGH - I, J</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following distribution was found: three district factor subgroups were identified: low income (district factor groups A, B), intermediate income (CD, DE, FG, GH) and high income (I, J). A total of 11 directors identified themselves as working in low-income districts, designated as district factor groups A and B, by the New Jersey Department of Education. This represented 15.9 percent of our respondents. The majority of the directors, a total of 33 directors, identified themselves as working in intermediate income districts, designated as CD, DE, FG and GH by the New Jersey Department of Education. A total of 25 directors identified themselves as working in high income districts, designated as J and I by the New Jersey Department of Education.

A bar graph reflecting the frequency distribution is depicted below in Figure 6.
Figure 6

*Graph of District Factor Groups*
Table 15 provides statistic information including the mean score of 2.2029, range for district factor grouping was 2.00, with a minimum for rank of experience from 1.00 for Low Income to 3.00 for High Income districts; the standard deviation was .69831.

Table 15

*Mean Scores for Socio-Economic Factor Grouping*

**Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>socio</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.2029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis for Question 2

The hypothesis for this question is stated in the null form. Statistical analysis indicates whether the hypothesis is either rejected or not rejected. The formula for the null hypothesis \( H_0: \mu_L = \mu_M = \mu_H \) states that there is no significant difference in director's attitude toward the inclusion of preschool student’s with disabilities with respect to different district factor groups. If the null hypothesis is rejected and \( H_1 \) is accepted, this would mean that there is a significant difference in director’s attitudes toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities from districts of different district factor groups. The accepted standard for social science research, level of
significance, p = .05, was used for determining rejection of $H_0$ or the acceptance of $H_1$ (Hinkle, Wiersma & Jurs, 2003, pp.331-362)

An analysis of variance was used in this determination. The following assumptions were made in using statistical analysis: an independent random sample, the normality of the population and the homogeneity of the variance. Table 16 includes statistical information regarding the comparison of means of director's attitudes and district factor grouping rank.

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics for Socio-Economic Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
<td>Upper Bound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31.3636</td>
<td>5.29665</td>
<td>1.59700</td>
<td>27.8053</td>
<td>34.9220</td>
<td>23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35.3939</td>
<td>6.04638</td>
<td>1.05254</td>
<td>33.2500</td>
<td>37.5379</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33.0000</td>
<td>5.97216</td>
<td>1.19443</td>
<td>30.5348</td>
<td>35.4652</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>33.8841</td>
<td>6.02821</td>
<td>.72571</td>
<td>32.4359</td>
<td>35.3322</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sampling distribution of the F ratio is the F distribution. Each one is a function of the degrees of freedom associated with the two-variance estimates. In Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), K-1 degree of freedom is associated with the MS_b and the N-K degrees of freedom are associated with MS_w. In this case, the sampling distribution of the F ratio MS_B and the MS_w is the F distribution with K-1 (2) and N-K (66) degrees of freedom, or $F_{k-1, n-k, \alpha} = F_{2, 66, .05} = 3.15$; (Hinkle, Wiersma, Jurs, 2003, p. 644).
The following formula is used to obtain the calculated value of \( F = \frac{MS_{between}}{MS_{within}} \)

Therefore the researcher should retain the null hypothesis if:

\[ F < F_{k-1,n-k, \alpha} = F_{2,66,.05} = 3.15. \]

The researcher should reject the null hypothesis if:

\[ F > F_{k-1,n-k, \alpha} = F_{2,66, \alpha = .05} = 3.15. \]

\[
F \text{ Ratio} = \frac{MS_{between}}{MS_{within}} = \frac{82.324}{43.946} = 2.356
\]

\[ \therefore F < F_{k-1,n-k, \alpha = .05} = F_{2,66, \alpha = .05}. \]

2.356>3.15

As the calculated value for \( F (2.356) \) is less than the critical value of \( F (3.15) \), the researcher cannot reject the null hypothesis; therefore the researcher must retain the null hypothesis. The analysis of variance completed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) is shown in Table 17

Table 17

*Analysis of Variance: District Factor Grouping/Attitude*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>164.648</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>82.324</td>
<td>2.356</td>
<td>.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2306.424</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34.946</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2471.072</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of variance was also performed on the sampled data using SPSS as shown above in Table 17. An F value of 2.356; df= 2, 66 was obtained, significance =
.103. This question looked at the relationship of district factor group upon Director's attitude. The .05 level of significance, standard for social science research, has not been met; therefore this confirmed the analysis completed above; the researcher cannot reject the null hypothesis and must assume that there was no significant relationship between director's attitudes toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and the district factor grouping of their district.

Research Question 3: Directors Attitude Toward Inclusion of Preschool Students With Disabilities with Respect to Years of Experience

Research Question 3 posed the following question: Is there a significant difference in the years of experience of the director with respect to the director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? The frequency distribution for experience is displayed in Table 18.

Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Rank</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid 1.00 - 0-5yrs</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 - 6-10 yrs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 - 11-15 yrs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00 - 16+ yrs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7 depicts a bar graph for the frequency distribution of the years of experience for the directors of special education. More than half the survey respondents, 38 directors, 55.1% of the directors have only served as directors for 1-5 years; the combined percentages for the other three categories. Eight directors, 11.6% of the respondents served as directors for 6-10 years. Nine directors, 13% of the respondents served as directors for 11-15 years. Fourteen Directors, 20.3% of the directors served as directors for more than sixteen years.
Figure 7

Experience Rank for Directors
Hypothesis for Question 3

The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in a director's attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to varying years of experience. If the null hypothesis is rejected and $H_1$ is accepted, that would mean that there is a significant difference in a director's attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities between directors' varying years of experience. The alpha level of significance is .05.

Statistical analysis indicates whether the hypothesis is either rejected or not rejected. The formula for the null hypothesis ($H_0: \mu_L = \mu_1 = \mu_H$) states that there is no significant difference in a director's attitude toward the inclusion of preschool student's with disabilities with respect to years of experience. If the null hypothesis is rejected and $H_1$ is accepted, this would mean that there is a significant difference in a director's attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities between directors' varying years of experience. The accepted standard for social science research, level of significance, $\alpha = .05$, has been used for determining rejection of $H_0$ or the acceptance of $H_1$. An ANOVA was the statistical analysis selected in making this determination. The following assumptions were made in using this statistical analysis: an independent random sample, the normality of the population and the homogeneity of the variance. Table 19 includes statistical information for comparison of means for attitude and experience of directors.
Table 19

*Years of Experience: Attitudes on inclusion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Bound</td>
<td>Upper Bound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33.3947</td>
<td>6.44536</td>
<td>1.04558</td>
<td>31.2762</td>
<td>35.5133</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35.2500</td>
<td>5.65054</td>
<td>1.99777</td>
<td>30.5260</td>
<td>39.9740</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33.6667</td>
<td>4.97494</td>
<td>1.65831</td>
<td>29.8426</td>
<td>37.4907</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34.5714</td>
<td>6.08547</td>
<td>1.62641</td>
<td>31.0578</td>
<td>38.0851</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>33.8841</td>
<td>6.02821</td>
<td>0.72571</td>
<td>32.4359</td>
<td>35.3322</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sampling distribution of the F ratio is the F distribution. Each one is a function of the degrees of freedom associated with the two-variance estimates. In the ANOVA, K-1 degree of freedom is associated with the MS_b and the N-K degrees of freedom are associated with MS_w. In this case, the sampling distribution of the F ratio MS_b and the MS_w is the F distribution with K-1 (3) and N-K (65) degrees of freedom, or

\[ F_{k-1, n-k, \alpha} = F_{2, 65, \alpha = .05} = 2.76 \]  
(Heineke. et al., 2003, p. 644).

The following formula is used to obtain the calculated value of 

\[ F = \frac{MS_{between}}{MS_{within}} \]

The researcher should reject the null hypothesis if: 

\[ F \geq F_{k-1, n-k, \alpha} = F_{3, 65, \alpha = .05} = 2.76 \]

\[ F = \frac{10.355}{37.539} = .276 \]

.276 < 2.76

\[ \therefore F < F_{k-1, n-k, \alpha} = F_{3, 66, .05} \]

Thus, the researcher must retain the null hypothesis, as the calculated F (.276) is less than the critical value of F (2.76). See Table 20 for the SPSS ANOVA table.
Table 20

*Analysis of Variance: Years of Experience/Attitude*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>31.065</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.355</td>
<td>.276</td>
<td>.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>2440.008</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>37.539</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2471.072</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An ANOVA was also performed on the sampled data using SPSS; an F value of .276, df= 3, 65 was obtained, significance = .843. The researcher was assessing the relationship between years of experience upon director’s attitude. As .843 > .05 level of significance has not been met. Thus, the researcher cannot reject the null hypothesis and must accept that there was no significant relationship between director’s attitudes toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and their years of experience.

Research Question 4: Director’s Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Preschool Students With Disabilities with Respect to Litigation

Research Question 4 posed the following question: Is there a significant difference with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs in districts with litigation as compared with those with no litigation? Table 21 displays the breakdown of responses.

No litigation was coded as .00; some litigation was coded as 1.00.
Table 21

Litigation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid .00 No Litigation</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00 Some Litigation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21 reports a total of 69 responses from directors of special education who returned the ATLREPSD survey instrument. A demographic survey question asked the following:

Please list the number of times for the Jan.-Dec. 2006 year that you have:

- a. Appeared before an Administrative Law Judge:
- b. Had a case go to court:
- c. Participated in mediation:
- d. Participated in a resolution conference:

Directors in 42 districts reported no experience with litigation within the past year. Directors in 27 districts reported that they had experience with litigation within the past year. Figure 8 depicts a graph of litigation.
Figure 8

Litigation
Table 22 reports statistics for the attitudes of the two groups of special education directors, related to experience with litigation.

Table 22

*Group Descriptive Statistics Attitudes/Litigation*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.00—No Litigation</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33.8333</td>
<td>6.65130</td>
<td>1.02632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00—Some Litigation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33.9630</td>
<td>5.02671</td>
<td>.96739</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In assessing experience with litigation, one of the demographic questionnaire asked directors whether they had any experiences with litigation in their district. This included appearing before an Administrative Law Judge, had a case go to court, participated in mediation, or participated in a resolution conference. Table 22 reveals the following:

Of the total of survey respondents, 42 directors reported that their district had been involved in "no" litigation over the past year, coded as .00. The mean for Director's Attitude toward inclusion among the directors who had no experience with litigation was 33.8333, standard deviation, 6.60589, standard error, 1.02632. Of the total of survey respondents, 14 directors reported that they had at least one, or "some" experience with litigation, coded as 1.00. The mean for directors with some litigation was 33.9630, standard deviation, 5.02671, standard error, 1.02632.
Hypothesis for Research Question 4

The null hypothesis $H_0: \mu_{nl} = \mu_{sl}$ states that there is no significant difference in a director's attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to school having no litigation and those having some litigation. If the null hypothesis is rejected, then the alternate hypothesis, $(H_1: \mu_{nl} \neq \mu_{sl})$ states that there is a significant difference in the director's attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with respect to districts having no litigation and district's having some litigation. An independent $t$ test was performed to analyze the significance of the difference between means for the two groups. The alpha level of significance was .05. In using the $t$ test, three assumptions were made. First, the samples were random and independent. Second, populations were normal and the populations had equal variance. The decision rule was to reject the null hypothesis, if $t > t_{SL} + n_{SL}$.

Results from a ATLREPSD Survey were used to compare attitudes of directors/supervisors regarding the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with litigation with the attitudes of directors regarding the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities from districts that have not had litigation given a mean score of 33.8333 with the mean for districts having litigation with a mean of 33.9630. The results of the analysis of independent sample $t$ test for the relationship between director's attitudes and experience with litigation reported has been Table 23.
Table 23

*Independent Sample τ test Results: Litigation/Attitudes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equal variances assumed</strong></td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equal variances not assumed</strong></td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td>65.137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of a two independent sample τ test was used to determine whether the difference in scores of the two groups represented a different underlying population or whether the difference in scores, could be attributed to random chance in more than 5 out of 100 directors.

This analysis required hypothesis testing. The SPSS data output provided the researcher with the following: the mean for the "no litigation group" = 33.8333; mean of my Group 2 Some Litigation = 33.9630. Mean difference = -.12963; standard error difference = 1.49038, \( \tau = -.087 \) (see Table 23).

The researcher was able to calculate the correct degrees of freedom for the appropriate "τ curve degrees of freedom, d.f. = n₁ + n₂ - 2 (42 + 27 - 2) = 67. The central limit theorem also tells the researcher that because the sample size was sufficiently large, that the sample size will produce a symmetrical, uni-modal bell curve that will be normally distributed, even if the underlying populations were not normally distributed.
The .05 level of confidence was used to determine whether the hypothesized mean could be the result of random chance in which case the null hypothesis will be retained, or whether the researcher can make the stronger decision to reject the null hypothesis and determine that the result of this experiment was so rare that results obtained could not be due to random chance in less five out of 100 trials.

Using the $\tau$ curve for 67 d.f, the researcher was able to calculate the $\tau$ level; if the $\tau$ value was equal to or greater than 2.00, then the result for this research question was unlikely to be due to random chance, using the standard confidence level ($p<.05$) for social science research (Witte & Witte, 2004, p. 592).

$$\tau = \frac{\text{X}_1 - \text{X}_2 - \mu_1 - \mu_2 \text{(hyp)}}{s_{x_1} - s_{x_2}}$$

Degrees of freedom = $n_1 + n_2 - 2$.

The null hypothesis ($H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$) would mean that there was no difference in the attitudes of directors of special education regarding the inclusion of preschool students between those in districts who have experienced litigation from those who have no experience with litigation. The results could be attributed to chance and that nothing special was happening to the underlying population.

The alternate hypothesis ($H_1: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0$) would mean that there was a significant difference in the directors attitudes regarding litigation in district with experience with litigation and no litigation.

The decision rule would be to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance if $\tau$ was greater than 2.00 or less than -2.00 at 67 degrees of freedom (df = $n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 42 + 27 - 2$; df = 67)
\[
\tau = \frac{(X_1 - X_2) - \mu_1 - \mu_2 (hyp)}{s_{x1} - s_{x2}} = \frac{\text{Mean error difference}}{\text{standard error difference}} = -\frac{12963 - 0}{1.49038}
\]

\[\tau = 0.087\]

Degrees of freedom = \(n_1 - n_2 - 2 = 42 + 27 - 2\); \(df = 67\);

\[\tau = -0.087 < 2.00; -0.087 > -2.00;\]

Based on these calculations, the researcher must retain the null hypothesis; this means there was no significant difference between the attitudes of directors toward the inclusion of preschool disabilities, with experience and without litigation experience, at the .05 level of significance.

Using the SPSS printout, the \(\tau\) score for 65 degrees of freedom matched the researcher’s rough calculations and is equal to \(-.087\) (See Table 23). The ‘\(\tau\) test’ assumed that the two population variances were equal and the variance common to both populations could be estimated most accurately by combining the two sample variances to obtain the pooled variance estimate, also known as the standard error difference. In this case, the pooled variance was equal to 1.49038, according to the SPSS printout. These scores were obtained by using the \(t\) scores \(-0.087\), \(df 67\) degrees of freedom at the .05 level of significance. The SPSS printout indicated that the likelihood of this result occurring was the result of random chance .931, or ninety-three out of 100 trials, which does not meet the established criteria of the same result occurring five out of 100 times.

\[\tau = -.087 < 2.00.\] Therefore I am unable to reject the null hypothesis and must assume that there was no significant relationship between the attitudes of directors of special education with regard to experience with litigation in their district.
Research Question 5: Director's Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Preschool Students with Disabilities and District's Eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid

Research Question 5 posed the following question: Is there a significant difference between the director's attitudes as measured by survey instrument and the district's receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid from the New Jersey Department of Education? Is there a significant difference with respect to the director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs in districts with litigation as compared with those with no litigation? The breakdown of responses has been reported in Table 24.

Table 24

*Percentage Receiving Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid .00 - No Aid</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00 - Aid</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 69 special education directors who completed the *ASLREPSD* Survey, 56 indicated that their district received no Early Childhood Program Aid Funds (ECPA), representing 81.2% of the responses. A total of 13 directors indicated that their district received the ECPA funding. This represented 18.8% of the responses. Figure 9 depicts the frequency distribution for ECPA funding.
Figure 9

Distribution of ECPA
Table 25 reports descriptive statistics for the two groups of directors, those in districts receiving no Early Childhood Program Aid, and those in districts receiving aid.

Table 25

*Director’s Attitudes/Early Childhood Program Aid*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>ECPA</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Aid</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>34.3214</td>
<td>6.17063</td>
<td>0.82458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32.0000</td>
<td>5.16398</td>
<td>1.43223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25 reports descriptive statistics for the attitudes of the two groups of directors, those receiving no funds and those receiving Early Childhood Program Aid. Of the total of 69 directors who responded, 56 directors reported that their district received no ECPA funds over the past year. This was coded as .00. The mean for director’s attitude toward inclusion among the directors with no funds was 34.3214, standard deviation 6.1603, standard error mean, .82458. The mean for districts receiving ECPA funds, coded .01 was 32.00, standard deviation, 5.16398, standard error mean, 1.43223.

**Hypothesis for Research Question 5**

The null hypotheses $H_0: \mu_{NA} = \mu_A$ states that there is no significant difference in a director’s attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect to districts receiving no Early Childhood Program Aid and districts receiving Early Childhood Program Aid. If the null hypothesis is rejected, then the alternate hypothesis
(H₁: μ_{NA} ≠ μ_{A}) will be accepted, which states that there is a significant difference in a
director's attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities with respect
to districts receiving no Early Childhood Program Aid and districts receiving Early
Childhood Program Aid. The alpha level of significance is .05.

Table 26 reports SPSS analysis for an independent sample τ test for attitudes
among directors from districts with no aid and districts with aid.

Table 26

Independent Sample τ test/Inclusion/EPICA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude_</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>1.405</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of a two independent sample τ test was used to determine whether the
difference in scores of the two groups represents a different underlying population or
whether the difference in scores, can be attributed to random chance in more than 5 out of
100 directors.
This analysis requires hypothesis testing. The SPSS data output provided the researcher with the following: the mean for the "no funds" = 34.3214; mean of my Group 2 "some funds" = 32.00, mean difference = 2.32143; standard error difference = 1.84803, \( t = 1.256 \). The researcher was able to calculate the correct degrees of freedom for the appropriate \( \tau \) curve degrees of freedom, d.f. = \( n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 56 + 13 - 2 = 69 - 2 = 67 \). The central limit theorem also tells the researcher that because the sample size is sufficiently large, that the sample size will produce a symmetrical, uni-modal bell curve that will be normally distributed, even if the underlying populations are not normally distributed. The .05 level of confidence was used to determine whether the hypothesized mean could be the result of random chance in which case the null hypothesis will be retained, or whether to make the stronger decision to reject the null hypothesis and determine that the result of my experiment is so rare that it could not be due to random chance in less than five out of 100 trials.

Using the \( \tau \) curve for 67 df, the researcher was able to calculate the \( t \) level; if the \( \tau \) value is equal to or greater than 2.00, then the result is unlikely to be due to random chance, using the standard confidence level (p<.05) for social science research (Witte & Witte, 2004, p. 592).

\[
\tau = \frac{(X_1 - X_2) - \mu_1 - \mu_2 (hyp)}{s_{x1} - s_{x2}} = \frac{\text{Mean error difference}}{\text{standard error difference}} = \frac{2.3214 - 0}{1.848} = 1.256
\]

Degrees of freedom = \( n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 65 \);

The null hypothesis (\( H_0: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0 \)) would mean that there was no difference in the attitudes of directors of special education regarding the inclusion of preschool students between those in districts who have experienced litigation from those who have
no experience with litigation. The results can be attributed to chance and that nothing special is happening to the underlying population.

The alternate hypothesis \((H_1: \mu_1 - \mu_2 = 0)\) would mean that there is a significant difference in the director's attitudes regarding litigation in district with experience with litigation and no litigation.

The decision rule would be to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance if \(t\) is greater than 2.00 or less than 2.00 at 65 degrees of freedom

\[
df = n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 43 + 26 - 2; \ df = 67
\]

\[
\tau = 1.256 < 2.00; \ 1.256 > -2.00;
\]

Based on the decision rule, the researcher cannot reject and must therefore retain the null hypothesis and assume that there was no significant relationship between the director's attitude regarding inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and their receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid Funds, at the alpha .05 level of significance.

Using the SPSS printout, the \(t\) score for 67 degrees of freedom matched my rough calculations and is equal to 1.256 (See Table 26). The \(\tau\) test assumes that the two population variances are equal and the variance common to both populations can be estimated most accurately by combining the two sample variances to obtain the pooled variance estimate, also known as the standard error difference. In this case, the pooled variance equaled 1.844, according to the SPSS printout. These scores were obtained by using the \(t\) scores = 1.256, df 67 degrees of freedom at the .05 level of significance. The SPSS printout indicated that the likelihood of this occurring as a result of random chance was .384, which did not meet the established criteria of the same result occurring 5/100 times due to chance alone. \(\tau = 1.256 < 2.00\) and \(\tau = 1.256 > -2.00\). This confirmed the
researcher’s decision to retain the null hypothesis and the assumption that there was no significant relationship between the attitudes of directors of special education and whether their district received Early Childhood Program Aid.

Research Question 6: Director’s Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Preschool Students with Disabilities and Percent of Inclusion

Research question 6 posed the following: Is there a significant difference between the director’s attitude as measured by the enclosed survey and the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who participate in general education more than 80% of their school day? Table 27 displays the descriptive statistics from the SPSS Output regarding directors attitude toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and the district’s percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities more than 80% of the school day, the standard established by the federal and state government.
Table 27

Percentage of Inclusion of Preschool Students More than 80% of the School Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>percent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.07</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>34.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>36.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>.18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.57</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.62</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>84.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>.83</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>87.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As noted in Table 27 above, the 12 directors reported including 0% of their students; 9 directors reported including 100% of their preschool student with disabilities. There is a wide variation in the percentage of inclusion. Figure 10 depicts the same information, in graphic form. Figure 10 includes the frequency distribution for the percentage of students included more than 80% of the school day.
Figure 10

Inclusion of Preschool Students with Disabilities More than 80% of School Day
Descriptive statistics for the comparison of director’s attitudes with their district’s percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities more than 80% of the school day is reported in Table 28.

Table 28

*Director’s Attitude/Percentage of Inclusion of Preschool Students More than 80% of the School Day*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.3974</td>
<td>.33487</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28 indicates that of the 69 directors who returned their completed ATLRESPD surveys. The mean percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities was .3977.

Hypothesis for Research Question 6

The null hypothesis $H_0 (P = 0)$ stated that there’s no linear correlation between the director’s attitude and the percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities special education students greater than 80% of the school day. If the null hypothesis were rejected and the alternate hypothesis were to be accepted $H_1 (P ≠ 0)$, then there would be a linear correlation between the director’s attitude and the percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities special education students greater than 80% of the school day. The alpha level of significance is .05.

Figure 11 plots the relationship between special education director’s attitudes toward inclusion and the reported percentage of inclusion in their districts.
Figure 11

*Attitudes toward Inclusion/Percentage of Inclusion of Preschool Students More Than 80% of Day*
Table 29

*Attitudes toward Inclusion/Percentage of Inclusion of Preschool Students More than 80% of the School Day*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In research question 6, an analysis was completed to determine whether there was a relationship or correlation between the following variables, attitudes of special education directors toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and the district’s percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities more than 80% of the school day. For this research hypothesis, the researcher was not trying to determine causation. Therefore, a correlation study with the two variables noted above was most appropriate to determine the strength of the relationships, if any were found.

In using a correlation analysis, the following assumptions were made:
The numbers were a random sample of paired data, the Y populations (Percentages) are normally distributes at each X values (attitudes). The Y populations had equal variance at each X point and both populations were normally distributed.

The decision rule would be to reject the null hypothesis if “r”, the correlation is greater than .232, df 67 or if r is less than -.232 (Hinkle et al., 2003, p.647). In performing calculations, supported by SPSS output computations, r = .110.
Since .110 < .232 and .110 > -.232, based on the pre-established decision rule, the researcher could not reject the null hypothesis and accepted that there was no linear correlation between the director's attitudes and the percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education more than 80% of the school day.

Interpretation of SPSS results yielded the following: The strength of r = .110 indicated that there was little if any correlation; the 2 tailed significance test = .370 indicated the relationships between directors attitudes and the percentage of inclusion in their districts were not significant (See Table 29). The direction was positive and non-linear. The shared variance \( r^2 \) equaled .012. This could be interpreted as approximately 1.2% shared variance between director's attitudes and percent of inclusion. The significance, \( 1 - r^2 \) indicated that approximately 98.8% of the shared variance, which was likely to be due to random chance.

To summarize the results to research hypothesis 6, the proportion of variability between the attitudes of special education directors toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and the district's percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities more than 80% of the school day was associated with random chance, 98.211% of the time. This result did not meet the .05 level of significance, accepted as the standard for social research standards.

**Summary of Quantitative Data**

The research for this study utilized an adapted attitude survey and demographic information from elementary special education directors in New Jersey in districts in which the district's superintendent or the district's chief operating officer granted prior
written permission to conduct the study. Data was also collected on the number of preschool students with disabilities divided by the number of reported students in general education more than 80% of the school day. The return rate for useable surveys in districts with prior administrative authorization was 84.2%. Based on their responses to the ATLREPSD survey instrument, the relationship of director’s attitudes, in New Jersey elementary school districts was analyzed with regard to the following demographic variables: socio-economic district factor grouping, years of experience, experience with litigation, eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid and percent of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education for 80% of the school day. Diversity among director’s attitudes were found, however the relationships between director’s attitudes and the variables posed in the research questions 2 through 6 were not found to be significant.

Analysis of Interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted between the dates of November 20, 2007 and December 7, 2007. As per IRB guidelines, interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, plugged directly into the phone line; the researcher completed all transcriptions. Each interview was transcribed in its entirety and included in Appendix A of this dissertation. The sole modification was the removal of any information that could identify a director/supervisor or district.

Demographic information was accessed through introductory questions – “tell me a little about your district, programs and type of district you work in.” Additional
information was obtained through discussion revealed through the standard questions posed. Fifteen structured questions were asked during the telephone interview with each of the eight directors. Responses were then related to the six research questions.

From the 23 directors who returned informed consent for interview participation, the researcher selected eight. Interview participants represented eight different New Jersey counties across the state. They also represented districts from different socio-economic district factor groupings, reflecting a diverse grouping with regard to years of experience as well as suburban/rural settings; in New Jersey, urban districts are underrepresented among Elementary School Districts. In small elementary school districts, directors/supervisors of special education often wear many hats. Among the eight interviewed as part of this study, one was a Superintendent/Director of Special Services, another was a Child Study Team Coordinator/Learning Consultant and a third participant served as Coordinator for a four-district regional group of schools districts. Thus the selection of participants provided the researcher with unique access to attitudes and experiences with regard to the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities.

The qualitative analysis of interviews has been organized by relevance to the six research questions. Information related to demographic information was gathered during the introductory exchange as well as in relation to the structured interview questions. In section one, discussion of Research Question 1, the discussion of qualitative results for interview questions has been paired with corresponding survey questions. The interview participants expressed diverse attitudes regarding inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education and offered information regarding a variety of inclusive preschool program options provided within their districts.
Qualitative data from interviews was paired with quantitative data obtained from responses to matching survey questions when available. Table 30 reports the relationship between this study’s research questions and the relationship between specific research/survey questions.

Table 30

*Research Question/Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1</th>
<th>Attitudes of Directors</th>
<th>Interview Questions: 1, 4, 6, 8,9,10,11 (and corresponding survey questions) Incidental information gathered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>District Factor Grouping</td>
<td>Introductory question – tell me about your district, location, size, suburban/rural Incidental information gathered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3</td>
<td>Experience of Director</td>
<td>Introductory question – tell me about your district, location, size, suburban/rural Incidental information gathered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 4</td>
<td>Litigation/parental attitudes</td>
<td>Introductory question – tell me about your district, location, size, suburban/rural Incidental information gathered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 5</td>
<td>Receipt of EPCA funds</td>
<td>Introductory question – tell me about your district, location, size, suburban/rural Incidental information gathered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 6</td>
<td>Implementation/Percent of Inclusion</td>
<td>Introductory Question, Interview Questions: 2A, 2B, 7, 12 Incidental information gathered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 1: Diversity of Attitudes

The eight interviews were conducted with special education directors who shared diverse attitudes and experiences related to inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education. Each was thoughtful and shared a variety of experiences and views with regard to the challenges in meeting federal and state expectations for the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. As the premise of the study indicated, most of the eight elementary school districts represented by the interview participants did not start off with general education preschool programs. In accordance with the literature review in Chapter II, for the districts, not eligible to receive Early Childhood Program Aid, the impetus for program development was derived from special rather than general education mandates. It should be noted that the strong wording of many of the questions solicited agreement or disagreement through the use of words such as, “all” “always;” “never.” This yielded unsolicited comments written on a number of the returned surveys; these words were circled or directly commented upon, despite the closed-ended format of the instrument.

In general, the researcher was impressed with the foresight and attention, which the eight directors have given to inclusion in their district, and these interviews provided the research/reader with insight into the planning, decision-making and implementation process. A comment by Interview Participant #8 reflected the viewpoints of many:

8 Well, it’s complicated. I’ll tell you where I feel it’s positive. There was a time, when I started in this business, before there was this push toward inclusion, that regular education teachers as well as child study team members had the philosophy that this kid is having trouble, so get him out. I think that the inclusion model has really broadened the educator’s minds. That’s the biggest value. Now a
regular education teacher needs to say to himself, I don’t know what to do with this child – so just get him out. They know it’s not going to be that easy. So it’s really forcing everybody to say what can I do to keep the child in the general ed population. I’m only going to pull him out at last resort, or I’m only going to pull him out to give him specific skills to take back into the gen. education classroom. It makes everybody less likely to segregate him or her. I do think that overall, philosophically, it has changed the whole idea of regular and special education. It has really broken down that barrier so that now special education is sometimes in regular education. Special education is sometimes in the regular ed; so you’re not just thinking that special ed. is separate and apart. I guess I believe that concept has been powerful, and unbelievably valuable to education as a whole.

Interview Question 1

This question asked directors: “Many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of preschool students with disabilities to be good educational practice. Why would do you think they hold this view and how does this coincide or differ from your views?” The 8 directors interviewed indicated general agreement with this statement.

Interview Participant 5 and Interview Participant 8 reflected some concerns because they feel strongly that early learning is crucial to future success and question whether preschool students with disabilities always receive the best preparation in inclusive or special education settings.

The following were answers for Interview Question 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I think it is good - I think it is very good to let both regular education students see what these children are capable of doing. I also think it is motivating to the child who does have special needs to see what other children are capable of doing, because they are not always perfect either. I also think it gives them a happy medium. Sometimes the regular education student is more appreciative if they are able to help and share things...I feel that children can be an inspiration to other children and I think that’s the best way to be. We have never had a severely handicapped child. My most severely handicapped child was a spastic quadriplegic which we could not service in our school, and he was placed in an out-of-district placement because he required so many special services...In our small</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
district, it just didn’t work and his mother realized that and we found a place that’s so good for him that the parent kept him there even after 6th grade when we were through servicing him, he has remained there. So there are certain circumstances that I feel that inclusion is not good...That’s a problem to find a place for a child like that because where we are, there are not many. Where we are, it is hard to find a placement for a severely autistic child. I think that there is great merit in notion of normally achieving models for kids, with the most important things that happen at preschool, being language and play. If you are with all other disabled students, particularly with the high incidence of kids with language delays, that typical language and behavior is not modeled for you, so there is fewer opportunities for you develop those skills.

Yes. I think that’s why there is a push from federal government on down to include students with disabilities with the general education population. Yes, it would.

It probably will lead to a more inclusive society, if only because the more exposure people have toward all types of people, the better off we all are. I think that the research supports it.

I don’t know why there’s a push for inclusion. I mean I don’t know the thinking behind it. I can rationalize in my own mind that the reason that this was created was to not to segregate or label a child early on. We also know from the research that the preschool years so essential to learning and I think that probably the thought is to provide education as possible in the early years, and you’ll be dealing with less problems later on. But that’s the little struggle that I’m having right now. I believe in preschool programs, but as I said they do sometimes need some individual attention.... Yes neighborhood district with non-disabled peers.

I think that the children certainly have to learn to live in the world with both disabled and non-disabled people, so we might as well start early. I believe that the role modeling is often better and the kids just have a nicer, richer experience. But I also think that there’s a feeling on some parents part – because I think that its hard to explain to some parents that their three year old is autistic or disabled and I think that some parents are of the belief that if they put them with regular education students, they are going to be regular education kids. So some of it is denial on the parent’s part.

Hopefully, with the little ones, they are more open to differences. With everything, the younger you start them; the more receptive they will be for people who do have problems.

It’s so complicated...I believe overall, not just for preschoolers, because I don’t think it began with preschool. The real push began with statistics which
showed elementary/secondary ed special education was not always being effective. And maybe that trickled down to the preschool level. There are so many factors running through my head right now, I don’t know what the single factor was. I’m sure that part of it was parentally driven. I’m sure that there must have been some programs where, like with the boom of autism. Maybe parents of children with just language problems delays, those parents wanted their children in inclusive settings. I don’t think it was financial. I don’t know what caused the sudden push. The only thing that I can think of was that ten to fifteen years ago, the statistics came out showing that special education was not that special. That’s the only thing that I can think of that started the whole pendulum swinging. You know we really have to get the kids in general education, because it wasn’t equivalent...they are equivalent -- that’s the key. If you are going to have a good special education program, you have to make sure that it is equal or better and sometimes it’s not. Maybe that’s what drove the push to put everyone back into regular ed.

*Interview Question 4/Survey Question 1*

Directors were asked: “What do you believe about the statement, “All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others?” More than half the directors sought to qualify their answers, based on the word “all.” Several of the directors indicated greater comfort with the statement by adding qualifying words such as “most,” “usually,” or “if possible.” Several commented that “disruptive to self or others” should not be considered the only criteria in decision-making for regarding preschool students with disabilities.

*Interview Question 4/Survey Question 1* yielded the following responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I agree with that, I really do. I think that is the goal - that is the ultimate goal. The only thing that would make me take them out is if they are so disruptive that they hinder the learning of the regular education child. And that to me would be the last resort. I’d put an aide in there first — I’d do anything to keep that child in the classroom. I have an aide; sitting with an autistic child in kindergarten who I know doesn’t need the aide, just to keep him on target in other areas. He went into kindergarten able to read write and do math. But I think, just to keep him on task and target the aid is there. I’d rather pay for the aide, then have a child fail in kindergarten.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And the question is what do I believe about that - Unless disruptive to themselves or others? I would probably change the wording. Yes, providing it is a successful experience for them. And then, what defines successful depends on the child, and the community and everything else.

I generally agree with that. If possibly, sometimes there are times when you can give them a lot more attention in a separate program. I think whenever you can integrate time into general education that has good value also.

Well, I can't go along with anything that says all. So, I'd have to disagree... modify it to say most students, but there are student who have significant learning disabilities, such as a child with significant reading disabilities. I think that their needs are better met with replacement reading literacy - that's the type of child with a pullout-reading program with us.

If you had asked me that two months ago, I would have totally agreed with that. Now that I'm getting into that, and looking closely at this, I don't think it's going to be as successful as I thought it was going to be.... Because I'm looking at the services which we are providing for the children now, and I'm beginning to realize the number of services that we are not going to be able to provide.

I think that's an ideal -- that can certainly be a goal, but to start off that way is unrealistic. Maybe they'll get there, but not all kids will get there, even by fourth grade. Even by fourth grade, you still have students who need resource center, or self-contained classrooms. That's my response. That's why I think that the whole continuum of services is so important. We still need that. ...No, because some kids have different needs. For instance, I have kids who are now six or seven. We did include them in the preschool. And they were not autistic -- not our worst kids. But all they did was lie there for two years. They were spastic cerebral palsy children. They literally lied in the strollers for two years. They got OT and PT. Now if you think about it, and this is just me, is it more important that we try to get these children special help. That we try to get them some feeding therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy to try to loosen up their muscles so that maybe by the time that they are five, they can sit up, so they can be in a classroom. Or, is it more important for them to be in a classroom and we all pretend that they are making a Christmas tree for mommy for Christmas, and have the aide do it. That's my point. Whereas, now my children are able to use switches and all sorts of things, but they lied there for two years before that.
As soon as I hear “all” I keep saying is there an “agree somewhat!” Ok yeah – because there is the phrase that unless there is a disruption…but even with that, there are some students where maybe a pull-out would be better for them, even if they are not a disruption. I believe that it is a case-by-case decision that you have to look at.

No again, I don’t. I don’t feel there that mechanism to develop, to really overcome those specific deficits that those children have. It’s not intensive enough, sometimes, to really help them develop those skills. I guess that there could have been a model somehow, where this could be something to consider in the future, where if they simultaneously when to the which could went to the general ed, and then you provided them some kind of mechanism to develop those skills…but it’s sort of what we do, because then their going to general ed half of the day, and special ed, the other part.

Interview responses were aligned with survey responses for question (survey question 1). Collaborating data supported the qualitative interview data as follows:

The frequency distribution is depicted as a bar graph in Figure 12. The following response key for the survey question was used: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. More than half responded that they agreed (4.00 = 37.7%) or strongly agreed (29%) which represented a cumulative percentage of 66.7% who agreed with this statement. Only 24.6 % disagreed or strongly disagreed regarding the “inclusion of preschool students with disabilities unless disruptive to self or others.” Of the 69 surveys returned, the scores ranged from 1.00 to 5:00 on this questions and the mean score was 3.6812, standard deviation 1.19426.

Table 31 reports the responses to Survey Question 1.
Table 31

**Survey Question 1: Frequency Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>2.9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>8.7</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses are graphed in Figure 12. Table 32 displays descriptive statistics for the Survey Question 1.
Figure 12

Responses to Survey Question 1
Table 32

Descriptive Statistics for Survey Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<th>Maximum</th>
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<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 6/Survey Question 3

Directors/Supervisors were asked: “Would you like to work in a “full inclusion district? Why or why not?” Of the eight directors who participated in the phone interview, three indicated that felt that they were already working in a full inclusion district, two indicated that they would be interested in working in a full inclusion district, one said they were neutral and one indicated that they thought that a full inclusion district would compromise their ability to provide a student with the full continuum of options.

The directors offered the following responses:

Subject: 1  
Responses: I feel we are a full inclusion district. I’m hoping that the preschool next year will go to full inclusion. I’d like to see that and I’d like to see it so the little ones can just be taken out for a little help if they need it. We’ve talked about it off and on. Two years ago we spoke about this very seriously, but then we didn’t follow through. I’d like to see it happen this year – our new superintendent has had this in previous districts so he’s familiar with it and I like to see it happen before I retire. I’d like to see it happen and get off on a good foot. I think that with only the possibility of three children next year, that’s a good time to do it because you are starting with a small number and that to me is ideal. We are not starting with ten children; we’re only starting with two or three. It makes it so much easier to assimilate them and no one knows the difference.

Subject: 2  
Responses: If I am to understand full inclusion district to mean that every child goes to school in that school no matter what? Yes, if that district had financial
resources and full on-board from board of education down to make that happen. I think that has to be a very special set of circumstances for that to work and not be lip service. At the end of the day, you have to have environments where that child can make progress. You could have six one-on-one aides and if in the end, a child can’t participate in academics or be socially successful. I think that kids fit in less often than the government thinks they would. That can have negative impact. I’m thinking of a child we had with downs syndrome who we had here for preschool and kindergarten: once we got beyond that, it was not the right environment and he was very frustrated. You could individualize for him every minute of day, but that still didn’t mean that he was able and a part. I know there are kids - Videos can be made about the success for them, but that doesn’t mean that it works for everybody.

I would be neutral – I wouldn’t particularly seek it out, or not seek it out. That would be fine if that were where I was there. So I’d say, I’m neutral

No! Laughter – Now, you’ll know how old I am when I say that. I’d like to be able to meet the needs of every single kid. If you have a district that is full inclusion district, they may not be giving a full continuum of options for every child.

Absolutely! I don’t think I’d ever go to a district that didn’t believe in inclusion. My reasoning being that I certainly know what can happen with children who are classified handicapped in some way and how they benefit so totally from having the experience of dealing with their peers and being challenged to perform. I’ve seen it happen over and over again, how they come up to that challenge and some-times even far exceeded our expectations ... Students maintain relationships - Absolutely! We have a nine-year-old autistic child here and he is just adorable but he is not real communicative yet. He does have speech and doesn’t have language but he doesn’t – when you’re hallways or you’re going someplace and he’s in the hallways, kids say hi, - they recognize him and he responds to that. So even though he not in the same class, these were children, which he was with from last year though now he’s in a different class. The children from last year still are his friends, and still respond to him and that really has broadened his socialization. He really responds; he smiles and makes eye contact. That’s just an example of how positive it can be.

Well I am working in a full inclusion district – by choice, yes. I think I am. The twelve children that we have placed out of district are children with such significant behavior problems that they have thrown furniture at the vice principals, they are self destructive, they have cut themselves, have set fires. Their parents have had to call police to their homes. Those are the children who are out of district and those are children – talking
about being disruptive in a classroom. They need a psychiatric base to
their program. They are not learning and they need psychiatric care at this
point. So those are the kids who are out of district. I really feel that I am
in an inclusive district. I don’t send out any autistic kids. I don’t send out
any multiply disabled kids. I don’t send out any learning disabled
students. I have blind kids, deaf kids, cochlear implant kids, sign
language kids, but I hope I don’t have fire setters. I have to protect the
3600 other kids.

Yes. I feel we do, because again we go, based on the needs of the students
in mainstreaming whenever we can.

I don’t think I would. I think that I’d be frustrated because I don’t think
I’d have the options I needed. To say that you’re going to be full
inclusion, that’s taking away the whole gamut, the continuum of options
from me. I would just feel that I wouldn’t want to be in a district where
the only option was restrictive either. It takes all the options away. I
really believe strongly in the individualization of it so I want the option
for this kid to be able to have a special class and maybe another I want
them to be included. No, I don’t want it to be that or nothing.

Table 33 and Figure 13 report responses to Survey Question 3 as a frequency
table and bar graph. Table 34 reports descriptive statistics for same question. Responses to
this question again supported the answers of the participants in the phone interviews.

Using the same answer key as previously described, 42% agreed or strongly agreed with
the idea of working in a “full inclusion district; 31.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The reported range was between 1.00 and 5.00. The mean for responses to Survey
Question 3 equaled 3.3478, t.18602.
Table 33

*Frequency Distribution for Survey Question 3*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 13

*Responses to Survey Question 3*
Table 34

*Descriptive Statistics for Survey Question 3*

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Interview Question 8/Survey Question 5*

Directors/supervisors were asked: “Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?” Director's concerns were related to preschool students with disabilities always being educated in their neighborhood schools; they would feel more comfortable if the statement was qualified with the words most, or usually. Most indicated that the preschool students were a part of their community, particularly in small elementary school districts. Inclusion provides the opportunity for them to be part of their neighborhood school. Directors again preferred to qualify the statement, references the continuum of options and that “one size does not fit all” and this possibly translated to inclusion may not be right for all children. In the case of students with severe disabilities, a more specialized setting may in fact be more appropriate, particularly in medical needs or behavioral needs impact not only on the needs of the individual child but his/her non-disabled and peers with disabilities. The following were responses given by the interview participants:

Directors interviewed offered the following responses:
Subject | Responses: 
--- | ---
1 | Well a lot of times that’s where their playmates are. Our students are sometimes scattered all over the islands. But a lot of times, they do have friends. It may be their older siblings friends, but the do have friends that they play with. They may be from previous preschools that they’ve gone too, if they’ve been in school before. I know one, no two of my little preschoolers this year, they have had siblings in school so they do know all of the children from other situations. And they do belong here, they really do. If I were to send them away, I think that the parents would be angry. One family, we did offer another placement, and they said no. They said we want him here and this is his school. His sister is here and we want him here to. We said okay, fine. It’s up to you to make that decision. I said that if we send him there, than these are the additional services that we can provide him. But they said no, we want him kept here and that was their decision and we accepted that. But we sometimes will offer that. If they want the services that we cannot offer enough of, then we will offer an out of district placement, but that’s up to the parents.

2 | Well – it the same – it sounds almost like a repeat of an earlier question. I do believe they should because every child should have the opportunity to be educated in their local public home school. I believe they shouldn’t. Because there are some circumstances for preschools, they would not be safe medically or the resources to serve them properly, especially for low incidence disabilities. But yes, I do believe that the typical preschool handicapped child should be educated in a local public school – I do believe that’s their home school.

3 | Well, that’s where they live and where they are going to be integrated. If they are going to be doing activities, then that’s where they’ll be doing it. It’s where their family lives and of course, there are lots of advantages in your neighborhood.

4 | Well again, it’s the word “always” because I believe that you are missing kids if you say always. I’d say, most.

5 | Well, they are part of the community. Children with handicaps are part of the community. We are not a transient community. They are going to grow up here; these are going to be their classmates for the years that we educate them and they should get to know their classmates and their educational community, which they are going to be part of. The community is very kind and loving and caring, by the way. We are a community school. We are here and this is their school. If I have to send them someplace else because they are so severely handicapped, our goal is always to bring them back to district at some point.
I am not so sure; we don’t necessary do it in their neighborhood school because I have four elementary schools. One is completely barrier free and handicapped accessible. It was build for wheel chairs and Rifton chairs and all that. So we have kids, in their district, but not necessary in their neighborhood school.

Again, I feel that medically is the major part of it, because especially when they are that little, I think that they should be exposed or given as many chances to be with the general education students as they can. At that level, it’s really not academic, its social and I think that’s important for them also. Where in a specialized setting, they wouldn’t get the role models and interactions with the general ed. kids.

No, I think that I do believe that. It might not be in a fully general ed. program. But I don’t know why, except as I said, if they were incredible violent to those around him, or I guess, if the child’s condition was so specialized that I didn’t feel that I couldn’t bring in a specialist that could serve that need, then maybe I would seek a specialized placement. I think it does well for everyone in the building. Our preschool has helped to make the school kinder. I do think that every child should be in its neighborhood school.

Quantitative survey data from Table 35 indicated that 46% of those who responded disagreed with the statement that preschool student should always be educated in their neighborhood school. The bar graph in Figure 14 depicts the distribution of scores. Table 36 reports the mean for scores was 2.8261, standard deviation 1.21215.

Table 35

Frequency Distribution for Survey Question 5

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<th>Frequency</th>
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<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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Figure 14

*Graph of Responses for Survey Question*
Table 36

Descriptive Statistics For Survey Question 5

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<td>69</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.826</td>
<td>1.21215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Question 9/Survey Question 6

Directors were asked: “Whether restrictive in LRE is synonymous with segregated?”

A wider discrepancy is noted in response to this question, with three stating a definite yes, four responding no and one did not respond directly.

Subject: Responses:

1 The only self-contained is my preschool and that makes a difference too, because it is my preschool. We don’t refer to it as self contained – however we say it is a special class – it is a special education class. So the parents know that and we are very honest with them. But being as it’s the only special class. We just called it as a preschool class. It’s just a very small class for kids who need special help. However, it doesn’t stand out as much as if it were one of eight classes. It’s just the way that is presented. .... And yet the regular preschool class has 12 children in it – 12-14 and that’s a small too yet, that’s regular education.

2 No. Sometimes the general education setting is the most restrictive environment for a child, and the more segregated setting whether it’s a self-contained classroom or a specialized school is the least restrictive for the child, because they can flourish in a more engineered environment.

3 Yes – I guess I do.

4 Yes – absolutely! “Laugh” Is it supposed to be? I don’t know why, but it is.

5 “Laugh” No, I think because I look at least restrictive environment, which
is a term we throw around a lot, but I view it as a term, but it has to be used individually, for each child. So what might be restrictive for me might be least restrictive for you. Not what the parents say or what the teachers say, but what is right for the child – how the child is going to react? Therefore I feel very strongly that when we use the term least restrictive environment for the child, we need to be sure we are talking about the child when we make the determination and not what’s least restrictive for the parents or the child study team.

6

No! I would think that it’s individualized; that is what I’d really like to see. It’s got to be individualized and appropriate. And I keep telling my team members that the word is not best. Yes, I think that’s the way it’s used.

7

Yes, I think that’s the way it’s used.

8

As you move down that continuum of least restrictive options, it gets more and more segregated. Do I believe that restrictive is synonymous with “segregated”? Well no, there are gradations on that continuum. Do I really believe that if I pull out a kid for one period of reading to give him a Wilson program, that I’m being more restrictive. I mean he’s segregated, and it is more restrictive than having reading with his grade, but that’s a tradeoff. I guess it is, yeah, I guess it is, but you keep moving along that continuum it does get more restrictive and segregated. Yeah.

Survey responses reflected the same split in opinion between those that felt that restrictive and segregated are synonymous and those who felt the terms were different.

Table 37 reports the frequency distribution of responses; Table 38 indicated that the range for scores was again between 1 and 5; the mean for 69 responses was 2.8841.
Table 37

*Frequency Distribution for Survey Question 6*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 38

*Descriptive Statistics for Responses to Survey Question 6*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15 depicts a bar graph.
Figure 15

Responses to Survey Question 6
Interview Question 10/Survey 7

Directors were asked: “Whether they believe there’s a push for the inclusion of preschool students want do they believe this will lead to a more inclusive society?” There was greater uniformity of interview responses to this question. Directors perceived a push for inclusion from the federal and state government parents and advocates. Most felt, however, that greater exposure and visibility within the community will lead to a more inclusive society. The following were responses to this question:

Subjects: Responses:

1
I do – I think they need to. I think the days for putting children in closets because they’re a little bit different is over.... I really do. That’s why we see more of the children with Downs Syndrome or Autistic in public. You never saw them – you never did. I don’t that that’s it’s a case that there’s more autistic children, I think that it’s a case of more children being better diagnosed. We had a chance of listening to Dr. Zaborodny, the autistic study, at our supervisors meeting. That questions came up ...It’s a case that New Jersey just happens to be one of the states that happen to do better reporting, better testing and evaluations. He says, “It’s the same population.” They’re just better documents. I really think that people are more aware of this population. It’s not the case of people hiding them. When I was in school, people didn’t take them out of the house or travel with them...now days, we were in Hawaii and we were in a museum and my husband was so upset because there was a child who was upset. He said, can’t you go over there and calm him? I said no – he has a teacher and an aide – they know what to do. If I were to go over there, I’d make it worse – I’m a stranger. I said, he’d be fine; he just needs maybe a half hour - he’s in a strange place and he is just out of sorts.

2
I think that there is great merit in the notion of normally achieving models for kids, with the most important things that happen at preschool, being language and play. If you are with all other disabled students, particularly with the high incidence of kids with language delays, that typical language and behavior is not modeled for you, so there is fewer opportunities for you develop those skills.

3
Yes. I think that’s why there is a push from federal government on down to include students with disabilities with the general ed. population.
It probably will lead to a more inclusive society, if only because the more exposure people have toward all types of people, the better off we all are. I think that the research supports it.

I don’t know why there’s a push for inclusion. I mean I don’t know the thinking behind it. I can rationalize in my own mind that the reason that this was created was not to segregate or label a child early on. We also know from the research that the preschool years so essential to learning and I think that probably the thought is to provide education as possible in the early years, and you’ll be dealing with less problems later on. But that’s the little struggle that I’m having right now. I believe in preschool programs, but as I said they do sometimes need some individual attention.... Yes neighborhood district with non-disabled peers.

I hope it would lead to more inclusive society. But I’m afraid that people are losing track of what children need. I think that some of the push is coming from parents who feel that if their children are in a regular program that they will grow and make better gains. That they will be less handicapped! They can say that they are in a regular school – they don’t have to say that they are in another school. Quite honestly, in my district, not the politically correct thing to say, but I think some of them seek the classification because of finances. Why should they have to pay, if public schools will provide a program for their kids with the occupational therapy and the physical therapy and the speech therapy in classroom? Why should they pay $9000 a year when they are already paying $20,000 per year in taxes? So I think that some is the parents can say – my taxes are so high - let them do it.

Hopefully, with the little ones, they are more open to differences. And with everything, the younger you start them; the more receptive they will be for people who do have problems.

It’s so complicated - Why do I believe there’s a push? I think that overall, not just for preschoolers, because I don’t think it began with preschool. The real push began – there was statistics done which showed that children in elementary and secondary ed that showed that special education was not always being effective. And maybe that trickled down to the preschool level. Yeah – there are so many factors running through my head right now, I don’t know what the single factor was. I’m sure that part of it was parentally driven. I’m sure that there must have been some programs where, like with the boom of autism. Maybe parents of children with just language problems delays, those parenis wanted their children in inclusive settings. I’m really not sure. I don’t think it was financial. I don’t know what caused the sudden push. The only thing that I can think of was that ten to fifteen years ago, the statistics came out showing that
special education was not that special. That’s the only think that I can think of that started the whole pendulum swinging. You know we really have to get the kids in general education, because it wasn’t equivalent. Yeah, I think that’s what started it - that they weren’t equivalent and are they equivalent – and that is the harder thing – that’s the key. If you are going to have a good special education program, you have to make sure that it is equal or better and sometimes it’s not. Maybe that’s what drove the push to put everyone back into regular ed.

The qualitative interview data was more consistent and positive than some of the other questions. The quantitative data indicated that directors had less extreme views with regard to the push for inclusion is likely to lead to an inclusive society. Table 39 indicates there were less strong opinions in response to this question with few scores in the strongly agree or disagree categories; the majority of responses indicating agreement, disagreement with 29 directors indicated they were neutral. Perhaps the verbal exchange encouraged directors to expand their thoughts on the question. Figure 16 graphed the distribution and Table 40 indicated a mean score was 3.06582.

Table 39

Frequency Distribution for Survey Question 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 16

Responses to Survey Question 7

![Bar Chart](image-url)
Table 40

*Descriptive Statistics for Survey Question 7*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.1594</td>
<td>1.06582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next questions addressed director's opinions as to whether preschool students receive a "less rigorous education" in special education settings. Of the 8 directors who were interviewed, 6 expressed their disagreement with this question. One was in general agreement, and one was neutral. Most felt that self-contained programs were quality programs, which offered more structure and services to the students. As a group, they also considered district self-contained programs to be of "higher quality" than community and private preschools. One response indicated the following: In our preschool program, from the moment they walk in that door, it is planned and prescriptive of activities and here how we’re going to do this. Even the play, which we call “free play,” is clearly focused."

*Interview Question 11/Survey Question 8*

Directors were asked: “Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education?”

**Subject:** Response:

1. Well the way they are all being held accountable – well they haven't gotten down to testing our preschoolers yet to assess them, thank god - but, then I think that state does give us a curriculum and I think that the fact is that we are exposing them to more and more of what we want them to do. I think it’s important that we try to get them to the pinnacle of their personal best and I that that’s important. I think that’s the importance of an IEP – I just wrote one for a child with 90% goal intent.
And the parents said to me, “Do you really feel that he can do that. I said that his speech/language therapist gave you a 90% goal as well. We trust the child and he has a 122 IQ. So I said that I definitely think he can do that so I think this is very important. I've always found that if you set a goal for a child, that nine times out of ten, they'll meet that goal or surpass it.

2

No, absolutely not. In our district, the goals are the same and materials are the same. No.

3

No, I don't think that’s true. Sometimes they may have a better experience in separate settings.

4

No – it think that varies, dependent on the level of your expectations for your staff, whether they are regular ed or special ed. I know a number of bad general education and some amazing special education teachers.

5

In this district, they do not. We have been very clear that any child in a self-contained is taught the same curriculum as everybody else, they are just taught it a little bit differently. We don’t have a typically developing preschool program. But I know that our preschool program is equal to what other private preschool programs are offering, because we’ve done the research on that, so they are comparable. They are receiving exposure to the same education.

6

I think that they should receive a program, which is appropriate to them and one where they could be successful. I wouldn’t want them frustrated and wouldn’t want it “dummied” down for them...Well, I have got one little guy who doesn’t speak. He’s seven and he was in a first grade classroom last year. He was in that “morning meeting responsive classroom” – it’s kind of like that show and tell kind of thing. And for the end of the school year play, he was the narrator because the teacher and the mom prepared his piece and put it on a tape. But he was able to hit the switch when it was his turn to talk. That was really nice to see. Could he participate? Yes! Was he disabled – Oh yeah! He probably will never walk or talk. He is severely cerebral palsy. He is a great kid.

7

A lot of times, I think so. Because they have other issues- it's may be the medical piece or there may be other issues, such as behaviors. I think that they don’t always get around to the academics, which they could if it were an inclusion type of program because they are so focused on the other problems.

8

No – not for preschoolers, especially. I really don’t. For preschooler, I think our special education preschool is ten times more rigorous than the general ed preschool. I think that you have more of that problem as you
go up into middle and high school, quite honestly. That's where I feel that the rigor in the special ed. is not going to be as strong as in the regular ed. But down in preschool, I think it's actually more. Our preschool program, they walk in that door it is planned and prescriptive of activities and here we're going to do this. Even the play, which we call "free play," is clearly focused. There are a lot of adults in that room saying, Oh come on, let's play pretend here, encouraging language and social interaction, where in a general education, it's just not that focused. It's so complicated. For preschool, I'd have to say that the special education program is much more rigorous.

Analysis of the 69 survey responses to the comparable question (6) yielded similar responses to those expressed in the interview process. As in response to the other questions, responses ranged between 1 and 5. For this question, Table 41 indicates that 14.5 percent strongly disagreed and another 45% disagreed, yielding a cumulative percentage of 65.2% who responded that preschool students with disabilities do not receive a less rigorous education outside of general education, graphed in Figure 16. Table 42 indicated a mean score of 2.2174; standard deviation, .90537.

Table 41

*Frequency Distribution for Survey Question 8*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 16

Responses To Survey Question 8
Table 42

Descriptive Statistics for Survey Question 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<td>.90537</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
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Summary to Research Question 1

Special education directors expressed diversity in their views and experiences regarding the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. The majority expressed general agreement with inclusion and the possibility that this will result in a more inclusive society in the future. As the questions became more narrow and absolute in their scope, directors/supervisors expressed more reservations; many articulated discomfort with statements such as “all,” “always,” “no,” or “less rigorous.” They stated their concerns that districts should continue to provide the full continuum of services from inclusion to specialized programs, “when or if” needed. If only inclusive services were offered, what happens to the continuum of services that the federal and state laws also specify as requirements for LRE? As anticipated, interviews/transcription yielded more depth and insight yet remained surprisingly consistent with quantitative data available through survey question analysis.
Research Question 2: Attitude/District Factor Grouping

The eight directors interviewed expressed differences in local district factor grouping. Table 43 summarized information regarding the socioeconomic factors; location/district size varied, characteristic of New Jersey Elementary School Districts. As defined in the quantitative analysis portion of Chapter 4, interview participants included two directors from lower income districts (A, B), two from intermediate income districts (CD, DE, FG) and four from high income districts. Thus, the interview group was somewhat skewed when compared with survey respondents, with the highest percentage from the intermediate category. This reflected the twenty directors who volunteered and the researcher's goal of interviewing directors from diverse locations from all areas of New Jersey. Table 43 reflects demographic information regarding "dfg" factor grouping, location by county and type (rural, suburban or urban) and information regarding the student population. Among those interviewed, one director coordinated special education services for four cooperating districts of varying incomes; in another, the Superintendent of the district maintained Directorship for Special Education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>DFG</th>
<th>District Type</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Charge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Suburban/rural “Wealthy/diverse”</td>
<td>Ocean</td>
<td>250 - total PK - 6 PSD - 7</td>
<td>PS tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>Suburban/high income</td>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>660 - total PK - 8 PSD - 7</td>
<td>PS tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Rural middle class</td>
<td>Sussex</td>
<td>PSD - 14 or 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Consortium for 4 districts -varying (low to intermediate income); suburban (District A &gt; affluent District B District C &gt;FR lunch District D - least affluent)</td>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>PK-6 Total 130 SE/ 4 districts Approx. 15%. 200 students</td>
<td>Public PS in 2/4 schools – no charge (15GE/2P SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Monmouth</td>
<td>K-8 (K-2, 3- 5, 6-8) 1740 students 295 classified 15 PSD</td>
<td>PS tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>“Suburban/rural”</td>
<td>Hunterdon</td>
<td>Pk - 8 3600 students 450- classified 3 schools – PK-4, 5- 6, 7-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Rural 40% free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>K-8 780 pupils 6 PSD students</td>
<td>No charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>PK – 8 Send-receive w/another district/ Reg. HS 520 students 6-8 PSD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 3: Attitude/Years of Experience

Is there a significant difference in the years of experience of the director with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? This question looked at differences in experience among the eight directors interviewed. Table 44 reports interview data regarding diversity of experience among directors/supervisors interviewed, ranging from 2 - 38 years.

Table 44

*Years of Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1yr/22 years in district on CST;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11 yrs/ Director (&amp; Curriculum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 yrs/Superintendent/Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Twenty-one years as a director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10 years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 4: Attitude/Litigation

This question looked at the whether there a significant difference in the amount of litigation in a district with respect to the director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? As there was not a specific interview question to address this issue, Table 45 includes information shared by directors/supervisors related to litigation. Those who reported experience with litigation indicated that parents were seeking more specialized settings rather than inclusive settings and their experience with litigation or potential litigation was not necessary related to students of preschool age.

Table 45

Experience with Litigation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Experience with Litigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No – work with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes that's true. However, generally, we have a wonderful track record. I've been here for thirty-three years and we're not going often. We've been to court once, and mediation once. We work out problems at the table but it doesn't mean that there's any rhyme or reason to how it works out in the end. But the courts will overwhelmingly make their decisions in the parents favor. That's what the data shows. You have to work it out – that's the bottom line. And it's different for every child.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience with Litigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve been taken to court two times; not by preschoolers. I prevailed both times; we won both times and they were both cases where parents wanted their children out-of-district and we won.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well, we had one; I guess he was actually aging out of the preschool. And then we’ve had and maybe one other that wasn’t a preschool aged dispute. They were looking for more specialized services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher found information related to parent perspective, obtained in relation to director’s responses to other structured questions worth including in this section, as indirectly related to the issue of litigation. Diverse experiences and views were shared regarding parental response to inclusive settings: some reported their parents were more responsive to inclusive settings whereas others expressed that their parents felt “safe” with their children in self-contained, or specialized programs. Several considered the severity and type of disability as a factor – particularly parents of students with significant medical problems or autism. The following comments, relative to parental attitudes were considered notable by the researcher:

**Director’s Perspective Regarding Parents**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Subjects:</th>
<th>Responses:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It’s interesting. The parents who want children as general ed. students in our integrated setting had siblings in our programs; the adults have siblings severely disabled and want their child to develop this understanding. In some ways, you are teaching to the choir. These are people who already believe people should have a more open attitude. And these are people who want their children in the program. Also, they are normally achieving siblings of children who have been through the program, and they appreciate the quality of the program. The teacher is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
just wonderful. We only have six children each year; we’re not dealing with a large group of 50. So our district may not be a good representative; it’s quite the microcosm. You wouldn’t leave it because it’s a great laboratory but I can’t say that it’s typical. I’ve been here 33 years; it’s a great district. That depends on how it’s handled by the district. We treat our classes the same. We run parent support groups for both – it’s the same teacher. The difference is that there are fewer children in the preschool disabled class, and more children in the general education class. We have even had a child participate in both classes. Now, it’s a different flavor of it.

3

Yes, definitely. We have a student on a respirator in our gen. ed class. He didn’t actually come as a preschooler. He was in a specialized out of district program and it was pretty much of a disaster. We brought him back and it’s been good. In fact, it’s been working beautifully. The other students have a real eye opening by having a student like that with him. It’s a way better situation having him in rather than out of district.”

4

Parents really like the restricted setting. It’s safe – they love the teacher. We have a wonderful reputation in our communities; they want that program. But all our classes have an excellent reputation. So I guess that wouldn’t be a problem. I wouldn’t worry about that. If a child is not eligible, and you know, not all are eligible, not all meet the criteria, and parents are sometimes rather annoyed. You say, aren’t you happy we didn’t find a significant enough problem?

5

Yes, our parents have been; we also have a parent who is just fantastic. She is just wonderful. But I have had some problems with some regular education parents, parents of typically developing children. If they have some really strong objections, and it is going to be a negative experience, we’ve made sure that we’ve noted that. Then the next year, because we are big enough. I have eight sections at each grade level. Then we often will put their children in a class, where they are still in an inclusion classroom, but that really don’t know it, because the children are learning or language disabled or mildly disabled.

6

Yes – they have been supportive.

7

Right – it depends on whom it’s coming from. There have been parents for whom talking with them makes a difference. There are others talking to them hasn’t done it. There has been some, where we have ended up having to switch the children out of the class. We do that, not penalizing the special education child, but if you have a problem, and you’re a general education student, we can put you in a different class. Also I think parental – I don’t even know whether to call it concerns or conceptions. Occasionally we still have, ‘I don’t want it.'
Research Question 5: Attitude/Early Childhood Program Aid

Is there a significant difference between the director’s attitude as measured in the enclosed survey and the district’s receipt of early childhood program aid from the new jersey department of education? In the quantitative analysis, the demographic survey question referred exclusively to the district’s eligibility for “Early Childhood Program Aid,” public funds dispersed to low-income districts for the development of general education preschool programs. Table 46 references “ECPA” in column 1. The researcher’s knowledge and interest were broadened by the qualitative assessment. As “ECPA” districts represent a small portion of the state’s school districts, (25% of all school districts) as well as the survey and interview participants, information in column 2 reflected other sources of income districts use to offset the costs for providing inclusive programs. In intermediate and high-income districts, this included the charging of tuition to limited numbers of children in the district. Respondent 6 reported that a one-year autism grant, used to develop an inclusive preschool program, including the purchase of specialized equipment and training. She is hoping the district’s Board of Education will assume the cost for continuation of the program. Table 46 describes funding and/or district eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid.
TABLE 46

Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Early Childhood Program Aid</th>
<th>Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Charge tuition for preschool program (for gen.ed students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open to all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Charge tuition for preschool program (for gen.ed students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lottery; psychologist screens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>EPCA</td>
<td>Charge tuition for preschool program (for gen.ed students) - lottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1 or 2 districts within consortium)</td>
<td>Autism - 1 yr grant to subsidize program setup costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 6: Attitudes/Percentage of Inclusion of Preschool Students with Disabilities

There A Significant Difference Between The Director’s Attitude and Inclusion of Preschool Students With Disabilities Who Participate In General Education More Than 80% Of Their School Day? For qualitative analysis, the focus of this question shifted to implementation. The researcher interviewed eight directors. Inclusive preschool programs were offered in four districts; another district is developing a program for 2008-2009, after new facilities construction has been completed. Self-contained classes were offered in 7/8 districts. Information related to implementation is included in Table 47.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>*PSD- Self-Contained</th>
<th>OOD</th>
<th>Inclusive Preschool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2007-08/PSD class</td>
<td>0 - currently; only if needs are too specialized</td>
<td>4 yr old – general ed program 2008-09 - inclusive only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 *PSD class</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Integrated preschool class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>*PSD - all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1/4 districts – all districts send students to this self-contained class; other districts pay tuition if needed.</td>
<td>2 students for the four districts</td>
<td>Public preschools in 2/4 districts – no charge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>*PSD – all; Integrate student in community schools when appropriate</td>
<td>3 – private settings</td>
<td>Next year – integrated preschool program, after building addition is completed; will be open to all. Tuition for non-disabled students. 3 inclusive classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4 *PSD classes</td>
<td></td>
<td>6 *PSD students split between AM &amp; PM; approx.13-14 non-disabled students/per class. Open to all 4 yr olds who reside in district &gt;50% eligible come – others in full-day child care settings No charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes. 6-8 *PSD students</td>
<td></td>
<td>No; relationship with private preschool – tuition/transportation paid when included in IEP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note *PSD – Preschool Students with Disabilities
The following questions were aimed toward better understanding of challenges facing directors/supervisors and their school districts in implementing the federal and state mandates for inclusion. Interview Question 2A looked at specific concerns, which educators should have regarding inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. One theme echoed throughout the remaining questions: the value placed on all general education programs, regardless of where offered over a structured, well-staffed and developed, “quality” self-contained class in district. Directors spoke about consideration for placement in community preschools which are often staffed with uncertified teachers, with curriculum, not aligned with the state’s established early childhood expectations, where class size were likely to be large, facilities limited and often with religious affiliation/instruction. Some directors perceived this bias as disregarding the intent of “special education” to be individualized, and structured to maximize skill development.

One director responded:

The people, who are total inclusionists, forget that children have different needs. Even our buddy, Piaget will tell you that not all kids are alike! They have different needs that need to be addressed at different levels and even the different stages. It’s just not so cut and dry to say that everyone is going to be included and to be happy. It just doesn’t work that way. They are too young and they come in with too many needs. They come in with everything from English as a Second Language needs to having been born drug addicted to kids who are early autistic, brain trauma. Some kids who were low birth weight at 1 ½ pounds— they were simply born to early. You just can’t simply say, that all three year olds are the same. They just haven’t had enough time. I think that this is where my frustration comes in. Well just include everybody. I just think that that is a shortsighted, foolish way to address it!
Interview Question 2A

“What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students?” In response to the interview question, the following responses were elicited:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>That the program that they are putting them in is appropriate and that they are accepted. I am always concerned that something will be done or said, or that something will be planned that is too difficult or that they would not. Fortunately we have not accommodated for severe physical handicapped. For the older children with the broken arm or leg we have made the accommodation, but for the little guys, we’ve never had to do that. Because that’s something I’m very sensitive to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Okay, that’s ok because I think that the preschool piece is different. Okay, can you ask the question again…well for medically fragile – you’re talking about educators in general, teachers or directors of special education? You have the teachers who are trained for the variety of needs that will come their way. How do you keep children who are medically fragile? How can you be sure to meet their medical needs? For children with orthopedic needs, how do you access the staff that meets the needs of the kids in a single school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The times we have had preschool student in a regular program where we’ve integrated them (in community preschools), the classes have been rather large and it didn’t work real well. A lot of the preschools near us have classes of 20-25 children and it didn’t work well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I think that the most important thing is to meet the needs of the special education kids in inclusion settings is to make sure they are able to get what they need; the regular teacher needs to be trained – needs to have knowledge of specific disabilities and this is really important. I think that related services are critical to the development and success of the students. Speech or anything that is needed for them to improve must be provided. I think that integrated services, no this is a generalization, but for the most part, children do better when the related services is integrated into the classroom. As long as you can keep doing that, I think that’s a big factor in a child’s development and success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I think that you have to take a look at the individual child and figure out what their needs are. I think that that’s some of the needs that the inclusion people don’t necessarily want to look at. The child has been identified as needing a specialized or some kind of special education program. Then why don’t we just eliminate or do with the preschool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
disabled program/population all together. Then theoretically, we could put everybody into the Goddard School, for instance. I mean, there is a reason for this and the reason is probably that the kids get a specialized program. There are times in which we should look and say, well why do we want to eliminate or do away with the regular program. If everyone should be in a regular or inclusive preschool, taught by a regular educator, then we could just do away with preschool disabled. Just tell everyone, Fine! You don’t have to classify them -- you’re regular kids -- just can keep them there. Then your situation is solved.

I think that the general education teachers and I don’t know how they are coming out of college, because unfortunately our general education teachers that are working in the inclusion classrooms have been teaching awhile and they don’t have a lot of experience with it. I think that’s where part of the problem lies. The general education teachers need more exposure and training in what to do with these kids. It’s the wave of future, they are going to be there and they need to be included.

It’s just that I feel that sometime the only issue is that it’s just not intense enough. Unless, if you had the resources to provide the speech/language therapist there all the time, but that would be very difficult to do...someone that could really get that child to develop all those beginning skills that they need. And really, it isn’t just speech, I’m saying speech, but really, it’s all those kinds of social skills. In our special class, there’s a constant focus on all those beginning skills that child has and pushing them to develop them. I see that when they are in their general ed., just by nature of the program, the ratio of teachers to children is much greater and the regular education teacher just can’t give them the constant prompting they need to force them to communicate, or force them to socialize or any of that. Whereas in a small group, we can set up a model where they are going to have to respond and that encourages them to develop the skills, which we want them to acquire. Just in general ed., you can’t develop the missing skills as well. I believe that’s the answer.

*Interview Question 2B*

The following were responses to the open-ended question: What specific concerns do you have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I think we did. I’m also very sensitive to the parents. A lot of the parents will tend to keep the children home. This is one of the problems, which we are having with one of the children right now. They are tending to keep the child home at the slightest whim and we are trying to encourage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
him to send him anyway. If he has a slight cold, he needs to be in school. He’s not going to be ready for kindergarten and last year, we had him enrolled in extended school year, first day came and he was not ready for the bus. The second day came and we found that he was in the hospital. There was no communication with the parents and finally came down where I had to write a letter, since you haven’t responded to the phone call and you haven’t acknowledged to the bus, I am taking that you are taking him out of the preschool program for the summer. If you don’t respond to me, I’m discontinuing his registration. And I never heard a word from the woman, not a word; I’m worried that this child has asthma, and I know what that’s like. Meantime I am concerned and his teacher is concerned. I’m worried that the child has asthma. It’s a young mother whose mother is mothering not only her, but also her children. So it’s a concern. She gets very attached to the children... and nothing is better than when you get to see them in sixth grade and they get to be independent people.

2

I guess, the only other piece, which I haven’t spoken about, is children on the spectrum – can you provide program that will move them forward and what would that program be? For a real low incidence disability, and meeting your budget and reaching consensus with parent because some parents want their children in segregated settings. So the big issue is - how do you meet the expectation of government and come to a happy conclusion with parent because they don’t always look at things the same way.

3

We’ve already covered my concerns.

4

I think that the most important thing is to meet the needs of the special education kids in inclusion settings is to make sure they are able to get; the regular teacher needs to be trained – need to have knowledge of specific disabilities and this is really important. I think that related services are critical to the development and success of the students. Speech or anything that is needed for them to improve must be provided. I think that integrated services, no this is a generalization, but for the most part, children do better when the related services is integrated into the program.

5

The main concern that I have right now is that we have such as strong preschool program. I would say that of the students that come from the four-year-old program and go to kindergarten, three-quarters of them are immediately mainstreamed into our kindergarten program. Some of them are declassified. We do not have a large number of students who have to go from our preschool program into a self-contained classroom. They get a lot of attention; they get a lot of language development. We have a lot of autistic children in our classes. They get that really intensive language
development with the speech/language specialist. The whole program is based on language development. My biggest fear is that we’re going to lose them because that’s not going to the nature of a full-inclusion program for them.

And ours - we are having trouble, trying to fit in all their “ABAs” and therapies. Because then, we have occupational therapy and speech therapy. And then some of the argument is then why don’t you just do it in the classroom. But then, why bother have them classified? If they don’t need speech therapy, or you don’t want to give them speech therapy or the speech therapy should happen in the classroom. I’m sure that you’ve seen as well, that speech therapists are wonderful, fabulous resources. I’m blessed. I’m fortunate, one of the people, blessed to have fourteen of the most fabulous speech therapists working for me. And believe me not everyone has that. And to say, just do in-class speech. You know what – for some children, that’s just now enough. Some children have significant speech issues and I think that the inclusion – the people who are total inclusionists, forget that children have different needs. Even our buddy, Piaget will tell you that not all kids are alike! They have different needs that need to be addressed at different levels and even the different stages. It’s just not so cut and dry to say that everyone is going to be included and to be happy. It just doesn’t work that way. They are too young and they come in with too many needs. They come in with everything from English as a Second Language needs to having been born drug addicted to kids who are early autistic, brain trauma. Some kids who were low birth weight at 1 1/2 pounds – they were simply born to early. You just can’t simply say, that all three year olds are the same. They just haven’t had enough. I think that this is where my frustration comes in. Well just include everybody – include everyone. I just think that that is a shortsighted, foolish way to address it! Can I just go back to the pressure? Yes, I think that there is a lot of state support and where the state is remiss is that there is not a lot of state support. In private programs, the teachers are not even certified. That is just bizarre. They make us, find that just simply to have the child included in a nearby private school, which may be wonderful places, but where the teachers are not even certified, have no approved curriculum and just by rubbing elbows with non-disabled children, something wonderful is supposed to happen. I just think that that is really stupid. The state has been very short sighted. They have not provided districts with meaningful training in curriculum. They say that there are only two approved curriculums, which they want you to use, but just try to get training. Try to schedule training. I have a grant and I have money for the training, and I can’t schedule them to come and do training I think that the state wants you to do it, but they are certainly not backing it up.
I think that the general education teachers and I don’t know how they are coming out of college, because unfortunately our general education teachers, that are working in the inclusion classrooms have been teaching awhile and they don’t have a lot of experience with it. I think that’s where part of the problem lies. The general education teachers need more exposure and training in what to do with these kids. It’s the wave of future, they are going to be there and they need to be included.

It’s just that I feel that sometime the only issue is that it’s just not intense enough. Unless, if you had the resources to provide the speech/language therapist there all the time, but that would be very difficult to do...someone that could really get that child to develop all those beginning skills that they need. And really, it isn’t just speech, I’m saying speech, but really, it’s all those kinds of social skills. In our special class, there’s a constant focus on all those beginning skills that child has and pushing them to develop them. I see that when they are in their general ed., just by nature of the program, the ratio of teachers to children is much greater and the regular education teacher just can’t give them the constant prompting they need to force them to communicate, or force them to socialize or any of that. Whereas in a small group, we can set up a model where they are going to have to respond and that encourages them to develop the skills, which we want them to acquire. Just in general ed., you can’t develop the missing skills. I believe that’s the answer.

*Interview Question 7*

“What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated and what criteria is applied in your district?” This question focused on director’s views regarding sending students out-of-district. Directors indicated that most students should be educated within their school district, and several described maintaining children in district with significant medical needs, including a child with a respirator, autism, cognitive impairments, etc. Out-of-district placements were most likely to be considered for students with serious behavioral disabilities, medical issues and students with autism, often at the request or with the support of parents and advocates.
Subject: 1

Response:

The only criteria that we employ – is if the services they require – if they need OT and PT more than twice a week. My OT only comes two days a week and my PT only one day a week. My speech therapist, we can usually work as often as three days a week, because we have someone in district. If they require services more times than that, than I have to send them to a larger district where those people are employed every day. That’s the main criteria. Also, if their needs were such that they may need a deaf interpreter or they may need sign language taught to them, although my speech/language teacher may do that, if that’s going to be their sole means of communication, then they’re going to need a class they can do that. So there are a lot of things that go into the thought. The three boys that I have out of district right now – one of them had already been held back and we had to send him out of district because he was not ready to go to second grade after two years in first grade and he needed a self-contained class and he’s doing beautifully. We just had his IEP and we actually moved him from a lower functioning group to a higher functioning group. We do actually try to do the placement in they are allowed to grow. The one thing with a preschooler, you want them to meet with success so they don’t want them to become too frustrated. You want them to achieve, because the younger, the better footing that they get, all the structure that they get into. I’m very strongly in favor of that. Most of our children go into kindergarten, I would say either declassified or with minimal services. And some of that can be just eligible for speech language services since that’s usually the main area. Some of them will go classified communication impaired because they may need help with writing skills, and OT and things like that. But we really make an effort for them to be declassified, going into kindergarten. The only self-contained is my preschool and that makes a difference too because it is my preschool. We don’t refer to it as self contained – however we say it is a special class – it is a special education class. So the parents know that and we are very honest with them. But being as it’s the only special. We just called it as a preschool class. It’s just a very small class for kids who need special help. However, it doesn’t stand out as much as if it were one of eight classes. It’s just the one that is presented. .... And yet the regular preschool class has 12 children in it – 12-14 and that too a small, too yet, that’s regular education. They are next door to each other and they come to school on the same bus. We transport everyone to and from school and ours is free. We do not charge any of them. It’s very interesting.

2

Well it’s the same flip side – it depends on where they going to be successful – with the exception of where parents demands an out of district setting, we always try here in here first, with as much support as possible. And if it isn’t being successful, we tweak it and if it’s still isn’t successful, we start thinking, is there another setting where the child is
still successful. Sometimes the answer is yes and sometimes the answer is no. I don’t think so; you can’t always find a separate school that will always meet the child’s needs either.

We haven’t needed to do that – I would think that would be a special instance.

Decisions re: segregated settings should be based on child’s individual needs. We are fortunate that we have a segregated setting as well as an inclusion setting in one of our schools. So kids can move around and it’s pretty fluid. I will say that we don’t have an inclusion class for three years old; we do have one for four year olds. Typically, what happens and has been successful is that for three year olds, they will go into a segregated setting for three year olds. It’s a special education class; then, depending on how quickly they make gains, they then move into the four-year-old program. So it’s a little bit of everything.

Yes. We do have three preschool children right now, not in that count I gave you who are placed in another setting. They are severely autistic and we cannot handle their behaviors. Basically we invite all the children to come in and spend some time in our classroom before we place them. We have taken autistic children in our classroom, children without speech and children who didn’t walk. We have done all that. But when their behavior is such that, as you said, they are harm to themselves or others, we sometimes have to place them out.

I have sent two out and I told the superintendent that it was a real big waste of money, because I was sending money out, and the program was not as good as what we offered. That’s when I got approval for the inclusive preschool program. I was sending $45,000 to places where the teachers weren’t certified; I had no control of the curriculum and had no idea what they were doing; yet I was the one who was signing checks. It was an absolutely stupid idea. So I said that we have to start our own, so I could have control; we are doing a high level curriculum and we know what’s going on.

We look at the needs of the student. We have one actually who is out of district because of medical reasons. We just felt that her medical problems were so severe that we felt that she required a specialized medical preschool program in a private setting. So you have included children in your self-contained classroom kids with autism? Oh yes, we have included everything kids with autism, medical problems, everything.”

We very rarely send out. I can’t even think of a preschool student who we’ve sent out of district. I guess my criteria would only be if that child
was one of two things: either they were being so disruptive to themselves, let’s self-injurious, but even that though, I’d probably just put a one-to-one aide with them here. If they were so changing the tenor of the classroom, affecting the program for all the students, maybe that would be my only criteria for send a preschooler out, was if it was greatly effecting the education of the other seven children in the class. Then I’d have to make that decision for the other seven. Otherwise at that young age, I can’t really think of a situation where I wouldn’t be able to deal with it by giving them a one to one aide would at least get us through that. Using all my resources, I couldn’t get that behavior under control.”

Interview Question 12

This question requested that directors/supervisors consider the following: “How is inclusion of preschool students with disabilities progressing?” Several indicated that the movement is progressing slowly; one notes that things take time to work their way down the New Jersey Turnpike, while another reports that in her County, most districts already have inclusive programs and her district was granted a reprieve until they could establish additional space to house the program.

Subject:    Responses:
1           I think it’s slow – I think there’s a lot of resistance from regular ed.
3           I think that the progress is pretty slow. I think that it’s hard to do, especially in Sussex County. I only know one or two districts with general education preschools in the school. I think its space that’s a problem: we have a lot of people moving in.
4           You know, we’re in South Jersey and it takes a long time for thinking to come down the New Jersey Turnpike. Laugh. So I have not gotten...years ago, we were told that we had to make sure that we paid for students who go to regular education preschools, so we did that. That was probably ten years ago. After that, I didn’t know there was a big movement, am I missing something? (Laughter)
5           Most of the districts in Monmouth County do have integrated preschool programs already. Our county offices have been pretty blatant in telling us that inclusion of preschool students is the expectation of the state/federal government. That’s the directive out of the state department and so most of them do have integrated
program. We basically, when the district had our monitoring, we were giving a little reprieve, because at that time, we didn’t have the room. But we know that it is a requirement that the children be exposed to typically developing children. So we have been doing the out-of-district placement where necessary, in typically developing preschool programs. Yes we have discussed this, but I think that when we’re talking about preschool, now, we are in a major move to plan starting in January. We have contacted the state; we have their curriculum. We’ve done all the research; we know how much it is going to cost us. Our classroom structured is planned. We’ve designated the rooms and we are in the final six months of planning for an integrated preschool, so it is just what we are doing in district.

6

I think that I’m ok but I think that some other places could probably come along. But I also think that we probably need to look at the whole preschool classification? If the goal is for them to get a general education program, then is that the role of special education?

7

Yes, we’ve had it. I think that it’s slow. I know I talk to directors in larger districts and they have more programs than we do and they look at it as a problem because they have more. We are smaller and we don’t have as many, so it’s manageable. But I think that overall, its been a slow progress. We are one of the few in our area that has the type of setting that we do.

8

I guess, I’m being idealistic, but I hope that everyone is going thought the say thought process as I. I ask myself, can this child be serviced in a general ed with putting supports or services such as a speech teacher in the room? Then I continue going down the continuum of LRE. As a for instance, I think that hopefully, ideally, inclusion is going at the appropriate rate to the needs of the individual child. At least we have those options available – that’s what I think is the best. When I first started in this business, it was as a special ed. teacher in 1977, so at that time, there was no in-class model and at preschool, there definitely was no thought to support in general education. Nobody was even thinking of an inclusion model. Just having the options available and to discuss the child with an open mind – that’s the value of it. That’s what’s exciting - just to have the options!

Directors discussed changes in preschool programs in their districts. Significant moves toward inclusion were reported in two of the districts within the past year; others described their programs as remaining stable.
Interview Question 13

Directors were asked: “Do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?” The following were responses to this question:

Subject: Response:
1 As we’ve discussed, we’re in the process of developing an inclusive program. I think I have a regular education teacher whose willing to do it. The problem is finding the special education teacher who’s willing to do it with her. and that’s going to be a hard problem this year. The superintendent, I’ve already said that this is what I want to do, so start thinking...

2 I think that, with the exception of parents with autism, parents want children in integrated settings. I think with the population of parents of student with autism – it has to be on a case-to-case basis- everybody feels very passionately about what they believe and they all believe something different is best for their child. It can be just as easy to have a parent go to court to be mainstreamed, as you would have a parent of the same age child with the same degree of disability that would be willing to go to court to fight for a specialized placement. We do have two coming down the pike. We have 2 children coming in, with significant impairments. One child, we are ready for and we think it will work out fine. And another is very medically fragile, and if he’s touched the wrong way, his bones will go out of joint. We haven’t quite figured it out – we haven’t started evaluating him yet. He’s very fragile. The dilemma is - how do you keep that child safe and learning, yet he needs to have an education. We haven’t had a lot of experience with such problems at a preschool level. The parents are still on the fence and they haven’t sent in their request yet to evaluate. This is a child who has spent much of his life in a body cast, so we’ll see what happens.

3 No, I think that it is going to be a slow process.

4 No, not in the near future. I think that the way we do it is a balance that is appropriate.

5 Yes, we have discussed this, but I think that when we’re talking about preschool, now, we are in a major move to plan starting in January. We have contacted the state; we have their curriculum. We’ve done all the research; we know how much it is going to cost us. Our classroom structured is planned. We’ve designated the rooms and we are in the final
six months of planning for an integrated preschool, so it is just what we are doing in district.

Yes – we’ve been pretty good! Even when I tell the regular education parents, when I tell them that their children will be included with children with autism. They don’t really bat an eye. They say, ok that’s fine.

No, our program has been stable. The only change will be in the next few years, if it goes through for a state mandated, full-day program.

No real changes. I don’t see us, maybe they’ll include a lottery system with our own regular ed class, but I don’t see that in the near future. Our class is a little different. One of the things I do believe in, is that if I’m going to have that special class, I really want to make sure those kids get a lot of individual attention, so I have a two: one or three: one ratio and they are here for a longer day, from 8:30 – 1:30. Again they may go out to general education some days. The program is offered five days a week. The therapies are both pull out and or integrated; I’d have to say they are doing individual skills in a pull-out and then they are having group to have them transfer skills they have been working on in individual services.

The final section of qualitative data reflected the obstacles to inclusion. A narrative of responses essential question was shared during telephone interviews. A comparison for the themes which emerged from discussion, included: government pressure and lack of public funds and training for imposed mandates, lack of space/facilities, additional staff and need for specialized resources including behavioral therapists, speech/language specialists, occupational and physical therapists, nurses available on-site, etc. Regardless of perceived benefits or deficits of inclusive education, most directors of special education who were interviewed indicated that an inclusive program services fewer preschool students with disabilities so more of all of the above are needed when inclusive programs are added. Quantitative data is not available for this section.
Interview Question 14

Directors were asked: “Do you see major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?” The following were their responses:

Subject:  
1. Yes, staff attitude is one. Administrative? No, because the principal in my building is my former supervisor of special education; my superintendent was also the supervisor of special ed. So I am in a very fortunate position. The two people that I now work with know what needs to be done, so they are very encouraging and supportive. My principal I’ve worked with for 21 years; I was here before she got here. My superintendent just came – this is his second year. So we really know what has to be done. So it’s taking the staff we have and putting them in the right places. The board has always been very supportive. Funding has not been a problem in this district. It has never been an obstacle. It is wonderful. I’ve taught in other districts where it’s been a major obstacle, but in this district we have always been able to have somehow found the resources.

2. Community attitudes, teacher attitudes, space, financial resources, staffing. Nothing really to do with the kids. I mean everything to do with the kids, but nothing stemming with the children.

3. Yes, and just reorganizing the programs you already have to do this. I know, we’ve looked at it and I guess a lot of places have, but it never gets off the ground. Funding would be to a particular degree, as you would have to pay their tuition in addition to having your own class. You know it would be an additional tuition. It hasn’t been a big, giant concern, but it has impact to a certain degree.

4. Yes, it’s space and because we are limited with small resources and you get more bang for buck. I have 16 spaces for my 2 half day, restricted programs for my 3 restricted for my four districts. That gives an ability to serve more kids.

5. No, I do not. But I have very strong feeling about that also. This is not something that you just drop on people. It’s not something that you just say we are going to do, and do it. We have been working this out and talking about this for three years. First we made our curriculum counsel fully aware, and then we made our Board of Education fully aware of our need for the program. We had presentations and curriculum counsel groups that went out to study programs in other districts. We really have done a lot to bring teachers in, our parents in and our Board in. We have
gotten to the point that, as I always say, that if you can make people feel that its their idea.... and that’s where we are right now. And so, I don’t think that you have the opposition when you do it that way... Well we have been, because we are an “I” district. We have been flat-funded, like a number of districts. Despite this our enrollment has continued to grow, and our number of classified students has also continued to grow in the last five years. This has taken away from our regular education programs. We are a district who has been the lowest per pupil dollar that is spent in Monmouth and Ocean County. We are also the forth lowest “I” districts in the state of New Jersey on what we spend per pupil. We do not spend a great deal of money and I have worked extremely hard, as well as my predecessor, not to have that divide happen. But what is happening right now, with the funding, the formula that we are hearing about that is coming down, where districts such as ours I, J and even GH districts, are going to have to handle most of the special ed. costs. Because that’s what we’re hearing – there will be a flat fee – a flat dollar amount, assessed for every student. The over the top costs for special education, English as a second language services, bilingual services – those things will be either taken care of, depending on the districts ‘digg’ factor, that’s going to cause a huge divide in this district. It really is. That’s where parents are going to be resistive to things that we’re trying to do.

The preschool program right now - I just came off a fight to get a full day kindergarten in. And I lost. We went out twice on a second question and it was defeated both times. We basically folded up our tents and went home. We created the enrichment program instead. I’m not going to fight that fight anymore. I do not want to go through that fight for preschool. So I’m hanging my hat on the fact that this is an essential program, mandated by the state. (Laugh) No, I really am. I’m just hoping that when this funding comes down, we don’t get walloped with it.

6

Lack of training by state. Facilities – schools don’t have a lot of room for these kinds of programs. You need a lot of space. You need a bathroom. Certainly finances. You need to have a teacher, teacher assistants, sometimes transportation, specialized equipment. Certain kinds of toys and playthings are expensive. I’ve spent $40,000 just setting up my classroom. If a district’s going to spend that much money setting up one classroom and you have to set up staff – it’s just crazy. We haven’t even hired a teacher yet.

7

Some of obstacles, I guess would be the facilities. That’s one of the problems we have right now. Our preschool program is off-site, in a little two room school, which is very nice. But it presents a problem with someone with medical issues. The one student that we have out presents issues – not having a nurse, right there. It’s also an older building; while it’s handicapped accessible. So facilities are one of the problems. Also
parental and teachers’ perceptions of inclusion and what it isn’t. Can they handle the problems that the children are bringing in?"

8

Yes, I would say that the child’s skill and ability is the only obstacle that I see. If I had space, then I’d start up a general education program. I’d have other things I’d want to start, before I’d choose an inclusive preschool. I don’t know; this model has served me well. Well, I guess it would be nice to have another classroom, I guess it would be convenient to have my own setting. Maybe you are right. Yeah – space. Do most people do it by lottery because if I opened a program, we would be inundated with more students than we can handle?

Table 48 lists the most frequently reported obstacles noted by directors.

Table 48

**Obstacles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub</th>
<th>Admin Support</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Funds</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Gov’t Pressure</th>
<th>Prof. Dev</th>
<th>Staffing Resource</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Some teacher resistance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mandate clear</td>
<td>Yes- fed</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>Most</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Involved</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of Qualitative Analysis

Eight Special Education Directors were interviewed to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the diversity of attitudes regarding inclusion. Qualitative analysis of interview data clearly supported this goal. The directors from different counties across the state of New Jersey, from different size, location and socioeconomic backgrounds were generally supportive of inclusion for most, though not necessarily all preschool students with disabilities. A number of directors expressed the need to qualify statements phrased with absolute terms such as all, always, no, feeling that this negates IDEA’s mandate for offering a continuum of services. In other words, sometimes special education really was “special” and uniquely structured or supported to ensure greater success for students with severe physical, behavioral or language impairments. Most agree that inclusion of young children were likely to lead to a more inclusive society. Directors have different interpretation as to whether “restrictive” in “least restrictive” environment was synonymous with “segregated.” Some agreed, while other felt that LRE was defined on the basis of each individual student, and what is restrictive to one student, may be least restrictive to another student. Most directors acknowledged benefit to students attending their neighborhood school, with the qualification previously discussed. The interview questions related to attitudes match survey questions. When possible, survey data for specific questions was paired with interview question data.

Descriptive interview data is shared regarding director’s attitudes in relation to research question 2 (district-factor-grouping), research question 3 (years of experience), research question 4 (litigation) and research question 5 (Eligibility for Early Childhood
Program Aid). Research question 6, the relation of directors' attitudes to the percent of inclusion of students was addressed through a number of questions. Directors with inclusion programs in district used their experience to support the benefits of inclusion, although they had reservations regarding its appropriateness for students with the most severe disabilities. Diversity was seen in terms of the rate of growth in inclusion programs, the relative benefit of self-contained district special education programs in comparison to relatively large less structured community preschools, often taught by non-certified staff. Finally, directors shared common concerns regarding obstacles to developing inclusion programs for preschool students with disabilities, including unfounded state/funding mandates, lack of state training, cost, space, specialized service needs and the ability to serve fewer students within a general education than a self-contained special education program. Most shared personal observations and direct experiences with the inclusion of children in early childhood programs.

Relationship between Quantitative Analysis and Qualitative Analysis

Results of quantitative data analysis were reflected in the qualitative analysis. By triangulation of data, the researcher was able to develop greater knowledge regarding the attitudes of special education directors and their unique circumstances. When possible, specific survey questions matching interview questions were available, similar patterns of responses were noted between the in-depth interview with eight directors and survey responses among the 69 directors completing surveys. Significant relationships between the attitudes of directors with the identified variables: district factor grouping, years of
experience, litigation experience, receipt of early program or percent of inclusion. When inclusive programs are available in district, positive experiences were reported. Other factors or obstacles that appeared to impact were space and facilities limitations, cost/availability for specialized services, and the ability to serve fewer students with disabilities within an inclusive classroom. These were reported along with lack of funding in intermediate/high income districts, and lack of training provided by the state department of education to support planned program development.

Chapter 5 includes the summary of research findings and implications for policy, program development and future research.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Special Education Directors/Supervisors in New Jersey Elementary Public School Districts in relation to the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. The researcher assessed whether a significant relationship existed between the attitudes of the special education directors/supervisors and the following demographic factors: socio-economic grouping of the district, the director's years of experience, recent litigation within the district, the district's eligibility for receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid and the percentage of students included in general education (based on district's Annual Data Report, completed as of December 1, 2006). Based on the prior research by Seton Hall Doctoral Students, including Inzano (1999), Maricle (2001) and most prominently Weitzman (2000), this researcher sought to contribute to the established body of knowledge regarding the implementation of Least Restrictive Environment through inclusion, as it pertains to preschool students with disabilities.

This researcher presented the background for the study's investigation, purpose, research questions, rationale, significance, limitations, definitions of terms and research summary in Chapter I. An overview of the literature included a comparison of federal and New Jersey inclusion data, legislation and court decisions related to Least Restrictive
Environment, literature on preschool inclusion and it’s status in NJ, along with recent research on administrative attitudes regarding LRE for school aged students with disabilities. Demographic factors including district socio-economic factors, director’s experience, litigation and percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities have been presented in Chapter II. Methodology, research design, subjects, instruments adaptations, data collection and data analysis are presented in Chapter III. Results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis related to the six research questions including the acceptance or rejection of the null hypotheses, comparison of interview data with paired survey data and a summary of research findings has been presented in Chapter IV. A research summary, conclusions and recommendations for policy, program and future research is presented in Chapter V.

Summary of Study

Special education mandates established by “Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act” (2004), a collection of federal legislation referred to as IDEA and New Jersey Administrative Code 6A-14 re-affirms the importance of providing educational services to students in the least restrictive environment. While past standards were less stringent for the inclusion of preschool students in general education than for students of school age, this is no longer the case. Acknowledging that many districts do not and are not required or funded to provide early childhood general education programs, new language was included to emphasize the intent and provide options for “LRE” at a preschool level.
New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC 6A: 14-4.3 (d)) specifies the following:

(d) A preschool age student with a disability may be placed by the district board of education in an early childhood program operated by an agency other than a board of education according to the following: 1. Such early childhood program shall be licensed or approved by a governmental agency; 2. The district board of education shall assure that the program is nonsectarian; 3. The district board of education shall assure the student's IEP can be implemented in the early childhood program with any supplementary aids and services that are specified in the student's IEP; and 4. The special education and related services specified in the student's IEP shall be provided by appropriately certified and/or licensed personnel or by paraprofessionals (September 2006).

Analogous to past arguments that "separate is not equal" for issues of race or gender in public schools, advocates reason that typically developing peers provide more effective models for academic readiness, language acquisition and socialization, unavailable in a self-contained classroom for preschool students with disabilities.

Less than 20% of New Jersey school district has been determined eligible for Early Childhood Program Funds, based on low-socio-economic district factor grouping designation. Many of the remaining 80%, have not required and consequently, may not offer public preschool programs to students residing in their districts. Though New Jersey's rate of inclusion of school aged students in general education more than 80% of the school day is aligned with national averages, this was not the case for students, three to five years of age. Whereas the national average for preschool inclusion in general education at least part of the school day was approximately 42.815 percent in 2002, this
contrasts with 30.4 percent of preschool students with disabilities in New Jersey. As of December 1, 2006, the federal government established new criteria for special education data reporting. These criterion matched the previously established for school-aged students. Inclusion of preschool students in general education settings, more than 80% of the school day.

Consequently, general education programs for preschool students have most often been developed as a direct result of special education, rather than general education, mandates. Therefore Special Education Directors play a critical role in the development of inclusive opportunities. Knowledge regarding their attitudes toward the least restrictive environment, specifically related preschool students with disabilities, could be essential to the understanding and/or change in the status of inclusion at a preschool level in New Jersey. While much has been written regarding the inclusion of school aged students in New Jersey including several Seton Hall University dissertations, the current study focused on the inclusion of preschool children with disabilities, three to five years of age. Consistent with the previous research, this study was also designed to investigate the relationship between other demographic factors that may impact the attitudes of special education administrators in New Jersey elementary school districts. For the purpose of this student, the term director, will also refer to supervisor or coordinator, responsible for special education services in the district.
Summary of Research Methods

This study was designed to yield quantitative and qualitative data regarding the attitudes of special education directors toward preschool inclusion. Quantitative data related to the 6 research questions was obtained through analysis of the instrument, *Attitudes of Directors/Supervisors of Special Education Toward "Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students With Disabilities (ATLREPSD)* (Appendix H). In addition, qualitative data was obtained through eight follow-up telephone interviews with directors/ supervisors chosen from among the 23 volunteers.

In accordance with current University IRB requirements, letters requesting permission to conduct the study were mailed to superintendents in the 281 elementary school districts based on data available on the New Jersey Department of Education website (Appendix D). Permission was received from 81 superintendents to conduct research in their districts. This allowed the researcher to complete a mailing to the 81 special education directors which included the following: a solicitation letter (Appendix E) surveys which be returned without identifying information, coded for follow-up purposes only, a letter of informed consent forms to indicate willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview or to receive summary of findings (Appendix G) and the survey, *ATLREPSD* (Appendix H). Separate stamped return addressed envelopes were provided for return of required research data. Three weeks were allocated for initial response; a reminder letter was mailed to those who had not yet responded, allowing an additional two weeks (Appendix H). This mailing yielded the following response: 69 completed survey, representing a return rate of 84.2%. In addition, 23 directors returned
"Informed Consent Forms" volunteering to participate in a telephone interview; 24 directors returned consent forms requesting summary data. This represented a response yield of 28% for interview participation.

**Summary of Research Findings**

Research question 1 investigated: What is the diversity of attitudes among special education directors toward including preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? Data was obtained by adding the responses to the ATLREPSD Likert Scale ten questions, dividing the responses into 5 categories. With a potential range of between 10 and 50 points, analysis revealed a mean score of 33.8841 with a standard deviation is 6.02821; 98.6% of the responses indicated that directors were supportive of inclusion; 17% were somewhat support; 62.3% were supportive; 15.9% were very supportive). Only 1.4% of the surveys returned (1 survey) indicated that the director’s attitude was unsupportive.

Eight directors were interviewed; each director indicated their support of inclusion and shared experiences that they have had with regard to inclusion of students in district programs as well as in community preschool programs when necessary. These findings were consistent with prior research findings by Weitzman (2000) who found New Jersey elementary school directors who held essentially positive attitudes toward inclusion, of school-aged students with disabilities. The mean score obtained on the survey instruments was 32.4; the mean score for the current survey was 33.8841 and the majority of responses in the Weitzman study (2000), 81% fell in the “somewhat supportive range.” In contrast, current study’s responses were more positive toward
inclusion of preschool students, with the majority (62.3 %) responding in the “supportive range” many responding in the very supportive range, (19.9) and an additional 21.7% responding as somewhat supportive.

Question 2 assessed: If there’s a significant difference in the district factor grouping of the director with respect to the director’s attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? ANOVA was completed to analyze research hypothesis 2. The results indicated that there was no significant difference; therefore the null hypothesis was retained and the researcher concluded that local district factor grouping did not impact attitudes of special education directors.

Interviews supported these findings; neither socio-economic district factor grouping nor location (urban, rural or suburban setting) appeared to make a difference in the inclusion programs developed by the district. Directors interviewed were chosen to represent elementary school districts throughout New Jersey, from Low, Intermediate and High Income districts. Interview participants reported working in suburban and rural settings; elementary school districts have low representation in urban areas due to their relatively small size and configuration. These results were consistent with prior studies by Inzano (1999) who found that it did not make a difference among elementary school principals; Weitzman (2000) also found that socio-economic factors did not make a difference among special education directors in elementary school districts and Maricle (2001) who did not find a significant relationship in research attitudes of secondary level principals toward inclusion.
Research question 3 assessed: If there's a significant difference in the years of experience with respect to the director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? ANOVA was completed to test the hypothesis related to this question. The results yielded by the current research found no significant difference; therefore the null hypothesis was retained and the researcher concluded that years of experience did not impact attitudes of special education directors. Consistent with the research of Inzano (1999) with elementary school principals and Maricle (2001) with high school principals, only Weitzman (2000) found significance related to years of experience. Though targeting the same population of elementary district's special education directors, the sampling method was different, and a higher percentage of directors had more experience within the Weitzman study (2000). In the present study, more than half the survey respondents, (55.1%) had less than 5 years of experience as directors; this represented more than the other three categories combined. In the Weitzman study (2000), a significant relationship was not found for this experience group either, however a positive relationship was found among the other groups of more experienced directors. The quantitative analysis for the current study revealed directors ranged in years of experience, a greater number offered 16+ years of experience; most offered an overall positive attitude toward inclusion. Eight directors, or 11.6% of the respondents, served as directors for 6-10 years. Nine directors, or 13% of the respondents served as directors for 11-15 years. Fourteen directors/ supervisors, 20.3% of the directors served as directors for more than sixteen years. The different result for this variable could be a result of different sampling of the population as a result of design
changes required by the new IRB requirements for prior administrative approval to conduct research.

Research question 4 assessed: If there was a significant difference in the amount of litigation in a district with respect to the director's attitude toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities in general education programs? A $t$ test was completed to test the hypothesis related to this question. The results indicated that there was no significant difference; therefore the null hypothesis was retained and the researcher concluded that litigation experience did not impact attitudes of special education directors/supervisors. This was comparable to the results of the Weitzman study (2000), which also investigated the impact of litigation. Interviews supported quantitative analysis; special education directors who have experienced litigation or some aspect of court involvement related that such actions did not appear to be related to this age group; typically resulted from parents requesting more restrictive rather than inclusive programs. The decision to include litigation as a variable for a study in New Jersey school districts was based on the Oberti case vs. Clementon, NJ (1993), a landmark case which established guidelines for assessing the benefits of regular education on behalf of a child with significant cognitive impairments, and reinforced the concept of a continuum of services from least to most restrictive.

Research question 5 assessed: If there's a significant difference between the director's attitude and the district's receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid from the New Jersey Department of Education? A $t$ test was completed to test the hypothesis related to this question. The results indicated that there was no significant difference; therefore the null hypothesis was retained and the researcher concluded that the district's
receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid did not impact attitudes of special education
directors. This aspect of funding is by definition, unique to students of preschool age. The
funding is dispensed to low-income districts only; in New Jersey, approximately one
quarter of all districts (25%) are eligible for these targeted funds the percent of eligible
school is somewhat less among elementary school only district. Interviews related to
funding supported quantitative findings of this research study. Inclusion was offered in
districts with and without public funds. Districts with high incidence of full or subsidized
lunch were able to use their pre-existing programs paid for by specialized funding.
Directors in the more affluent districts reported the practice of charging tuition fees to
typically developing peers, as a means of defraying some of the costs providing inclusive
programs, which one director reported as a win for the child and for the community.
Inclusion provided opportunities for their students with disabilities to learn from typically
developing peer models; the need for such a program however open new options for
participation in a program within their public school where siblings attended, these
children might have otherwise attended private or parochial preschool programs.
Because of the uniqueness of inclusion at a preschool age, this variable was not
comparable to previous studies related to inclusion of school-aged children, where grades
kindergarten through grades six or eight, (depending on the district) which by definition,
offers public education to non-disabled children.

Research question 6 assessed: If there’s a significant difference between the
director’s attitude and the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who
participate in general education more than 80% of their school day? A correlation study
was completed. The results indicated that there was no linear relationship between the
percentages of preschool students with disabilities included in general education for more than 80% of the school day and the attitudes of special education directors.

Interviews supported this; overall directors were supportive of inclusion. Three districts have had ongoing in-district public inclusive programs; one director coordinated special education for a consortium of four districts with an inclusive program available in two of the four, one district developed a program using a federal autism grant which they hope the district will continue to fund, another was developing an inclusive program for the 2008-2009 school year. Two districts did not have inclusive programs and operated self-contained preschool disabled programs; community programs were utilized when needed. Participants volunteering to be interviewed may have more interest and/or experience with inclusion than those who chose not to volunteer for the follow-up telephone interview. The interview questions generated strong feelings not only regarding the benefits of inclusion, but also about the importance of focusing on individual needs along the continuum from least restrictive to more restrictive, specialized programs.

Several did not want to lose sight of the importance of small class size, structure and specialized resources, which can, at times, be more effective and efficient, when provided in self-contained district or regionalized public or private settings.

Additional Research Findings

A correlation study was performed for quantitative data, not related to the six original research questions. Table 49 includes the descriptive statistics; Table 50 reports the correlations.
Table 49

*Descriptive Statistics for the Demographic Variables Included in this Study*

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<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
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Table 49 summarizes this research study's demographic variables as follows: For the 69 directors who completed the *ASLREPSD* survey, SPSS reveals the following:

Attitude – mean, 33.8841, standard deviation – 6.02821; percent of inclusion – mean, .3974, standard deviation, .33287; socio economic district factor grouping – mean – 2.2029, standard deviation = .69831; litigation – mean .3913, standard deviation .49162, Experience – mean, 1.9855, standard deviation, 1.23065, Eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid -.1884, standard deviation .39390.

Using SPSS, a Pierson correlation study was completed for the every variable considered for the current study. Table 50 reports findings.
Table 50

Pearson Correlation for Research Variables

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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Table 50 reports the results from the correlation analysis for the 6 variables: attitude, percent of inclusion, socio-economic district factor grouping, litigation, experience rank and Early Childhood Program Aid (EPCA). The following significant relationships were identified:

District’s eligibility for Early Childhood Program Aid and low socio-economic district factor grouping was significant at the .003 level of significance. This positive correlation is to be anticipated as low income status is a requirement for funding.

There was a negative correlation between inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and district’s socio-economic factor grouping at the .001 level of significance. This would indicate that as the income level of the district increases, the percent of inclusion of preschool students in general education more than 80% decreases. \( r = -0.312 \), indicating that the strength of the relationship is weak; \( r^2 = 0.09734 \) indicating a shared variance of 9.8%. \( 1-r^2 \) indicated the shared variance that is due to random chance; (1-9.8%) indicates that there is a 90.2% that the shared variance is due to random chance.

There was positive correlation between the director’s years of experience and the district’s socioeconomic factor grouping, significant at the .05 level of significance, which indicates that more experienced directors were likely to be associated with district’s of higher socio-economic district factor grouping, \( r = 0.227 \); positive, though weak relationship was noted. \( r^2 = 0.05451 \) indicates that the shared variance was 5.5%. \( 1 - r^2 \) indicates that the shared variance, which can be contributed to random chance, is approximately 94.5%.
Conclusions

As in the cited study by Weitzman (2000), "No matter how often terms are defined, the confusion over the definition of what the least restrictive environment means and how inclusion is to be implemented is still apparent" (p. 163). Absolute terms such as "all" "always" and "no" "never" continue to generate controversy, noted by unsolicited comments written on the returned surveys and discussed at length discussion during interviews. While 98.6% of surveys were supportive of inclusion, responses to individual questions which were phrased with such words, directors continued to express general agreement with the concept of inclusion, but took issue that inclusion could be right for all children in all circumstances, regardless of their medical, cognitive, language or behavioral needs. Consistent comments concerned the importance of preserving the concept embedded in the need to develop an Individual Education Plan for each child was reiterated.

Quantitative and qualitative data supported and confirmed the benefits and barriers to inclusion in the cited monograph by Wolery and Wilbur (1994) discussed in Chapter 2 of this research study (pp 40-42). Directors interviewed shared information related to the advantages of inclusion for students, families and communities, as well as barriers, including the philosophical differences between general and special early education, related services needs of students with disabilities, statewide monitoring systems based on the responsibilities to provide a free and appropriate education, negative staff attitudes which may be based on lack of exposure or education supports, emphasis on academic achievement and a de-emphasis on social outcomes and competition for shrinking fiscal resources were highlighted.
In response to a question regarding the rate of progress of inclusion, one of the director’s interviewed stated the following:

I guess, I’m being idealistic, but I hope that everyone is going thru the same process as I, saying ‘gee, this kid, could they be serviced in a general ed with just putting some supports in or sending in the speech teacher, as a for instance, and then continue down that continuum. I think that hopefully, ideally, it’s going at the appropriate rate to the needs of the individual child. At least we have those options available – that’s what I think is the best. When I first started in this business, as a special ed. teacher in 1977, there was no in-class model and at preschool, there was none of that. Nobody was even thinking of an inclusion model. Just having the options available and to discuss the child with an open mind – that’s the value of it. That’s what’s exciting - just to have the options.

Implications for Policy

In survey responses as well as during telephone interviews, directors articulated a number of policy concerns. Directors accurately feel pressured to provide inclusive settings for all age groups, however the current research focused on the unique challenges for students with disabilities of preschool age. Support as well as concerns regarding director’s attitudes regarding inclusion of students with disabilities transcended the variables investigated. They go beyond socio-economic factors, years of experience of the directors, litigation experience, or the district’s eligibility for early childhood program aid. Director’s attitudes also do not correlate to percentage of inclusion. Directors articulated conflicting values, for inclusion of students and for providing each student with what they need in the “least restrictive environment.” Each has reached their balance. The following however are clear implications for policy:

(a) Value placed on consideration of community preschool: In the process of interviews, most directors expressed concerns that if inclusion is to be a highly
valued option, the state/federal government needs to hold community preschools similarly accountable to districts in the following areas: need for certificated instruction and support staff, class size, implementation of the state’s Early Childhood Expectations and use of state approved curriculum. Funds to offset the costs of paying student’s tuition, transportation and/or related services in community setting was another concern, as districts would then be sending valued resources to other preschool settings, not under public control or responsibility.

(b) Lack of state/federal funds for mandated services/training for program development/implemention within districts: The overall sentiment was that if the state is going to mandate programs, there should be subsidies to support at least some of the costs. At a time when directors, in intermediate and high-income districts anticipate changes (significant cutbacks) in the funding patterns shifting additional fiscal responsibilities back to districts, directors expressed concerns regarding the backlash that special education will experience.

(c) All preschool students are lumped under one eligibility category/tier of service: this system does not differentiate by the severity of the child’s needs and ignore more specialized needs for academic, language, motor and social skills development. Despite these factors, IDEA funding tends to remain flat or decreases annually.

(d) Directors reported the ability to serve less students in inclusive settings: based on state recommended ratios of students with disabilities: typically developing peers, to “naturally occurring proportions,” less students can be served in an inclusive
setting than in a self-contained setting. Many districts do not have space/funds to do both.

(e) Further dialogue on a state and national level regarding special education directors concern - in the push for inclusion, are some, if not all children, losing the “specialness” of special education? “If they were truly incidental learners, then they would have developed essential skills through exposure within their families along with prior preschool experiences should have been sufficient, and they would not need us.” As a group, directors indicated the need to preserve the continuum of services and consider what is truly “least restrictive for each child.” The other concern, amongst even the strongest inclusion advocates, was that by maintaining state recommended guidelines for disabled: typically developing students, a smaller number of preschool students can be served. Therefore more classrooms, teachers, aides and therapists are needed to serve the same population of preschool disabled students.

Implications for Program Implementation

The researcher was impressed both with the percentage of inclusion revealed by the analysis of the survey data as well as the depth of information and the degree of inclusive programs as well as the significant impairments described among children who had been included in their district programs. Figure 18 indicates the wide range obtained for the percent of students included in general education more than 80% inclusion in the school day.
Figure 18

Percent of Students Included in General Education More than 80% of School Day
For the 69 directors/districts participating in this study, the mean score for percentage of inclusion for preschool students with disabilities in general education settings more than 80% of the school day was .3974 or approximately 40% of all students. This exceeds that state average of 29.4 percent, which was reported in 2006. These results could be interpreted as an increase in the state average within the last year, or the directors who responded to the survey and volunteered to be interviewed, were more knowledgeable regarding inclusion and more experienced in the implementation of inclusive programs for preschool students with special needs.

(a) Increased training by the four state Learning Regional Centers for training, networking and consideration of shared programs/resources to meet the needs of the smaller elementary school districts targeted in this study.

(b) Establish consortia for preschool inclusion through county or regional director’s associations to exchange ideas and experiences regarding the various models/curriculums for preschool inclusion.

(c) Work with foundations and private funding sources to develop additional grants which to subsidize the initial costs for program development and implementation as noted by one of the directors/supervisors interviewed. She was able to make use of a one-year autism grant to finance room setup, purchase specialized equipment/services, train staff, etc. Once the program is up and running, it is easier for the district to maintain ongoing costs.
Implications for Future Research

The current research has the following implications for future research:

(a) Application of research design for a study of K-12 districts to determine if significant relationships exist between director’s attitude and variables under investigation in this study. Elementary school districts, by their nature tend to be smaller, located in suburban or rural locations rather than urban ones and more differences may be noted in relationship to district factor grouping, years of experience, litigation, and funding and percentage of inclusion.

(b) Based on correlation study for other variables based data generated by this study, relationships with some correlation are noted between socio-economic district factor grouping, years of experience, and the obvious relationship between district ‘dfg’ and eligibility for early childhood program aid. Future research could focus on these relationships within K-8 or K-12 districts as well as within a study of large urban districts in New Jersey.

(c) Research developed to focus on variables related to program implementation, rather than director’s attitudes. Variables could include the following: optimum ratio of disabled, typically developing students, staffing options such as general education teacher, dually certified teacher, combination of general and special education teachers, effectiveness of administrative, staff and parent training for inclusion, utilization of related service personnel through pull-out vs. integrated service models.
(d) Attitude studies related to other stakeholders – including, but not limited to
general education administrators (my interview with a superintendent/director of
special education yield unique and valuable insight), parents, teachers, related
service providers, students (general/special education) regarding inclusion in
relation to any or all of the variables considered in this study.

(e) Consideration of the obstacles that emerged as themes during interviews
including, but not limited to facilities, training, funding, study of district
relationships with community preschools discussed in policy section.

(f) Comparative study with districts in the process of establishing new inclusive
programs: compare student outcomes before and after new program
implementation.

(g) Study of preschool inclusion rates, based on federal/state data generated as a
result of the newly established data collection criteria, >80% in general education.

Summary of Research

During the interview process, a clear theme emerged: special educators walk a
fine line between when education becomes either too special or not special enough.
As with other aspects of education, directors/supervisors face a challenge –
developing inclusive settings that genuinely meet the needs of preschool students
with disabilities, and recognizing when more restrictive settings are needed for
student progress and success.
Quantitative data did not reveal significant relationships between the attitudes of special education directors in New Jersey Elementary School Districts and the variable posed in the research questions: district factor grouping, years of experience, litigation within the district, receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid or percentage of inclusion of preschool students with disabilities.

Qualitative data revealed more a more comprehensive view regarding the impact of these variables as well as other factors, which affect preschool inclusion. Most agree that inclusion is valuable as a philosophy of education, which is here to stay. Among the questions posed to directors as part of the survey and interview process:

Do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities? Will this lead to a more inclusive society? In conclusion, these are some of the thoughtful answers offered by the directors, who willingly gave their valuable time at an especially busy time of the year to be interviewed:

1. I do – I think we need to. I think the days for putting children in closets because they’re a little bit different is over.... I really do. That’s why we see more of the children with Down Syndrome or Autistic in public...I think this will lead us to a more inclusive society.

2. I think that there is great merit in notion of normally achieving models for kids, with the most important things that happen at preschool, being language and play. If you are with all other disabled students, particularly with the high incidence of kids with language delays, that typical language and behavior is not modeled for you, there are fewer opportunities for you develop those skills

3. Yes, I think that’s why there is a push from federal government on down to include students with disabilities with the general education population. Yes, it would.

4. It probably will lead to a more inclusive society, if only because the more exposure people have toward all types of people, the better off we all are. I think that the research supports it.
5. I don't know why there's a push for inclusion. I mean I don't know the thinking behind it. I can rationalize in my own mind that the reason that this was created was to not to segregate or label a child early on. We also know from the research that the preschool years are essential to learning and I think that probably the thought is to provide education as possible in the early years, and you'll be dealing with less problems later on. But that's the little struggle that I'm having right now. I believe in preschool programs, but as I said they do sometimes need some individual attention.... Yes neighborhood district with non-disabled peers.

6. I hope it would lead to more inclusive society. But I'm afraid that people are losing track of what children need. I think that some of the push is coming from parents who feel that if their children are in a regular program that they will grow and make better gains. That they will be less handicapped! They can say that they are in a regular school – they don't have to say that they are in another school.

7. Hopefully, with the little ones, they are more open to differences. And as with everything, the younger you start them, the more receptive they will be to people who do have problems. It's so complicated.

8. Why do I believe there's a push? I think that overall, it's not just for preschoolers, because I don't think it began with preschool. The real push began with statistics that showed that elementary and secondary special education was not always effective. Maybe that trickled down to the preschool level. Yeah – there are so many factors running through my head right now, I don't know what the single factor was. I'm sure that part of it was parentally driven. I'm sure that there must have been some programs where, like with the boom of autism. Maybe parents of children with just language problems delays, those parents wanted their children in inclusive settings. I'm really not sure. I don't think it was financial. I don't know what caused the sudden push. The only thing that I can think of was that ten to fifteen years ago, the statistics came out showing that special education was not that special. That's the only thing that I can think of that started the whole pendulum swinging. You know we really have to get the kids in general education, because it wasn't equivalent. Yeah, I think that's what started it - that they weren't equivalent and are they equivalent – and that is the harder thing; that's the key. If you are going to have a good special education program, you have to make sure that it is equal or better and sometimes it's not. Maybe that's what drove the push to put everyone back into regular education.
REFERENCES


Appendix
Appendix A

Permission to Use and Adapt Survey Instrument
November 6, 2006

Dr. Laura Weitzman

Warren, NJ

Dear Dr. Weitzman:

I am currently enrolled at Seton Hall University and am working toward an Ed.D. Degree in Educational Leadership, Management and Policy. I would like to further extend your Doctoral study in regard to attitudes of special education directors/supervisors in elementary school districts toward inclusion of students with disabilities. I plan to focus on the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. I would like to use the instrument which you developed, *Attitudes Toward Least Restrictive Environment of Directors/Supervisors of Special Education*. Using the instrument you used to survey special education directors/supervisors will also allow me to compare the responses of the school-aged population to the responses for the preschool population. A copy of my proposed instrument is enclosed for your review. The only changes made will reflect the age group targeted in my study. I plan to substitute one question in the demographic section: the district's eligibility for Early Childhood Program Funds in place of the question on gender, which is more pertinent to my research questions.

This letter confirms our conversation regarding your consent to allow me to use your doctoral dissertation, including the survey so that I would be able to replicate the study and add to the current research for inclusive education.
I will send you a report of the findings of this study, if you would like a copy.

Please return the additional copy of this letter using the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope, which serves to confirm our conversation.

Thank you again for your willingness to assist me in my research. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you regarding your research and trust I will be able to also provide insight regarding special education directors' attitudes toward inclusive education.

Yours truly,

[Signature]
Ruth Schuster

I have read the material above, and any questions I have were answered to my satisfaction during our telephone conversation. I agree to allow Ruth Schuster to use my dissertation, including the survey, for her research regarding the attitudes of special education directors toward inclusion/least restrictive environment for preschool students with disabilities.

Dr. Laura Weitzman

Date

[ ] Yes, please forward to me a report of the findings of this study.
Appendix B

Approval for Dissertation Proposal
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: ATTITUDES OF SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS TOWARD INCLUSION/LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR PRESCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, (we) certify that (we) have read and understand the university's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects: (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. (we) further acknowledge my(our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079

[Signature]
RESEARCHER(S) OR PROJECT DIRECTOR(S)
RUTH SCHUSTER, Ed.S. M.S.S.A. L.C.S.W.

DATE: 11/30/06

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature. Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.**

[Signature]
RESEARCHER'S ADVISOR OR DEPARTMENTAL SUPERVISOR
ANTHONY COLELLA, Ph.D.

DATE: 12/5/06

**Please print or type out name below signature**

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the ______________________ meeting.

The application was approved ____ not approved ____ by the Committee. Special conditions were ____ were not ____ set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

[Signature]
DIRECTOR
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

DATE

Seton Hall University
9/2005
Appendix C

Approval Letter from Institution Review Board to Conduct Research
October 31, 2007

Ruth Schuster Ed.S., MSSA, L.CSW
51 Tremont Terrace
Livingston, NJ 07039

Dear Ms. Schuster,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled “Attitudes of Special Education Directors toward Inclusion/Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities”. Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form, and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of this stamped form.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final discussion and the vote.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzek, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Anthony Colella Ph.D.
Appendix D

Letter of Request to Superintendents for Permission to Conduct Research
Ruth Schuster  
255 Baldwin Road  
Parsippany, NJ 07054  
Phone: 973-216-7707  
Fax: 973-334-2134  
Email: rschus@comcast.net

September 13, 2007

Dear Superintendent

This researcher is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University. This is a letter of request for a survey/interview to be mailed to your district’s Special Education Director/Coordinator for participation in a research study, entitled: “Attitudes of Special Education Directors toward Inclusion/Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities” in elementary school districts in New Jersey. With the approval of the university’s Institutional Review Board, a survey will be mailed to Special Education Directors in Elementary School Districts in New Jersey for completion. Eight volunteers will also be sought for follow-up phone interviews.

A letter from you as superintendent, on district stationery, granting your permission for the researcher to send the survey/interview to the Special Education Director/Coordinator in your district is needed. Your response prior to 10/8 would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Ruth Schuster, Ed.S., M.S.S.A
Appendix E

Letter of Solicitation
Ruth Schuster  
255 Baldwin Road  
Parsippany, NJ 07054  
973-216-7707  
October 31, 2007

Letter of Solicitation

Dear Special Education Director:

This researcher is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University. This is a letter of request for your participation in a research study for my dissertation, entitled: “Attitudes of Special Education Directors toward Inclusion/Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities.”

The purpose of the study is to investigate the attitudes of Special Education Directors/Supervisors in relation to inclusive preschool education. The researcher will also assess whether a significant relationship exists between their attitudes and the following demographic factors: socio-economic grouping of the district, the director’s years of experience, recent litigation within the district, the district’s receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid and the percentage of students included in general education.

Two instruments will be used for data collection. The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. If you chose to volunteer for the follow-up telephone interview, the contact should take approximately 25 - 35 minutes.

Return of the completed survey, entitled “Directors/Supervisors of Special Education toward ‘Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities’” in the designated envelope will indicate your willingness to participate in the survey. Return of the signed “Informed Consent Form” in the designated envelope will indicate your written consent to volunteer for a telephone interview. A mutually agreeable time will be selected to conduct the telephone interview. No procedures are experimental in nature.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate or to discontinue participation will in no way result in penalty to you or your district.

The anonymity of participants will be protected in the following ways: (1) No names or identifying data will be used in reporting research. (2) Only the researcher will have knowledge of the identity of the survey and interview participants.

Confidentiality of all research data will be maintained in accordance with IRB guidelines. To ensure the confidentiality of survey participants, the researcher will maintain all survey data. A coding system, randomly assigning a three-digit code to each survey, has been developed for the sole purpose of tracking responses for follow-up.
allowing reminder letters to be mailed to those who have not responded by the requested date. This coding will not be used for data analysis. A master key with the subject's name, address and code number will be destroyed following final analysis of the data. The researcher will conduct, transcribe and code each interview to ensure confidentiality of the interview participants. The researcher has completed training in "Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams." Digital interview data, and electronic data will be transferred onto a USB memory key and maintained in a locked, secure physical site; electronic data will not be maintained on the computer hard drive. The researcher will retain all data collected for the study for at least 3 years after completion of the project, in accordance with the university’s IRB guidelines.

Thank you in advance for your contribution. Please return the completed survey to me by November 23, 2007. If you are willing to volunteer for a follow-up telephone interview, please complete and return the Informed Consent Form in the separate, designated return envelope. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Ruth Schuster

Enclosure: Survey/Designated Return Envelope, Informed Consent/Designated Return Envelope
Appendix F

Letter of Informed Consent
Informed Consent Form

1. Researchers' Affiliation:
The researcher is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Education, Leadership, Management, and Policy, at Seton Hall University. This is a letter of request for your participation in a research study for my dissertation, entitled "Attitudes of Special Education Directors toward Inclusion: Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities."

2. Purpose and Duration of Participation in the Study:
The purpose of the study is to investigate the attitudes of Special Education Directors/Supervisors in relation to inclusive preschool education. The researcher will also assess whether a significant relationship exists between their attitudes and the following demographic factors: socio-economic grouping of the district; the district’s years of experience; recent litigation within the district; the district’s receipt of Early Childhood Program Aid and the percentage of students included in general education.

Two instruments will be used for data collection. The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. If you choose to volunteer for the follow-up telephone interview, the contact should take approximately 20-45 minutes.

3. Procedures:
A research packet will be mailed directly to Special Education Directors/Supervisors in all elementary school districts in New Jersey. The packet will include the following:
- Letter of Solicitation
- Survey Designated Self-Addressed, Postage Paid Return Envelope
- Informed Consent Form for Follow-Up Interview or Request for Materials Designated Self-Addressed, Postage Paid Return Envelope

Surveys and Informed Consent Forms should be returned separately, using the designated return envelope. The deadline for responses will be specified, allowing 2-3 weeks for response.

A reminder letter will be mailed to those who did not respond to the initial mailing. The following will be included:
- Reminder Letter
- Survey Designated Self-Addressed, Postage Paid Return Envelope

The deadline for responses will be specified, allowing 2-3 weeks for responses.

Eight telephone interviews will be scheduled; participants will be chosen from among those indicating willingness to volunteer by return of the informed consent form. Interviews will be scheduled during a period of one month at pre-determined, mutually convenient times.

4. Instruments:
Two instruments will be used. The survey instrument, entitled "Directors/Supervisors of Special Education toward "Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities" includes 40 multiple choice questions regarding your attitudes toward preschool inclusion. Seven additional demographic questions will be included on the survey. The semistructured telephone interview includes a total of fourteen questions.

Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board
OCT 31 2007

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy
Tel: 732-263-3387
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-3085

Expiration Date
OCT 31 2008

Approval Date
5. Voluntary Nature of Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate or to discontinue participation will in no way result in penalty to you or your infant.

6. Anonymity:
In accordance with the guidelines specified by the Institutional Review Board of Seton Hall University, the anonymity of participants will be preserved in the following ways: (1) No names or identifying data will be used in reporting research. (2) Only the researcher will have knowledge of the identity of survey and interview participants.

7. Confidentiality and Access to Data:
Confidentiality of all research data will be maintained in accordance with IRB guidelines. To ensure the confidentiality of survey participants, the researcher will maintain all survey data in a coding system, randomly assigning a three-digit code to each survey, that has been developed for the sole purpose of tracking responses for follow-up, allowing researchers to be mailed to those who have not responded by the requested date. This coding will not be used for data analysis. Access to the subject's name, address, and code numbers will be destroyed following final analysis of the data. The researcher will conduct, summarize, and code each interview to ensure confidentiality to the interview participants. The researcher has completed training in “Human Participant Protection Education for Research Teams.” Verbatim transcripts, inclusive of identifying information, may be included in the Appendices.

8. Research Records:
Research records including collected data, survey forms, interview recordings, transcriptions and electronic files stored on a USB memory key will be kept in a locked, secure physical site. No electronic data will be stored electronically on hard drives of laptop or desktop computers. The master key including the codes for survey forms will be maintained separate from the research data. As required, the researcher will retain all data collected for the study for at least 3 years after completion of the project in accordance with the university’s IRB requirements.

9. foreseeable Risks or Discomforts:
There are no risks or discomforts associated with this study.

10. Description of Direct Benefits:
There are no direct benefits for you or your infant resulting from participation in this study. The potential benefits of participating in this study will result in increased knowledge regarding positive attitudes of special education teachers toward inclusion of preschool students with disabilities.

11. Reconversion:
There is no type of remuneration or payment for participation in this research study.

12. Research Involving more than minimal risk: Not Applicable.

13. Disclosure of Appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be advantageous to the Subject: Not Applicable.

14. Contact information:
Participants who have questions at any time about this study can reach the researcher by email at 255 Baldwin Road, Paramus, NJ 07652 or by phone at (973) 216-3307 ext. 540. You may also contact the researcher's mentor, Dr. C. 0093a, at (973) 281-8100 or D.0093a@comcast.net. Any questions about your rights as a research subject can be directed to Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Institutional Review Board at (973) 313-6314 or mruzie@shu.edu.

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board

Exp date: OCT 31 2007

Approval Date: OCT 31 2009
15. Consent for Interview: Use of Audio-tape:
Return of this completed Informed Consent Form will indicate your agreement for audiotaping of the telephone interview. Please return the Consent Form using the designated return envelope. Access will be limited to the researcher.

Consent for Survey:
Return of the survey in the designated return envelope will indicate your agreement to participate in the survey portion of the study.

16. Please return this Informed Consent Form in its entirety to indicate your willingness to be interviewed on the telephone. A copy of your signed Informed Consent Form will be mailed to you.

Subject: __________________ Date: ______________

Interview or Material Request

☐ I would like to be interviewed by the researcher of this study so that I can further explain my views. I understand the interview will be recorded; my remarks and comments may be used in the research but that my name and district will not be revealed.

☐ I would be interested in receiving a summary of the findings of this research.

Name: ___________________________
School/District: __________________
Address: ________________________
City/Zip: _________________________
Phone (home): (school): __________
Email: __________________________
Preferred Contact Number: __________

Best Time of Day for Telephone Interview:
AM __________ PM __________
After Work Hours: __________

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board
OCT 31, 2001

Expiration Date
OCT 31, 2001

Approval Date
Appendix G

Reminder Letter
Ruth Schuster  
255 Baldwin Road  
Parsippany, NJ 07054  
November 23, 2007

Dear Director of Special Education:

This season represents a busy time due to state reporting as well as program, budget and staff development. Although I know that you have lots of things to do, I hope that you will take fifteen minutes to complete this survey. Your input is very important; the more responses received, the more valid the research on “Directors’ Attitudes toward Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities.

Two weeks ago, I mailed you a survey, “Attitudes of Special Education Directors toward Inclusion/Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students with Disabilities.” Unfortunately, I have not yet received your reply. Perhaps you have mislaid the survey or it may have gotten lost in the mail. In any case, another copy of the survey and return envelope is enclosed. Despite your busy schedule, your completion and return of this survey will provide valuable feedback for inclusion in the research data. The deadline for the return of this questionnaire is

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate or to discontinue participation will in no way result in penalty to you or your district.

The anonymity of participants will be protected in the following ways: (1) No names or identifying data will be used in reporting research.” (2) Only the researcher will have knowledge of the identity of survey and interview participants.

Confidentiality of all research data will be maintained in accordance with IRB guidelines. To ensure the confidentiality of the survey participants, the researcher will exclusively maintain all survey data generated by the study. A coding system has been developed, randomly assigning a numerical, three-digit code to each survey mailed to be used to track survey responses only; this code will not be used for data analysis. A master key with the subject’s name, address and code number will be maintained, separate from where the actual data is stored. Once the final analysis is completed and no further follow-up is planned, this master key will be destroyed. The master key as well as the data obtained from analysis will be secured in a locked file cabinet. Digital interview data and electronic data transferred onto a USB memory key and maintained in a locked, secure physical site; electronic data will not be maintained on the computer hard drive. As required, the researcher will retain all data collected for the study for at least 3 years after completion of the project in accordance with the university’s IRB requirements.

Participants who have questions at any time about this study can reach the researcher by mail at 255 Baldwin Road, Parsippany, NJ 07054 or by phone at
973-216-7707 or rsclus@comcast.net. You may also contact the researcher’s mentor, Dr. Colella, at (973) 761-9389 or Anthony139@aol.com. Any questions about your rights as a research subject can be directed to Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Institutional Review Board at (973) 313-6314 or irb@shu.edu.

Thank you for your time, attention and cooperation. Your completion and return of the survey indicates your willingness to participate. Thank you in advance for your anticipation cooperation in this research project.

Sincerely,

Ruth Schuster
Appendix H

Attitudes toward Least Restrictive Environment for Preschool Students With Disabilities
**ATTITUDES OF DIRECTORS/SUPERVISORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TOWARD “LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR PRESCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES”**

Directions: Please answer each question so that each best reflects your attitude toward educating students in the general education program. Circle your answer.

1. I believe that all preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves or others.

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2. I believe that all preschool teachers should be trained to teach preschool students with disabilities.

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3. If I had a choice, I would prefer to work in a “full inclusion” district.

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4. I believe that no preschool student with disabilities should be sent to out of district placements unless there are medical issues or they will do harm to themselves or others.

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5. I believe that a general education preschool class in the neighborhood school is always and for all students the least restrictive environment and the most appropriate placement.

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6. I believe that the word “restrictive” in least restrictive environment is synonymous with “segregated.”

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7. I believe that inclusive preschool classrooms will eventually lead to an inclusive society.

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8. I believe that students who are educated out of the general education preschool class for all or part of the school day receives a less rigorous education.

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9. I believe that over the past 5 years, I have seen that education in the general education class is more of an option for more preschool students with disabilities.

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10. I believe that the pace of changing our special education preschool programs to become more inclusive should be speeded up.

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*Demographic Information*

Directions: Please answer these questions completely.

1. The total number of students (all, not just special education) in your district: ________________________

2. The type of district factor group your district is: ________________________

3. The total number of preschool students with disabilities in your district from the Table 1AA of December 1, 2006 report: ________________________

4. The number of special education preschool students in your district who participate in general education more than 80% of the day (from your Dec. 1st report- Table 1AA): ________________________

5. Please list the number of times for the Jan.-Dec. 2006 year, that you have:
   a. Appeared before an Administrative Law Judge: ________________________
   b. Had a case go to court: ________________________
   c. Participated in mediation: ________________________
   d. Participated in a resolution conference: ________________________

6. The number of years that you have served as director/supervisor of special education (in your present district or any other)

7. Does your district receive Early Childhood Program Aid: Yes ____ No ____

*Thank you for your participation in this survey.*

* This survey was modified by author to focus responses on preschool inclusion, based on a Survey of “Attitude Toward Least Restrictive Environment of Directors/Supervisors of Special Education” developed by Dr. Laura Weitzman (2000)
Appendix I

Introductory Script/Interview Questions
Introduction

Hello. My name is Ruth Schuster, a doctoral student at Seton Hall University. You returned the informed consent form, expressing a willingness to participate in a phone interview. This time and telephone number was previously arranged as a mutually convenient time for this purpose. I thank you for volunteering to be interviewed today.

The information, which you will share in today’s phone interview will add greater depth of understanding regarding the attitudes of directors toward the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities, than could be accomplished through analysis of the survey instrument alone. Today’s telephonic interview will be taped for future transcription. As promised, no identifying information, including your name and district, will appear as part of the transcription of your responses or in the research report. Electronic and audio files will be secured in a locked cabinet which only I will have access to. You will have the right to terminate this telephone interview without penalty at any time.

I know this is an extremely busy time for Directors of Special Education. Please allow me to thank you in advance for your openness, time and contribution to this research study.
Interview Questions

1. Many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice.
   A. Why would they hold this view?
   B. How does this coincide or differ from your view?

2. What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students?

3. What specific concerns do you have?

4. What do you believe about the statement, “All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others.”

5. Should all preschool teachers be trained to teach students with disabilities?

6. Would you like to work in a “full inclusion” district? Why or why not?

7. What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated?

8. Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

9. Is “restrictive” in least restrictive environment synonymous with “segregated”?

10. Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities? Will this lead to a more inclusive society?

11. Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education? Explain

12. How is the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms progressing?

13. Do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?

14. Do you see major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?

15. Do you have any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities, which you would like to share?
Appendix J

Interviews with Eight Directors
Interview 1
Rural/Suburban: Ocean County
Date: 11/20-07
Time: 4:15-5:08

RS Thank you for agreeing to speak with me.

1 We are submitting November 15 report done and we cannot get it to work – so we just sent an email to the state telling them that. It's very easy this year, can't get the button to create or to verify...we can't find it and we had the same problem in the spring – so we're waiting for them to email us back to verify that they've fixed the system. We only have three pages this time...

Yes, but they want your report on time even if its not all working correctly.”

RS How many pages?”

1 Three - we're such a small district that is all we have to fill out. So that's easy.

RS Tell me a little about your district.

1 Our district is extremely small approximately - 250 children; 31 are classified ranging from preschool disabled to grade six. Of the 31 classified students, 7 are preschool disabled. We are located in Ocean County.

RS So it's actually a significant number, of your 30. Would you consider yourself urban, suburban or rural district?

1 We are a barrier island – we cover 15 miles long and 1 mile wide. It's an island and we cover the whole thing except for one square mile so I'd don't know what you'd call us – we are technically six miles out at sea.

RS So do you have a big population?

1 We go from 120 – 130,000 in the summer to about 10,000 in the winter.

RS That's a big difference.

1 Yes, a huge difference!

RS So it's a challenge.

1 Yes.

RS And in terms of the demographics? Do you have a wide range?
We have a wide range. We have a very wealthy population down to the restaurant workers and to the landscapers who keep the homes in shape. So we have wide range of demographics. Yes, it’s very interesting and I have the entire range within my classified students.

RS Okay, and so how does your setting and population impact on your special education programs? Do have a full range of services?

We have one self-contained program, which is for my preschool disabled population, which probably will change next year because of projected numbers. I see only three, possibly four preschool children next year...so it probably will change to a full inclusion program with a regular preschool education program next year.

RS So, you have a regular education preschool program?

Yes. We have a regular education four-year-old program. So we will probably go to an inclusion program. This is a good idea, cause we are doing more inclusion this year. We have always done inclusion with the children going into kindergarten. We start with our four years old in December, January, where they start going more and more in to that program. This year, we are actually starting next Monday, with our three children in the afternoon class will have them in gym with that class. Rather than the three of them having gym alone they will be going with that class which will is about twelve, so they will have a good sized class. The morning class is a split class with three and four years old, so none of those children are yet five. So that’s the reason that they are not going into inclusion program.

RS And that’s a self-contained class?

That’s a self-contained class of four. Our preschool program last year went to nine, and we ended up having to hire a second aide. So this year we split the class....we have child find on our website all year round. We have already done two Child-Find exercises so far this year and have had nobody respond. So that’s the reason why we are going to inclusion next year. It just makes more sense.

RS And is your teacher a special education teacher, a regular education teacher or dually certified?

No, she is certified both regular ed. and special education. My preschool teacher for my preschool disabled students is dually certified. Our regular education preschool teacher is not dually certified. So we would probably have a special education teacher going into this room...and possibly the special education teacher would take the ones who need extra help into her classroom and then services such as speech/language OT and Pt would also be provided.
Although our speech/language teacher has gone into the regular education program on a casual basis just to work with some children, just to see what their needs are. She’s already done that.

RS  
So you already have some experience with preschool inclusion.

1  
Yes, we have- casually, not very formally, but very casually. We have difficulty between the two preschool teachers right now, so that hasn’t been an easy road.

RS  
Hmm – politics is everywhere.

1  
Yes. Much to my chagrin because I am certified all the way from early childhood, all the way up and so it is very difficult for me to bite my tongue and not to say, grow up and get over it. But you can’t do that.”

RS  
Many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice. Why would they hold this view and how does this coincide or differ from your view?

1  
I think it is good – I think it is very good to let regular education students see what these children are capable of doing. I also think it is motivating to the child who does have special needs to see what other children are capable of doing, because they are not always perfect either.

1  
I also think it gives them a happy medium. Sometimes the regular education student is more appreciative if they are able to help and share things…to me it’s better to keep going. I feel that children can be an inspiration to other children and I think that’s the best way to be. We have never had a severely handicapped child. My most severely handicapped child was a spastic quadriplegic which we could not service in our school, and he was placed in an out-of-district placement because he required so many special services – the entire school day, special feeding and everything else. In our small district, it just didn’t work and his mother realized that and we found a place that’s so good for him that the parent kept him there even after 6th grade when we were through servicing him, he has remained there. So there are certain circumstances that I feel that inclusion is not good and he happened to be one that had such particularly severe needs that we and his family searched and searched to find a place that was good for him and he has done well in that setting. That’s a problem to find a place for a child like that because where we are, there are not many. It’s the same for a severely autistic child – where we are it is hard to find a placement for a severely autistic child.

RS  
And have you had that experience of having children with severe disabilities come into your program?

1  
We have had autistic children in our regular preschool handicapped program and autistic and successfully had them there and been able to service them. Out of my
thirty classified children, seven have been autistic and only one is out of district. Most of them are Asperger Syndrome children and with that we have been able to service them sufficiently with OT, PT and Speech/language services. Most, from the preschool level, on up. The oldest one right now is in grade 5; my most severe child is serviced out of district because his need was for a five day a week program and he is nearby – it’s a district about five miles away and he has had an excellent program.

RS So, that student is in a public school program?

1 Yes, he is in a public school in a regular education setting and he splits his day between a regular and special education. He’s gradually increasing time in regular education. He’s come a long way but whether he will ever get into a regular ed setting all day, I don’t know. It’s been heartbreaking for me, because his mother was one of our teachers.

RS So you know if from both sides.

1 Yes.

RS And your program – is it four days a week or five.

1 It’s a five days a week. Half day, 2 ½ days a week and then for extended school year we send them two and a half miles away to __ Township. So we do provide extended school year. For parents who do not want to send their children to extended school year, I sometimes will provide either PT or OT, sometimes in their home or in the therapist’s office as a convenience to the parents, so they have their choice, really.

RS It sounds like you’re doing a great job? What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students?

1 That the program that they are putting them in is appropriate and that they are accepted. I am always concerned that something will be done or said, or that something will be planned that is too difficult or that they would not. Fortunately we have not had to accommodate for severe physical handicapped. For the older children with the broken arm or leg we have made the accommodation, but for the little guys, we’ve never had to do that. Because that’s something I’m very sensitive to.

RS My next question was what specific concerns do you have, but do you feel that we’ve covered that already?

1 I think we did. I’m also very sensitive to the parents. A lot of the parents will tend to keep the children home. This is one of the problems, which we are having with one of the children right now. They are tending to keep the child home at the
slightest whim and we are trying to encourage him to send him anyway. If he has a slight cold, he needs to be in school. He’s not going to be ready for kindergarten and last year, we had him enrolled in extended school year, first day came and he was not ready for the bus. The second day came and we found that he was in the hospital. There was no communication with the parents and finally it came down where I had to write a letter, since you haven’t responded to the phone call and you haven’t acknowledged to the bus, I am taking that you are taking him out of the preschool program for the summer. If you don’t respond to me, I’m discontinuing his registration. And I never heard a word from the woman, not a word. Meantime, I’m worried that this child has asthma, and I know what that’s like. Meantime I am concerned and his teacher is concerned. It’s a young mother whose mother is mothering not only her, but also her children. So it’s a concern. He gets very attached to the children…. and nothing is better than when you get to see them in sixth grade and they get to be independent people.

RS What is your feeling about the following statement, “All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others.

1 I agree with that, I really do. I think that is the goal - the ultimate goal. The only thing that would make me take them out is if they are so disruptive that they hinder the learning of the regular education child. And that to me would be the last resort. I’d put an aide in first – I’d do anything to keep that child in the classroom. I have an aide; sitting with an autistic child in kindergarten who I know doesn’t need the aide, just to keep him on target in other areas. He went to kindergarten able to read write and do math, the aide is there just to keep him on task. I’d rather pay for the aide, then have a child fail in kindergarten.

RS And is your regular preschool program open to the whole population, like how do you enroll kids?

1 They are open to anyone who resides here on they island.

RS Ok and is it by lottery?

1 No, as long as they reside on the island and meet the Oct. 1st deadline.

RS OK, and is that for kindergarten and preschool as well?

1 Yes, and we also accept tuition students for preschool and kindergarten. We are a unique district. I will share this with you. Our tuition, our cost per pupil, is about 20,000 per child and we charge tuition of $2500 dollars. Our tax base here per household is about $350 dollars to send a child to school. That’s for anybody. Do you know where I work? It’s a very wealthy district, a very wealthy district.

RS And that would be just for the regular education kids?
It's one of the things where we have a greater opportunity than a lot of districts.

RS **And having your general education population is unique.**

Very unique. My general education population is very unique and we have children from a very big range – from the very bright down to the child who struggles.

RS **Ok, would you like to work in a “full inclusion” district or do you consider yourself a full inclusion district?**

I feel we are a full inclusion district. I'm hoping that the preschool next year will go to full inclusion. I'd like to see that and I'd like to see it so the little ones can just be taken out for a little help if they need it. We've talked about it off and on. Two years ago we spoke about this very seriously, but then we didn't follow through. I'd like to see it happen this year – our new superintendent has had this in previous districts so he's familiar with it and I like to see it happen before I retire. I'd like to see it happen and get off on a good foot. I think that with only the possibility of three children next year, that's a good time to do it because you are starting with a small number and that to me is ideal. We are not starting with ten children; we're only starting with two or three. It makes it so much easier to assimilate them and no one knows the difference.

RS **And what is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated? I guess that flip side Is there a criteria that your district would employ?**

The only criteria that we employ – is the services they require – if they need OT and PT more than twice a week. My OT only comes two days a week and my PT only one day a week. My speech therapist we can usually work as often as three days a week, because we have someone in district. If they require services more times than that, than I have to send them off the island to a larger district where those people are employed every day. That's the main criteria. Also, if their needs were such that they may need a deaf interpreter or they may need sign language taught to them, although my speech/language teacher may do that, if that's going to be their sole means of communication, then they're going to need a class they can do that. So there are a lot of things that go into the thought. The three boys that I have out of district right now – one of them had already been held back and we had to send him out of district because he was not ready to go to second grade after two years in first grade and he needed a self-contained class and he's doing beautifully. We just had his IEP and we actually moved him from a lower functioning group to a higher functioning group. We do actually try to do the placement that they are allowed to grow. The one thing with a preschooler, you want them to meet with success; you don't want them to become too frustrated. You want them to achieve, because the younger, the better footing that they get, they need all the structure that they get. I'm very strongly in favor of that. Most of
our children go into kindergarten, I would say either declassified or with minimal services. Some of them can be just eligible for speech language services, since that's usually the main area. Some of them will go classified communication impaired because they may need help with writing skills, and OT and things like that. We really make an effort for them to be declassified, going into kindergarten.

RS That's impressive.

1 Most of them, we try to. It just depends how severe they are. Last year we had one autistic child in kindergarten; this year I have one student in kindergarten and no other child who's classified in kindergarten. So, we really try to do our very best to have them declassified. We don't mind if they get re-classified in first or second grade, at least we give them that opportunity to try.

RS And the test you would do, you give them the educational testing that would pick up any discrepancy?

1 Right, when they come out of preschool, we give them the WIAT and the WPSI and if there is a learning discrepancy, we usually do find it. Usually they have come up to within their average age ranges. We try to give them the benefit of the doubt to grow. I think that this is the advantage to a small district. Our classes are small. I mean kindergarten can be as small as 15 students and we have two of them and both of those teachers are dually certified in regular and special ed – so that's the ideal situation with some of these small classes.

RS That's great – let's see. Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

1 Well a lot of times, that's where their playmates are. Our students are sometimes scattered all over the islands. But a lot of times, they do have friends. It may be their older sibling's friends, but they do have friends that they play with. They may be from previous preschools that they've gone too, if they've been in school before. I know one, no, two of my little preschoolers this year, they have had siblings in school so they do know all of the children from other situations. They do belong here, they really do. If I were to send them away, I think that the parents would be angry. One family, we did offer another placement, and they said no. They said we want him here and this is his school. His sister is here and we want him here too. We said okay, fine. It's up to you to make that decision. I said that if we send him there, than these are the additional services that we can provide him. But they said no, we want him kept here and that was their decision and we accepted that. But we sometimes will offer that. If they want the services that we cannot offer enough of, then we will offer an out of district placement, but that's up to the parents.
And I guess that the next question is a little more controversial. Is “restrictive” in least restrictive environment synonymous with “segregated”?

Not really – because, I’m trying to think. My preschool has a mixture; I have one child who is bi-racial – two children who are biracial, Hispanic and white and black and white; the rest of the children are basically Caucasian. It’s interesting to hear how the children describe themselves. The child, who is black and white, calls himself “chocolate” which I think it is hysterical. The child who is Hispanic and white doesn’t talk about it at all. So it’s just one of those weird quirks. But the other boy will say that my mother is white and my daddy is black and together they made me and I’m chocolate.

That’s cute.

It’s so cute. We had his older brother and his older brother was a behavioral problem. So when we got him the preschool on the island which is a public preschool had bounced him out of there two or three times. The mother was amazed that we could keep him. I said it’s a very small environment – not twenty-three in a class, I said it’s very different. It’s very structured and we know what to expect and we never had a problem. When I got this little guy, he didn’t talk. Well we have him talking now, but it’s just so cute, the way he describes himself, as chocolate. And he’s a beautiful chocolate – he has a milk chocolate complexion and he is absolutely adorable. But it is interesting, because we do run the whole gamut. And it happens that one is from a very wealthy family on the island and the other is Hispanic and white family – there’s three children in this class and that’s the range in that class.

And using self-contained – do you see that as segregated, or not?

The only self-contained class is my preschool and that makes a difference too, because it is my preschool. We don’t refer to it as self contained – however we say it is a special class – it is a special education class. So the parents know that and we are very honest with them. But being as it’s the only special. We just called it as a preschool class. It’s just a very small class for kids who need special help. However, it doesn’t stand out as much as if it were one of eight classes. It’s just the way that is presented. Yet the regular preschool class has 12 children in it; 12 – 14, and that’s a small too yet, that’s regular education.

Right, and you have the option – others I speak to do not all have that option.

And they are next door to each other and they come to school on the same bus. We transport everyone to and from school and ours is free. We do not charge any of them. It’s very interesting.

Yes, it is. Each district is very different.
Yes, it is and it's funny because if we were to say we were having an all day program, we would be mobbed – I think it would just be overwhelming. Right now, I think that one class has 12, the other has 14 – we cap it at 14, that enough for the teacher and the aide.

**RS**  Are there private options for students in your area?

We don't have many on the island. They'd have to go to a parochial school and they always have a waiting list. That is sometimes done; DYFS can place children there. There is also a small Episcopal church, which has a small program, which works three days a week, sometimes the morning, sometimes in the afternoon. It depends on the age of the child. When we started the preschool, they were very angry with us; when we went to five days a week and we didn't charge anything. It was free to the parents. We said that it's our time to do it and it's our time now.

**RS**  And do you maintain relationships with the regular preschools in your area?

When ___ has a problem, they will call me. If the director has a problem, they will call me. I will say, are you sure this is one of my children, not from a neighboring town? A couple of times I've found out, after visiting the school that they lived in another town, outside my territory. We are very careful. Sometimes, if they have a behavior problem, they will ask parents for permission and they will ask us to come and make suggestions. We have a very good relationship. They have as many as 25 per classroom ranging from six months and up and it is a huge program. I've worked with them. I've been on the Child Study Team for about 18-19 years and as the director for four years, so I've been working with them for years, but they've always known to call and we'll go down and look at them and do whatever we can to help and we have a very good relationship.

**RS**  And that's important and that's the direction that the federal and state laws are going in.

We had talked at one time about combining with their program but our association was against that because we would be teaching in a private setting and they were not happy with that. So, that has not been explored for many years because the vibes from the association was not good.

**RS**  Got you. Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities? And do you think that this lead to a more inclusive society?

I do – I think they need to. I think the days for putting children in closets because they're a little bit different is over. I really do. That's why we see more of the children with Downs Syndrome or Autistic in public. You never saw them -- you never did. I don't know that’s a case of more autistic children, I think that it’s a case of more children being better diagnosed. We had a chance of listening to Dr.
Zahorodny, the autistic study, at our supervisors meeting. That question came up.
It's a case that New Jersey just happens to be one of the states that happen to do
better reporting, better testing and evaluations. He says, "It's the same
population." They're just better documents. I really think that people are more
aware of this population. It's not the case of people hiding them. When I was in
school, people didn't take them out of the house or travel with them...now, we
were in Hawaii and we were in a museum and my husband was so upset because
there was a child who was upset. He said, can't you go over there and calm him?
I said no – he has a teacher and an aide – they know what to do. If I were to go
over there, I'd make it worse – I'm a stranger. I said, he'd be fine; he just needs
maybe a half hour - he's in a strange place and he is just out of sorts.

RS  So you do think that this will lead to a more inclusive attitude.

1  I think it will. When we travel - we travel a lot and see more handicapped than
we've ever seen. I think to see an autistic child in a museum like that, really
surprised my husband. And he was having a difficult time – it took him by
surprise. I think he really felt sorry for the child.

RS  Yes, many people do – or other people stand aside, in judgment. I guess
that's the two extremes.

1  Yes. He was a teacher for forty years, so he knows. He knows what I deal with; he
was a regular education not special ed.

RS  And do you feel that preschool students with disabilities receive a less
rigorous education outside of general education?

1  Well the way they are all being held accountable. Well they haven't gotten down
to testing our preschoolers yet to assess them, thank god - but, I think that the
state does give us a curriculum and I think that the fact is that we are exposing
them to more and more of what we want them to do. I think it's important that we
try to get them to the pinnacle of their personal best and I think that's important.
I think that's the importance of an IEP – I just wrote one for a child with 90% goal
intent. And the parents said to me, "Do you really feel that he can do that. I said
that his speech/language therapist gave you a 90% goal as well. We trust the child
and he has a 122 I.Q. So I said that I definitely think he can do that. I think this is
very important. I've always found that if you set a goal for a child, that nine times
out of ten, they will meet that goal or surpass it.

RS  How is the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general
education classrooms do you think it's progressing? It definitely sounds like
its progressing in your district.

1  I think it's slow – I think there's a lot of resistance from regular ed.
RS  Regular staff or families?

1  No, staff. I think they’ve heard the message for so long that you’re not capable of dealing with these special needs children that they really believe this and therefore they don’t even make an attempt. I have a problem on the 6th grade level, because I have a teacher who says she makes all these accommodations, but she doesn’t. For 10 years, I’ve made the special education teachers out of their minds because she doesn’t make the accommodations.

RS  So many of the staff have grown up in a time where special and regular ed. was separate?

I#1  Yes and where she thinks there are accommodations, there are not. So we kept the student who are the most gifted out there in that area, and the other five students who we felt would struggle in the class, we just gave pull out replacement, because that was the best we could do for the students. I think that there are still some people out there teaching that feel that I’m doing what I have to do. They just make it so difficult that the child can’t be successful.

RS  They make it difficult because they judge the children by their best moment.

1  I think it’s not just preschool – I think that it’s still across the board that you get some of those old time teachers who really are not willing to give up the last fortitude – that last inch they can hold on to.

RS  Do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms? We’ve already talked quite a bit about this so I apologize if this is repetitious.

1  No, I think I have a regular ed. teacher who is willing to do it. The problem is finding the special education teacher who is willing to do it with her, and that’s going to be a hard problem this year. The superintendent, I’ve already said that this is what I want to do, so start thinking…

RS  This leads well into my next question. Do you see major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms? So, one of the things we just spoke about was staff attitudes.

1  Yes, staff attitudes are one.

RS  Administrative?

1  No, because the principal in my building is my former supervisor of special education and my superintendent was also the supervisor of special ed. So I am in a very fortunate position. The two people that I now work with know what needs to be done, so they are very encouraging and supportive. My principal, I’ve
worked with for 21 years; I was here before she got here. My superintendent just came – this is his second year. So we really know what has to be done. So it’s taking the staff we have and putting them in the right places.

RS  And any other obstacles that you would see – Administrative.

1  No the board has always been very supportive.

RS  Is funding an obstacle?

1  No, not in this district. It has never been an obstacle. It is wonderful. I’ve taught in other districts where it’s been a major obstacle, but in this district we have always been able to have somehow found the resources needed.

RS  And do you have any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool student with disabilities? Anything we haven’t talked about or something which you would like to emphasize?

1  No. I think that we’ve covered it all. Good luck on your research!

Interview 2
Bergen County: Suburban
Date: 11/29/07
Time: 4:30 - 5:05

RS  Thank you for agreeing to this interview.

2  Roll on.

RS  First of all, can you tell me a little about your district?

2  It is a K-8 district, with one school, 660 students.

RS  And what are you doing in the way of inclusion generally, in your district?

2  Most of the children go to school here. We have only three elementary school children who are sent out of district. We have an integrated preschool class and a preschool disabled class, resource center, basic skills and a self-contained special education regional program for children with autism that are placed here.

RS  About how many children are classified all together?
Do you need exact numbers because I don’t have that here now? Including speech or classified for special education? I’m going to say probably 70-75.

RS OK and would you consider yourself an urban, suburban or rural district?

2 No, we’re suburban, high socio-economic district in Bergen County.

RS Many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice. Why would you think they hold this view and how does this coincide or differ from your views?

2 You say many educators, not legislators or government people, right? I think the belief behind that is that every child should have opportunity to be schooled in home district with other residents of their town and that it’s our job to provide the supports that a child needs to do so.

RS And is that what you believe or do you think something different?

2 I do believe it – I do not believe that it can hold true in 100% of the cases. I don’t believe that the public school is always the least restrictive environment and that depends on the child.

RS What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students?

2 Preschool? Ok, we’re only talking preschool? Was my answer before supposed to be only preschool too?

RS No – that’s intended to be more general.

1#2 Okay, that’s ok because I think that the preschool piece is different. Okay, can you ask the question again? Well for medically fragile – you’re talking about educators in general, teachers or directors of special education?

RS The focus of this study is on attitudes of Directors of Special Education.

1#2 You have the teachers who are trained for the variety of needs that will come their way. How do you keep children who are medically fragile? How can you be sure to meet their medical needs? For children with orthopedic needs, how do you access the staff that meets the needs of the kids in a single school? Yes, for easy, easy guys, it’s the absolute right thing to do. For kids who are very involved, it depends.

RS And this may have answered my next question, but what specific concerns do you have? I guess that’s what we were just speaking about.
I guess, the only other piece that I haven’t spoken about is children on the spectrum. Can you provide program that will move them forward and what would that program be? For a real low incidence disability, and meeting your budget and reaching consensus with parent because some parents want their children in segregated settings. So the big issue is - how do you meet the expectation of government and come to a happy conclusion with parent because they don’t always look at things the same way.

RS And you said that your district offers both an inclusive preschool for children with and without disabilities and a segregated preschool disabled program? So you are offering both options?

Yes we do.

RS The surveys I have received and prior research show that many districts don’t offer both options. How long have you been offering both options?

Both services are in the third year. We started with a preschool disabled class. We shifted it to integrated class and then added a PSD class and that had to do with meeting our population needs. If you are only running an integrated classes, you have to have more classrooms and again you have to run a budget and think of the whole population there so that’s the way we’re doing it.

RS That’s interesting; and also you are providing the full continuum of services.

We are, but what we are finding is that the parents, every one wants their child in integrated classes whether it’s right for them or not. And because to them it’s the old, they’re afraid of who might be in the disabled class – that’s the whole process of coming to grips and being an advocate for your child.

RS It’s complicated.

Yes it sure is.

RS I think particularly for preschool because districts didn’t always have general education for preschool.

Yes, but it’s much less complicated to offer an integrated program. An integrated program makes a lot of people happy. It makes the special ed parents happy that their children have normal role models and it make the community members happy because it opens some slots for general education children. There are never enough, but it does serve a nice purpose. The problem is that there are a fewer number of special education children you can serve. Because half the children are not disabled so you need more classes.

RS And do you charge tuition for your students?
Yes, we charge tuition for the general regular students.

**RS**  But obviously not too much as to discourage parents from applying. Do you use a lottery system?

We advertise; parents apply. Our school psychologist screens because we are not taking in anyone who needs services as general education students and then we do a lottery.

**RS**  What do you believe about the statement, “All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others.”

And the question is what do I believe about that? Unless disruptive to themselves or others? I would probably change the wording. Yes, providing it is a successful experience for them. And then, what defines successful depends on the child, and the community and everything else.

**RS**  The next question is, “Should all preschool teachers be trained to teach students with disabilities?”

Yes –Yes.

**RS**  And do you see any particular challenges to this?

Yes, of course. Preschool teachers, by in large, they come to their training in sometimes alternative ways. Certainly private preschools don’t require certification so it’s very complicated.

**RS**  And do you have relationships with private preschools or do you find yourself mainly using your own.

We pretty much use our own. We have a number of children that we provide consultation services to. These are our kids in preschool where they might be our kids we evaluated and didn’t classify. We do that as a bridge for children who didn’t qualify, monitoring their progress or as a bridge while we evaluate. For instance, a high functioning Aspergers child who’s having some social difficulties, but doesn’t need related services. We had our school psychologist go there every 6 weeks and that made a nice bridge for that child to come here to kindergarten. We just did that for that child last year. I’m not saying we do that for every child, but for that child it was appropriate and that’s an example. You know kids with attention problems – it’s part of an outreach program, because how do you show people who don’t know what to do, when they don’t know what to do? When the kids don’t really need services.
RS That’s good. Would you like to work in a “full inclusion” district? Why or why not?

2 I am to understand fully, if that district had financial resources and fully on-board from board of education down to make that happen? I think that has to be a very special set of circumstances for that to work and not be lip service. At the end of the day, you have to have environments where that child can make progress. You could have six one-on-one aides and if in the end, a child can’t participate in academics or be socially successful. I think that kids fit in less often than the government thinks they would. That can have negative impact. I’m thinking of a child we had with downs syndrome who we had here for preschool and kindergarten; once we got beyond that, it was not the right environment and he was very frustrated. You could individualize for him every minute of day, but that still didn’t mean that he was able and a part and successfully learning. I know there are kids who can. Videos can be made about the success for them, but that doesn’t mean that it works for everybody.

RS So most of your parents would prefer your integrated setting, even those with more involved disabilities?

2 I think that, with the exception of parents with autism, parents want children in integrated settings. I think with the population of parents of student with autism, it has to be on a case-to-case basis. Everybody feels very passionately about what they believe and they all believe something different is best for their child. It can be just as easy to have a parent go to court to be mainstreamed, as you would have a parent of the same age with the same degree of disability that would be willing to go to court to fight for out-of-district placement.

RS Right, and possibly do.

2 Yes, that’s true. However, generally, we have a wonderful track record. I’ve been here for thirty-three years and we’re not going often. We’ve been to court once, and mediation once. We work out problems at the table, but it doesn’t mean that there’s rhyme or reason to how it works out in the end. The courts will overwhelmingly make decisions in the parent’s favor. That’s what the data shows. You have to work it out – that’s the bottom line. It’s different for every child.

RS And this is the flip side of it. What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated? Is there a criteria employed in your district?

2 Well it’s the same flip side – it depends on where they going to be successful – with the exception of when parents demands an out of district setting, we always try it here first, with as much support as possible. And if it isn’t being successful, we tweak it and if it’s still isn’t successful, we start thinking, is there another setting where the child is still successful? Sometimes the answer is yes and
sometimes the answer is no. I don’t think so; you can’t always find a separate school that will always meet the child’s needs either.

RS And you’re in Bergen County and you actually have a lot of specialized placements.

2 Not really, it depends on the child’s disability.

RS Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

2 Well -- it’s the same -- it sounds almost like a repeat of an earlier question. I do believe they should, because every child should have the opportunity to be educated in their home school. I believe they shouldn’t, because there are some circumstances for preschoolers, that they would not be safe medically or we can’t provide the resources to serve them properly, especially for low incidence disabilities. But yes, I do believe that typical preschool handicapped child should be educated in a local public school -- I really do believe that's their home school.

RS Is “restrictive” in least restrictive environment synonymous with “segregated”?

2 No. Sometimes the general education setting is the most restrictive environment for a child, and the more segregated setting whether it’s a self-contained classroom or a specialized school is the least restrictive for the child environment because they can flourish in a more engineered environment.

RS Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities? Will this lead to a more inclusive society?

2 I think that there is great merit in notion of normally achieving models for kids, with the most important things that happen at preschool, being language and play. If you are with all other disabled students, particularly with the high incidence of kids with language delays, typical language and behavior is not modeled for you, so there is fewer opportunities for you develop those skills.

RS Any difference that you see with the families- do they develop a better attitude toward students with disabilities?

2 That depends on how it’s handled by the district. We treat our classes the same. We run parent support groups for both -- it’s the same teacher. The difference is that there are fewer children in the preschool disabled class, and more children in the general education class. But we have even had a child participate in both classes. Now, it’s kind of a different flavor to it.
I was thinking that parents who have been exposed by having their children in school with disabilities at a younger age may be more accepting when their children attend classes with student with special needs in the later grades.

No it's interesting. The parents who want children as general ed. students in our integrated setting are very often people who have siblings. The adults have siblings severely disabled and want their child to develop this understanding. In some ways, you are teaching to the choir. These are people who already believe people should have a more open attitude. And these are people who want their children in the program. Also, they are normally achieving siblings of children who have been through the program, and they appreciate the quality of the program. The teacher is just wonderful. We only have six children each year, so we're not dealing with a large group of 56 or more. So our district may not be representative — it's quite the microcosm. You wouldn't leave it because it's a great laboratory but I can't say that it's typical for the world. I've been here 33 years and it's a great district.

Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education?

No, absolutely not. In our district, the goals are the same and materials are the same. No.

How is the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms progressing, in your opinion, in your district and in the field, from your contact at directors meetings, workshops, etc.?

Well, the mandate is clear, here. Children come to school here unless we know that it isn't working. So, movement toward that mandate, I think we passed that critical mass mark. I think that we've reached the point that people understand that if you live in the town, you come to school here. In the world, that also depends. And I think the big step is — if you are a district - Once you open your own programs, it all shifts. You see what's possible. But until or unless you've done that, you're still in a different place. We spent a lot of years without having the rooms too. But you need a superintendent and board of education that says that this is a priority and this needs to happen. And it's better to do it this way, then if someone takes a district to court because it doesn't happen.

Right. Do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?

Yes and we do have two coming down the pike. We have 2 children coming in, with significant impairments. One child, we are ready for and we think it will work out fine. Another is very medically fragile, and if he's touched the wrong way, his bones will go out of joint. We haven't quite figured out — we haven't
started evaluating him yet. He’s very fragile. The dilemma is how do you keep that child safe and learning, yet he needs to have an education? We haven’t had a lot of experience with such problems at a preschool level. The parents are still on the fence and they haven’t sent in their request yet to evaluate. This child has spent most of his time in a body cast; we’ll see what happens.

RS  I’d like the update. Do you see major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms? I think we’ve touched on some of them.

2  Community attitudes, teacher attitudes, space, financial resources, staffing. Nothing really to do with the kids. I mean everything to do with the kids, but nothing stemming with the children.

RS  I see. Do you have any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool student with disabilities, which you would like to share?

2  No. I think that we covered a lot of bases there.

RS  In that case I thank you for participating.

Interview 3

Rural: Sussex County
Date: 12/3/07
Time: 6:00-6:35

RS  Tell me a little about your district size and location

3  It’s a K – 8 district, middle class, rural- suburban district. You know, very nice kids, a nice district.

RS  How would you characterize your district with regard to inclusion of students with disabilities?

3  Very supportive—open to the idea; very supportive administrators and teachers.”

RS  And would the same be true for preschoolers?

3  Generally, yes, it would be.

RS  Would you consider yourself urban, suburban or rural?

3  Yes, I’d say suburban, rural—yes more rural.

RS  “How does your type of district impact on your special education program—specifically for preschool students w/disabilities?
Generally, we have a preschool class within the district. It's a little difficult to have kids in a regular preschool program. We've talked about putting something in our district, but we don't have room. We just added on to our building, but it's pretty well filled. So that makes it pretty difficult. There aren't many places to put preschoolers into. Most of the regular preschool programs are already filled. You really have to have a spot. You can't just show up with a kid, so that makes it a little difficult.

RS  So do you have a general education preschool?

3  Not really, we have a self-contained special education preschool program and we do include the children in some of the activities with the kindergarten. They go in for activities with the kindergarten, in music and one other thing and as the kids are exited than they do spend a little more time in the regular kindergarten program, but that's about the extent of it.

RS  And do you find that is helpful in transitioning children to a regular kindergarten?

3  Yes, that has been very helpful.

RS  All right. Many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice. Why would they hold this view? How does this coincide or differ from your view? Define your own view.

3  Well I think they hold that view your talking about preschoolers, right? Because most of the preschoolers will probably be at least at some time within regular program in a regular school, so you want them to have that experience as much as you can before they go right into it. You'd like to give them a better transition into a general education program. Obviously, the regular things such as good role models and language models and speech models are important.

RS  So that would coincide with how you feel?

3  Yes, it does.

RS  What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students?

3  At times we've had a preschool student in a regular program where we've integrated them; The classes have been rather large; it didn't work real well. A lot of the preschools near us have classes of 20-25 children and it didn't work well.

RS  And that would be in private programs?
Yes, several times we’ve tried to integrate a few children in private local preschools, but it wasn’t wildly successful. The classes are large and it’s out of the district so you really don’t have control.

**RS** Is funding present a particular problem?

Funding would be to a degree, as you would have to pay their tuition in addition to having your own class. You know it would be an additional tuition. It hasn’t been a big, giant concern, but it has impact to a certain degree.

**RS** How many preschoolers do you have?

Let’s see – at this point, I think we have around 14 or 15 students.

**RS** And they are primarily in self-contained?

Yes. At this point, they all are.

**RS** Have you had any particular requests or issues from parents in that regard?”

Not really, no.

**RS** What specific concerns do you have regarding the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities? Have we gone over that to your satisfaction?”

I believe we have.

**RS** What do you believe about the statement, “All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others.”

I generally agree with that. If possibly, sometimes there are times when you can give them a lot more attention in a separate program. I think whenever you can integrate time into general education that has good value also.

**RS** Should all preschool teachers be trained to teach students with disabilities?

Yes, working in a public school or in a private school. I’d say that would have validity; I’d say, sure.

**RS** And if you had the option, would you like to work in a “full inclusion” district? If so, why or why not?

I would be neutral – I wouldn’t particularly seek it out, or not seek it out. That would be fine if that were where I was there. So I’d say, I’m neutral”
RS  How many years have you been in education?

3  "38"

RS  What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated? Is there a criteria employed in your district?

3  We haven’t needed to do that – I would think that would be a rare instance.

RS  So then it would probably be students with unique or extreme disabilities?

3  Yes.

RS  Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

3  Well, that’s where they live and where they are going to be integrated. If they are going to be doing activities, then that’s where they’ll be doing it. It’s where their family lives and of course, there are lots of advantages in your neighborhood.

RS  Do you believe that “restrictive” in least restrictive environment is synonymous with “segregated”?

3  Yes – I guess I do.

RS  Any other reaction or response to that?

3  No

RS  Ok. Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities? Will this lead to a more inclusive society?

3  Yes. I think that’s why there is a push from federal government on down to include students with disabilities in general education. Yes, it would.”

RS  And do you think that changes attitudes of other children or parents who do not have disabled students to be a little more accepting?

3  Yes, definitely. We have a student on a respirator in our general ed. class. He didn’t actually come as a preschooler. He was in a specialized out of district program and it was pretty much of a disaster. We brought him back and it’s been good. In fact, it’s been working beautifully. The other students have a real eye opening students by having a student like that with him. It’s a way better situation having him in district rather than out of district.”
RS Is he alert to his environment?

3 Yes. It’s a muscular disability, not a cognitive disability. It’s a very severe impairment, but he’s cognitively fine. Yes, it’s been quite an experience for everyone.

RS So you had to involved nurses...

3 Yes, we had to involve the nurses – a nurse and the aide who goes with him. Actually everyone’s been very good about it. The kids are just so used to having him there with them. He is just a part of the whole group.

RS And do you think that there’s any type of disability that is more challenging to integrate.

3 I’d say, a disruptive or emotionally disturbed student is harder to integrate than the student on the respirator.”

RS And do you feel that preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education?

3 No, I don’t think that’s true.”

RS Anything about the reverse – do you feel that the reverse is true – that the student are getting a better education in the segregated setting?”

3 Sometimes it is better

RS Yes, we had the experience of a parent of a child with cognitive disabilities being the first parent to object to a segregated setting, even though their child was had the most severe disabilities, so its kind of interesting.

3 Yes you see all different opinions on that. Sometimes I’ve seen it work out so much better when the child was in a special education class that you hadn’t had in because you didn’t think that’s what they needed. It just depends. It’s always a unique situation with every kid.

RS That’s why it is special ed- truly. Yes, how do you feel that the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms is progressing in your opinion?

3 I think that the progress is pretty slow. I think that it’s hard to do, especially in Sussex County. I only know one or two districts with general education preschools. I think it’s space that’s a problem; we have a lot of people moving in.

RS So you think its space rather than other things?
Yes I think so. I don’t think its attitudes – its space and how to organize it.

RS Do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?"

No, I think that it is going to be a slow process.

RS I think we’ve talked about this, but what do you see major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms? Space is obviously one, which you have mentioned.

Yes, and just reorganizing the programs you already have to do this. I know, we’ve looked at it and I guess a lot of places have, but it never gets off the ground.

RS Is you preschool disabled teacher dually certified as a special education and, regular education teacher?

I’m not sure about her certification; I think that she is. I think that most of them are, but I’m not sure.

RS And do you have any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool student with disabilities, which you would like to share - either in this district, or any place else?

No I don’t think so. I think that our preschool classes are very nice and just about all of them come out very well and go into a regular kindergarten. Rarely have we had students come and who didn’t at least start in a regular kindergarten – that would be pretty rare.

RS So they would start in the preschool disabled program, then as they spend some time in the general education kindergarten and then transition to the general education kindergarten when they reach school age.

Yes, we do – just about all of them. It’s very rare, but this year we did have one student who did not go into a regular kindergarten.

RS And do you have self-contained classes for older students?

Yes, we do – we have a variety but we’d at least like to see them start in a regular kindergarten.

RS And do you have any student in private preschools?

No, we don’t.

RS So thank you for participating.
Interview 4

Suburban: Gloucester County

Date: 12/4/07
Time 11:00 AM

RS Can you tell me a little about your district?

4 Sure – I am actually the director of 4 districts and they formed a consortium for Child Study Team Services.

RS I hit the jackpot with this interview.

Yes, you have four districts and they are different – four definitely different economic levels. District A is the smallest and definitely the most affluent. They have 200 students in their school. District B is a little bit down in terms of affluence – it is a little bit bigger with approximately 300 pupils and a K-6 district. District C is larger, also and has more socio-economically disadvantaged students and higher free and reduced lunch and they have about 300 kids. And district D has the most, free and reduced – almost 400 students. So that is four different districts, which send to a regional junior and senior high school.

RS The same regional school? Ok so I'm really getting good information about several districts in one interview. I appreciate your taking your personal time to speak with me.

4 Exactly.

RS Do any of the district receive Early Childhood Program Aid?

4 Yes, one of the districts receives public funds.

RS Would you characterize the districts as urban, suburban or rural?

4 No, these are suburban, all four of them.

RS Ok, and in South Jersey?

4 Yes.

RS How would you characterize your districts with regard to inclusion of students with disabilities?
I think they are very open. I guess I think that there’s a continuum. One of the districts is most open, another is least open so they do things less willingly, but they do it anyway. Everyone else is really pretty good.

RS So do they have the full continuum of services, from general education to self-contained?

No, only one of the districts has self-contained; everyone else has general education with resource center. But our kids, if one of the other towns needs a self-contained program, they’d go to the one school. They do pay tuition. The state kind of looks at it as out-of-district in that situation, but it really isn’t because it’s within the group.

RS So it’s basically one school sponsoring a more specialized program within the group, and then they feed into one regional school for middle and high school?

That’s right and then they end up in the same place.

RS Many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice. How does this coincide or differ from your view? Define your own view?

For everybody or are we talking preschool?

RS Well we are starting with everybody and then we are working toward preschool.

It does hold with my own view; depending on the subject and needs of the student. It is certainly really important for kids to be with their typical peers. Kids learn a lot from each other and so we need to make sure it’s a positive learning experience and not an experience that will be detrimental to the child.

RS And do you have an inclusive preschool setting in any one or in all of your programs?

Well, tell me what your definition of an inclusive preschool program is and then I’ll tell you if we have one.

RS Preschool where general education and children with special needs would be learning together.

Yes. We certainly do.

RS And is that a public program or a private program or a combination?
Public.

RS And is that in one or all of the districts?

It is in the two districts that have public preschool. Only those two districts have preschool programs.

RS And those are the district’s that receive early childhood funds?

I’m not sure whether one of the districts receives funds anymore. I know they used to; I know one of the districts does.

RS And would you feel the same way for the preschool as for school aged children? That it’s good for them to be good for them to be placed together or do see segregated settings as more beneficial?

It’s based on the child’s individual needs. We are fortunate that we have a segregated setting as well as an inclusion setting in one of our schools. So kids can move around and it’s pretty fluid. I will say that we don’t have an inclusion for three years old; we do have one for four year olds. Typically, what happens and has been successful is that for three year olds, they will go into a segregated setting for three year olds. It’s a special education class and then, depending on how quickly, they make gains, they then move into the four-year-old program. So it’s a little bit of everything.

RS It sounds complicated – balancing your time between four districts.

They are pretty near each other, but actually it’s a ten-mile distance from my home, which is not in the district. The furthest is five miles, but I can easily do thirty miles in a day.

RS What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students?

I think that the most important thing is to meet the needs of the special education kids in inclusion settings. To make sure they are able to get what they need; the regular teacher needs to be trained because they need to have knowledge of specific disabilities and this is really important. I think that related services are critical to the development and success of the students. Speech or anything that is needed for them to improve must be provided. I think that integrated services, no this is a generalization, but for the most part, children do better when the related services is integrated into the classroom. As long as you can keep doing that, I think that’s a big factor in a child’s development and success.
What do you believe about the statement, "All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others."

Well, I can’t go along with anything that says all. So, I’d have to disagree.

That’s fair. How would you modify that statement?

I would say most students, but there are students who have significant learning disabilities, such as a child with significant reading disabilities. I think that their needs are better met with replacement reading literacy – that’s the type of child with a pullout-reading program with us.

So let me rephrase that to be sure that I’ve got it – if you can really do something that’s special or really different in special education, then it may be better to pull them out.

Absolutely.

If they can benefit from the instruction in the general education?

Then that’s where they belong.

And you started to say something about a pace?

The specialness could be the pace, the intensity where it’s a little more difficult to provide in the general education classroom.

Should all preschool teachers be trained to teach students with disabilities?

Sure – absolutely!

So your teachers that teach in an integrated setting – how do you work staffing?

It’s a regular ed. teacher and the children are support with classroom aides. Then the teacher has been trained in “verbal behaviors” because the children in there are autistic.

But you don’t need a special education teacher going into the classroom?

No, we don’t.

And what’s the number of students in the classroom?
In that class, fifteen regular education students and just two special education students.

RS And how many aides?

Three.

RS And you said that the kids are autistic in that setting

Yes.

RS And if you had the opportunity to work in a “full inclusion” district? If so, why or why not?

No! Laughter – Now, you’ll know how old I am, when I say that. I’d like to be able to meet the needs of every single kid. If you have a district that is full inclusion district, then may not be giving a full continuum of options for every child.

RS Okay, that’s fair. And about how many children are there overall in the four districts?

Special education–wise, there are about 130 special education kids among the four districts.

RS Are those all elementary?

Yes we are pre-k, to 6.

RS What would be the percentage that would be in full general ed – like all general ed?

Full general education?

RS Well, let’s say more than 80%, the level set by the federal and state government as a criteria?

Let me think; I’d say we have maybe 15%.

RS What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated? Is there a criteria employed in your districts?

We do have a couple of preschool students that go out of district. For preschool students, it is the nature of severity of disability with regard to behavior as well as language development.
Are they in private or public settings?

We have a regional, publicly funded, special services school district. It has a brand new building for autistic kids. So it’s mainly autistic kids. We have two students who currently attend the special services school district.

And do these placements tend to be driven by child study team recommendations or parent requests?

It is usually a combination.

Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

Well again, it’s the word “always” because I believe that you are missing kids if you say always.

So if you modified the statement?

I’d say, most.

Is “restrictive” in least restrictive environment synonymous with “segregated”?

Yes – absolutely! Laugh - Is it supposed to be? I don’t know, but it is.

Anything else that you’d add to that or modify?

No, not really.

Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and will this lead to a more inclusive society?

It probably will lead to a more inclusive society, if only because the more exposure people have toward all types of people, the better off we all are. I think that the research supports it.

Have you had any experiences where it’s worked really well, or conversely, where it’s been a disaster?

I think it works - I like the way we do it – it works extremely well. I have had tremendous success, but I pick my kids. I don’t want to put a child in a situation where it’s not going to be a success. It’s hard on everybody.

Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education?
No — it think that varies, dependent on the level of your expectations for your
staff, whether they are regular ed. or special ed. I know a number of bad general
education and some amazing special education teachers.

I could say the same.

I mean really — right. You can have a bad teacher anywhere you go, and then of
course the reverse is also true.

So does that depend on the training or what the teacher brings to the table.

No I don’t think so — more depends on the teacher. Absolutely.

How is the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general
education classrooms progressing?

You know, we’re in South Jersey and it takes a long time for thinking to come
down the New Jersey Turnpike. Laugh. So I have not gotten... years ago, we were
told that we had to make sure that we paid for students who go to regular
education preschools, so we did that. That was probably ten years ago. After that,
I didn’t know there was a big movement, am I missing something? (Laughter)

No, but the way the federal government is now gathering statistics you saw
the change in the December 1 Count — they are now using the same criteria
as they had been using for school aged students. This is the first year when
the criterion is 80%. Till now you could say, special — general education early
childhood. So if kids had some type of inclusion experience you could call
them pt general ed/special ed. Now they will use that 80% criterion. That’s
based on the new IDEA pushed down to state code. The feeling is that for
preschool students with disabilities, like any student, the first choice should
be general ed. How is it being implemented?

For me, the really big issue is the quality for the 3-year classroom. Whereas, I
have a regular ed. principal with control of their regular ed classes whereas, if you
do not have a three or four year old program in your school, then you are at the
mercy of the private preschools in your community. Which really can be not very
good, or they are religious based. So there are a few more parameters with
preschool. So your hands are a little more constricted, if not restricted when it
comes to those decisions for the little kids as opposed to school aged children.

Because preschool is the one age you are not required to have. That is part of
the impetus for this research. The requirement of the preschool is generated
by special education rather than special education requirements. That’s why
I was looking at the attitudes of special education directors as crucial to the
development of inclusive programs. The direction is not going to come first
from administrators or principals. From directors, I'm not necessarily finding correspondence with funding or other factors.

4 That's right. The truth is that when it comes down to numbers of kids, segregated settings serve more kids than inclusionary programs. And so when you are walking a very fine line of having just enough kids, but not so many that then I have to go someplace else, then it's tricky.

RS That's certainly true because in setting up an integrated setting, we could serve half the number of special education kids in the program by opening it up to typically developing peers.

4 Exactly, and then what happens to those kids?

RS That leads me to my next question – what are the major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?

4 Yes, it's space and because we are limited with small resources and you get more bang for buck. I have 16 spaces for my 2 half day, restrictive programs in 3 of my four districts. That gives an ability to serve more kids.

RS In general, is space an issue?

4 Yeah.

RS And the other issue would be funding? Are you finding administrative and/or teacher support? Is that an obstacle?

4 No, that's not an obstacle.

RS How does parent attitudes fit in the mix?

4 Parents really like the restricted setting. It's safe – they love the teacher. We have a wonderful reputation in our communities – so they want that program. But all of our classes have an excellent reputation, so I guess that wouldn't be a problem, I wouldn't worry about that. However, they want that program. If a child is not eligible, and you know, not all are eligible not all meet that criteria, then parents are sometimes rather annoyed. This is funny, because what are you going to do. You say, aren't you happy we didn't find a significant enough problem?

RS I think that you answered this already, but I'm just going to ask it for consistency – you can let me know if it's already been sufficiently discussed. Do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?
No, not in the near future. I think that the way we do it is a balance that is appropriate.

Any additional input regarding inclusion of preschool students which you’d like to share?

No, I don’t think so.

Then I thank you for taking this time to speak with me!

Interview 5

Rural: Monmouth County
Date: 12/6/07
Time: 4:00-4:50

Could we start with your telling me a little bit about your district, the area in which your district is located and the type of services, which you provide.

Certainly, our district is a thirty-seven mile square community in Western Monmouth County. We have at the present time, three schools in district. We have a primary school, which is grades preschool to two, an elementary school that is grades, three, four and five, and brand new, newly constructed middle school, which houses grades six, seven and eight.”

So, that’s got to be exciting.

Oh yes, it’s a great time, a very great time to be here. The district—I’ve been in the district for eleven years and this is my second year as superintendent. We are an “I” district; our “dfg” designation is “I.” We have had a rapid growth in the community; this was farmland and horse country. Let me give you an example. In 1989, there were approx 470 students in the district; today we have approximately 1740.”

Wow!

So over a period of twenty years, we’ve really shown significant growth. Most of the growth took place during the mid-nineties and until approximately 2002. We have stabilized since then. We have 295 students classified in district, that the total students classified. At the present time, we have 15 preschool disabled students. We provide in each of three buildings, we do a self-contained; we have a preschool program which is self-contained right now and then in each of the three building we also have an LLD self contained class, the rest of our students are totally integrated, with some of them receiving pull-out resource services.
And you are Superintendent and also Director of Special Services?

Yes, and the Director of Special Services. We are a small district. I have a supervisor of special services, and I would have had him do this interview, but he is an interim and doesn't have the history of the district. When I came here eleven years ago, as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, I served as the Director, also. I had a dual role. As we hired Supervisors and added a supervisor of special services, I stayed on as Director because of my interest and background. Do you want me to concentrate on our preschool class - is that how you want to do that?

Yes, you can give me general information and then I have a series of questions to ask.

Well, our preschool class, normally, when I first came to the district eleven years ago, we didn't have that many children and then we did take in other children in from out of district. Within three years of my being here, our preschool program had grown so through our outreach efforts so that we could no longer take out-of district students. The model that we have right now, although it will change for next year, is strictly self-contained program. We take three year olds in morning session and four year olds in the afternoon session. We have a teacher of the handicapped teaching the class; we also have a full time speech language therapist as a co-teacher in that class. The speech/language therapist has a teaching degree also. We also, because of the number of students we have, have two aides in each class. So the same staff services the morning and afternoon sessions of preschool.

And you mentioned that you have a total of fifteen students.

Yes. The children are transported on mini vans; we do a door-to-door transportation for the children. We also work closely with our early intervention program. We are in the process right now, because now we have the room, when we opened the new middle school on September 2nd of this year, we did a reconfiguration of the schools. So last year, at the primary school, I had close to 800 students in that building. This year I have 450. So because I have the room now, next year we are going to be going to an integrated preschool model. We are going to have one third of the students as children classified as preschool disabled; the other two-thirds, will be typically developing.

Very nice. And so all your preschool classes will at that point be integrated?

Yes, we are just in process of working with a representative from the state is working with my interim supervisor and my principal over there. We are just in the process of planning stages for that, but we do have the classrooms and everything ready for that.

That's great. And do have established any relationships with private preschools?
Yes, we have a Kindercare in district and a privately owned preschool in the district. We at times send students there, but not all the students go, though.

RS And will you be charging tuition once you set up an integrated preschool?

For the typically developing, yes.

RS How would you characterize your district with regard to inclusion of students with disabilities?

Extremely positive, in fact, the ARC (Association for Retarded Citizens) of New Jersey recognized last year, two of our teachers and a paraprofessional as the teacher of the year. That was a very nice honor. The district didn’t receive the award, but the regular education teacher, the special education teacher and the instructional aide or paraprofessional. They had been nominated by the mother of a Down’s Syndrome child, because we had four children in a class, the child was totally included; it was total inclusion for them. They had been nominated for that

RS And how old is that child?

Now? Well at the time they had been nominated the child was in 2nd grade. Now he is now in fourth grade. They were nominated last year for services delivered the year before and the award was granted last year. The child is now in fourth grade and he is still in a full-inclusion classroom.

RS Well that is a lot to be proud of. Would you consider yourself urban, suburban or rural district?

Well, there are no – if you want to go as you and I would talk, we would say rural. But I know that in New Jersey, I’ve written enough federal grants to know that officially, there are no rural school districts in NJ. So I guess that officially, you would consider us a suburban district, but we are not. You and I would consider it rural. It’s a very affluent community. The homes are built on a minimum of three acres. Most of the homes have some kind or a lot of the homes have facilities attached for horses. It is kind of a “horsey” community. Of the thirty-seven square miles, I believe there’s quite a bit of town that is preserved for wetlands, so I would consider it rural.”

RS Many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice. Why would they hold this view and how does this coincide or differ from your view?

I totally agree with that. I believe so strongly in modeling behavior and in challenging students to perform. I believe that inclusion does that.
And obviously at all grade levels. We had a similar growth in my district—though we capped the class at a smaller number, so that at the end of the year, the ratio sometimes was closer to one half, than one third.

Well the state said one third, so I'd like to stick to that if I could.

So you plan to start off with a set number of non-disabled students and add the preschool students, which you can get at any point.

We'll start with a set number of typically developing and add preschool students with disabilities. And you're right, as you know, particularly with our three year old class, we usually start off with three students in the beginning of the year, and then by December we typically have seven and then it just keeps growing as the year goes on.

So will you be able to keep to the two classes.

Oh no, we'll have to be adding additional classes. We'll start, depending on the numbers for next year and I don't know them right now. Depending on the numbers where we start with, we'll have to leave room for the class to grow from there. We'll have to divide the children up. If we have the fifteen students right now in preschool; I believe that seven, no six of those are in the morning session and the remaining nine are in the afternoon, in the four-year-old session. So I know that we will start with at least two classes, and I assume that we are going to end up with three or four.

So your staffing for the district will change significantly as a result of this program development.

No, I was told by the state that our staffing would have to be by a regular education teacher.

Yes, they have to be regular education or dual certified.

Yes, so we'll try to go for dual certification for the teachers in there. And we'll try to leave the speech/language specialist designated for preschool. I won't take her away from the program, but obviously, her role will change. So, when it's appropriate. There have been circumstances, either because of behavior or for the safety of the other children in the class or if the child's learning or cognitive level has been so low that we have not been able to include them.

What specific concerns have you had, now that you are in the process of establishing an inclusive preschool program?

The main concern that I have right now is that we have such a strong preschool program. I would say that of the students that come from the four-year-old
program and go to kindergarten, three-quarters of them are immediately mainstreamed into our kindergarten program. Some of them are declassified. We do not have a large number of students who have to go from our preschool program into a self-contained classroom. They get a lot of attention; they get a lot of language development. We have a lot of autistic children in our classes. They get that really intensive language development with the speech/language specialist. The whole program is based on language development. My biggest fear is that we’re going to lose them because that’s not going to be the nature of a full-inclusion program for them.

RS  And numbers wise, will you be changing staffing and student: teacher ratio?

5  The state ratio...the state representatives, when I’ve spoken with them, indicated that between fifteen and eighteen with the typical preschoolers being the typical number, along with five or six students being classified. So it would be a third.”

RS  So you’re going to a bigger classroom, even though all the students do not have special needs. What do you believe about the statement, “All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others?”

5  If you had asked me that two months ago, I would have totally agreed with that. Now that I’m getting into that, and looking closely at this, I don’t think it’s going to be as successful as I thought it was going to be.”

RS  Really, and why not?

5  Because I’m looking at the services which we are providing for the children now, and I’m beginning to realize the number of services that we are not going to be able to provide.

RS  Like the speech therapist that’s in the classroom full time?

5  Yes, the speech therapist is a good example. We have an occupational therapist and physical therapists that are in there on a daily basis; we have – the children go to individual stations and get individualized attention for the three hours that they are here. But they currently get a lot of services, they really do. What I am really realizing now is that as we put them into these programs, they are not going to have the same level of individualized attention. Of course they will have the modeling, which I totally believe in.

So let me tell you what my ideal would be – my ideal would be that our children would be able to stay, could stay in preschool program as we have in the morning and then in afternoon, they would be able to be integrated into a preschool program, into a typically developing program. There I think that they would have the best of both worlds – they would have the modeling of the behavior and they
would still get the one on one education and treatment that they have been receiving.

RS  But then they would actually be getting a full day, some of them...

5  Yes, then they would be getting a full day, and many of them are not ready for that. And that’s what I’m also struggling with right now...

RS  Well you bring up some interesting experiences because you are on the cusp here and I am the beneficiary of that – I really appreciate your sharing your thoughts. Do you believe that all preschool teachers should be trained to teach preschool students with disabilities?

5  Yes, I think all teachers should be trained to teach students with disabilities

RS  So when you are looking at hiring now....

5  When we hire now, we look at hiring teachers who are dual certified. In our area, most of our teachers come from Georgian Court and Monmouth University, those are our two area schools and they only have dual certification programs, right now. They’ve moved to that so we do look for that.

RS  Would you like to work in a “full inclusion” district? Why or why not?

5  Absolutely! I don’t think I’d ever go to a district that didn’t believe in inclusion. My reasoning being that I certainly know what can happen with children who are classified handicapped in some way and how they benefit so totally from having the experience of dealing with their peers and being challenged to perform. I’ve seen it happen over and over again, how they come up to that challenge and sometimes even far exceeded our expectations sometimes.”

RS  And do you see lasting relationships that develop among the students?

5  Absolutely! We have a nine-year-old autistic child here and he is just adorable but he is not real communicative yet. He does have speech and does have language but he doesn’t – when you’re hallways or you’re going someplace and he’s in the hallways. kids say hi, - they recognize him and he responds to them, even though he not still in the same class. The children from last year still are his friends, and still respond to him and that really has broadened his socialization. And he really responds, he smiles and makes eye contact. That’s just an example of how positive it can be.

RS  And your parents have been positive as well? In my last district, one of the parents of a disabled child was our best advocate.
Yes, our parents have been – yes we also have a parent who is just fantastic. She is just wonderful. But I have had some problems with some regular education parents, parents of typically developing children. If they have some really strong objections, and it is going to be a negative experience, we’ve made sure that we’ve noted that for the next year, because we are big enough. I have eight sections at each grade level. Then we often will put their children in a class, where they are still in an inclusion classroom, but that really don’t know it, because the children are learning or language disabled or mildly disabled.

RS What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities to be educated out of district and is there criteria employed in your district?

Yes. We do have three preschool children right now, not in that count I gave you who are placed in another setting. They are severely autistic and we cannot handle their behaviors. Basically we invite all the children to come in and spend some time in our classroom before we place them. We have taken autistic children in our classroom, children without speech and children who didn’t walk. We have done all that. But when their behavior is such that, as you said before, a potential harm to themselves or others, we sometimes have to place them out.

RS And are they in public or private settings?

They are in private settings

RS And parents are in agreement with that?

Yes

RS And have you found that parents have come to you with specific ideas about whether their child should be in public or private settings.

No we haven’t found that.

RS Well that’s a good thing. Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

Well, they are part of the community. Children with handicaps are part of the community. We are not a transient community. They are going to grow up; they are going to be their classmates for the years that we educate them and they should get to know their classmates and their educational community, which they are going to be part of. The community is very kind and loving and caring, by the way. We are a community school. We are here and this is their school. If I have to send them someplace else because they are so severely handicapped, our goal in the back of our mind is always to bring them back to district at some point.”
RS Is ‘restrictive’ in least restrictive environment synonymous with ‘segregated’? I’ve gotten a lot of opinions on that.

5 “Laugh” No, I think because I look at least restrictive environment, which is a term, we throw around a lot, but it has to be used individually, for each child. So what might be restrictive for me might be least restrictive for you. Not what the parents say or what the teachers say, but what is right for the child – how the child is going to react. Therefore I feel very strongly that when we use the term least restrictive environment, for the child, we need to be sure we are talking about the child when we make the determination and not what’s least restrictive for the parents or the child study team.

RS That’s an excellent analysis. And what is your background? Obviously you are a superintendent and have administrative certifications. Were you a general education teacher or special education teacher initially?

5 No I have a very varied background. My first career was as registered nurse. I spent nine years working as a surgical intensive care nurse and I burnt out with babies dying in my arms, so to speak. I decided to get into school nursing when I had children. I became a school nurse and absolutely hated it. I was bored out of my mind. But the school that I was in, which was a middle school, required that nurses teach and I fell in love with education. So I went back to school and got a degree in elementary education with a certificate in science and I worked my way into teaching science. And then from there, with a little ADHD going, and moved on, got involved with counseling, got involved with substance abuse counseling. I was one of first of state to receive certification as a substance awareness coordinator. Once you start writing grants and bring money into the district, they suck you in to central office. I’m only teasing, but it is the truth though. I got pulled into central office to continue to write grants and to work on curriculum. The rest is history. I just started doing that and developing and working on programs and kind of found that even though I was away from the children, which I missed, I was really having issues with that but I found that I was able to work with teachers and a lot staff development and promote some of my values and beliefs, especially about special education. And so it went from there.

RS And thanks for sharing your interesting background. Is it all right if I include this in the transcription?

5 Oh, of course. Everybody knows – you know, I don’t know what I want to do when I grow up.

RS Well my experience is somewhat similar because I’m a social worker by background, with many years on a child study team and certainly was the only social worker in my school administration program at the university.
Sure, that’s very similar. We laugh because my husband says are you going to be retired? And then what are you going to be doing. I think that there’s a huge connection between social service careers and teaching. There really is – we bring a different understanding. And I always tell people that the years that I spent as an active nurse, and I stayed active in nursing. I eventually began taking care of children who were quadriplegics or hospice care for children who were dying. I kept doing that even through the years that I was teaching during the summers, it was a money issue, it helped put them through school.

RS Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and will this lead to a more inclusive society?

I don’t know why there’s a push for inclusion. I mean I don’t know the thinking behind it. I can rationalize in my own mind that the reason that this was created was to not to segregate or label a child early on. We also know from the research that the preschool years are so essential to learning and I think that probably the thought is to provide education as possible in the early years, and you’ll be dealing with less problems later on. But that’s the little struggle that I’m having right now. I believe in preschool programs, but as I said they do sometimes need some individual attention.

RS Do you believe that will this lead to a more inclusive society?

I#5 In a small way.

RS Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education?

I#5 In this district, they do not. We have been very clear that any child in a self-contained class is taught the same curriculum as everybody else, they are just taught it a little bit differently. We don’t have a typically developing preschool program. But I know that our preschool program is equal to what other private preschool programs are offering, because we’ve done the research on that, so they are comparable. They are receiving exposure to the same education.

RS And will your program be open to all preschool students in your district or will you have a lottery?

I No, it will be open to all preschool students – that will be the program.

RS So how is the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms progressing? Both in your district as well as through your exposure at statewide meetings?

I Most of the districts in Monmouth County do have integrated preschool programs already. Our county offices have been pretty blatant in telling us that that is the
expectation. That's the directive out of the state department and so most of them do have integrated program. Basically, when the district had our monitoring, we were giving a little reprieve, because at that time, we didn't have the room. But we know that it is a requirement that the children be exposed to typically developing children. So we have been doing the out-of-district placement where necessary, in typically developing preschool programs.

RS Are you paying tuition for these students?

5 Yes, we have been paying their tuition and transportation costs. The children integrate really well, from one class to another, just because we are an inclusive setting.

RS So in those two programs you mentioned you mentioned, then you may be paying tuition and sending in services to the children who attend there.

5 Absolutely.

RS I know some districts have been using the kindergartens as another means of involving students in general education programs, though its not exactly with same aged peers.

5 We don't do that because the children will eventually go into that kindergarten, so it will be a repeat of what they will eventually get to on a younger level. At least 85-90% of them go immediately into kindergarten the following year.

RS I know we have already discussed this a bit, but do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?

5 Yes we have discussed this, but I think that when we're talking about preschool, now, we are in a major move to plan starting in January. We have contacted the state; we have their curriculum. We've done all the research; we know how much it is going to cost us. Our classroom structured is planned. We've designated the rooms and we are in the final six months of planning for an integrated preschool, so it is just what we are doing in district.

RS And do you feel that demands or expectations for inclusion by state and federal government is a realistic one?

5 That's what they want. I mean that their research is saying that it's going to be beneficial and we haven't had it so we have to try it. We are going to do it. We've visited other districts in the area that have done it and we were very pleased with what we've seen. It's just that we have such strong program now that we are all a little fearful of loosing it. So we are going to be working really
hard in this district to make sure that we develop a program that will be very similar to our present program. We know that we will have parents who do not want their children in a larger program. We also know that we’ll have to do a lottery. We don’t have a full day kindergarten. We have a half-day program with an enrichment in the afternoon that we offer as a tuition based for our student. This is the first year that we did it and we have over 65% of our kindergarten children who attend that enrichment program. So parents are going to fight to get into this preschool program.

RS Oh yes, we had applications from board members on down. The day of the lottery parents were calling and they were very disappointed if their child’s name were not picked. But it did generate tuition, which we didn’t have before. We started it before we could charge tuition, but changed when the state said that district’s could charge for students.

5 Oh yes, our staff wants to send their children.

RS We are almost at the end, and I thank you for your patience. Do you see major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?

I#5 No, I do not. But I have very strong feeling about that also. This is not something that you just drop on people. It’s not something that you just say we are going to do, and do it. We have been working on this and talking about this for three years. First we made our curriculum counsel fully aware, and then we made our Board of Education fully aware of our need for the program. We had presentations and curriculum counsel groups that went out to study programs in other districts. We really have done a lot to bring teachers in, our parents in and our Board in. We have gotten to the point that, as I always say, that if you can make people feel that its their idea.... and that’s where we are right now. And so, I don’t think that you have the opposition when you do it that way.

RS This is the section I have heard that financing or lack there of is an issue...I don’t want to put ideas in your head, but....

5 You really don’t want me to get off on that, Ruth, do you?

RS This was something I was interesting in studying. Every other grade you have access to the regular curriculum because they are there, if you chose to access inclusion. But for preschool, there’s a unique challenge because general education for preschool students often comes out of a special education rather than a general education mandate.

5 Well we have been, because we are an “I” district. We have been flat-funded, like a number of districts. Despite this our enrollment has continued to grow, and our number of classified students has also continued to grow in the last five years.
This has taken away from our regular education programs. We are a district who has been the lowest per pupil dollar that is spent in Monmouth and Ocean County. We are also the forth lowest “I” districts in the state of New Jersey on what we spend per pupil. We do not spend a great deal of money and I have worked extremely hard, as well as my predecessor, not to have that divide happen. But what is happening right now, with the funding, the formula that we are hearing about that is coming down, where districts such as ours I, J and even GH districts, are going to have to handle most of the special ed. costs. Because that’s what we’re hearing – there will be a flat fee – a flat dollar amount, assessed for every student. The over-the-top costs for special education, English as a second language services, bilingual services – those things will be either taken care of, depending on the districts ’dng’ factor, that’s going to cause a huge divide in this district. It really is. That’s where parents are going to be resistive to things that we’re trying to do.

The preschool program right now, I just came off a fight to get a full day kindergarten in. And I lost. We went out twice on a second question and it was defeated both times. We basically folded up our tents and went home. We created the enrichment program instead. I’m not going to fight that fight anymore. I do not want to go through that fight for preschool. So I’m hanging my hat on the fact that this is an essential program, mandated by the state. (Laugh) No, I really am. I’m just hoping that when this funding comes down, we don’t get walloped with it.”

RS Because obviously there are only a percentage of the poorer districts that get special funding for preschool programs. It’s a special education driven program.

5 It really is. I tried to get, I have a friend who is a superintendent in another town, in a smaller district in a different county, much smaller. But she put in a preschool program with a grant and she has worked with me extensively to help me gather information, etc. She said, well you’ll get, but we didn’t qualify for anything.

RS One district said that they used a one-year, autistic grant to develop their new preschool program. It helped with the set for the program that they wanted to start. That’s obviously not an ongoing offset of costs for running the program.

5 Right. But I think that the feeling throughout the state is, that if the state is going to mandate programs, they have to fund them.

RS That would be nice. Do you have any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool student with disabilities, which you would like to share?

5 No, we really just enjoy them. The preschool children in our district, some years there are 25, others more, every year is different. I will tell you that in our district,
all the administrators know that if you are having a bad day, you visit the preschool class. And it's the truth. And we laugh about that when we socialize. I'll see one of my principals coming out the preschool class, and I'll ask her, are you having a really bad day, and she'll say, 'Yeah, I feel so much better!' They really are so cute."

RS Yes, it really is a reminder of why you are in education.

5 And when you see the potential. A few years ago we took a child in, a little girl, she was just adorable. She had a feeding tube, and did not walk. Two years later, she left the program walking, talking and no feeding tube.

RS Wow!

5 I know! You see that, and then she went to kindergarten. And when you see that you have to step back and say, 'Wow.' Not that she doesn't have problems or not that she's cured but when you see that, you say, Oh boy. This is what its all about.

RS Yes, and when I hear this, and I'm hearing this from a number of districts, these are kids that certainly weren't included in public schools before. So whether its in self-contained or inclusive programs, they are still part of their district school where other kids are exposed in a way they were never, before.

5 And the only thing that my desire is for inclusion in the future is that the kids don't know that the other kids have special needs. And though we are inclusive, on all our other grades, the classroom kids know. So we are working very hard to change that model for our kids. In some instances, they are always going to know, but I would like everyone to be treated equally. So there's inclusion, and then there's inclusion, you know.

RS You have shared a great deal of information and I really appreciate it.

5 Well I remember going through this with my dissertation; so I had to say of, course, whatever I could do to help.
Interview 6

Suburban/Rural - Hunterdon
Date: December 5, 2007
Time: 6:20 – 7:07

RS  Tell me a little about your district, size and make-up?

6  We have 3600 students; out of those, 450 are classified. That’s about 10.7%. Out of those students who are classified, we currently twelve students out of district, so we do consider ourselves an inclusive district. We are a K-8 district, with six schools. The configuration is pre-kindergarten to grade 4, 5-6 building and then a 6-7 building. We feed to a regional high school. My own responsibilities – I supervise the Child Study Team – we have nine CST members, 3 secretaries, 7 school nurses, a student assistance counselor, the special education teachers and teacher assistants. I have a total staff that reports directly to me, about 145. I am sort of above the principals – I report directly to superintendent, not to the assistant superintendent or to the principals. So that’s us, ok? We have a full range of programs, from self-contained, resource center programs, in-class support, to kids who are fully mainstreamed students. I currently have 65 teacher assistants to help the kids in the classroom as well, so you have a snapshot of our schools.

RS  And in terms of preschool, do you have...

6  Yes. I currently have, well last year, I had 5 preschool classes, one of which was inclusive; this year I have seven classes, three of which I consider inclusive.

RS  So you have recently expanded your programs?

6  And that was started because we, I, wrote a grant on the governor’s initiative for autism, and I started a preschool program with autism with those funds. We currently have five preschool students who are in preschool autism class and they are all included for part of their day.

RS  I guess we talked about this a little bit, but how would you characterize your district with regard to inclusion of students with disabilities?

6  I personally have worked in four districts and I think it’s one of the best I’ve ever seen. Also because of the way that the teachers respond to the kids and just the way that everyone has been very open and embracing of the kids.

RS  So you said that you were able to access special funds to expand your programs?
Yes. We would not have been able to expand our inclusive preschool programs for autism, without these funds.

RS I know that I'm hearing that's an issue for a lot of districts, but it sounds like your administration has been supportive.

Yes, very supportive.

RS Okay, that's great. Would you consider your district urban, suburban or rural?

Suburban, and parts of it are rural. I don't know if you're familiar with our area in Hunterdon County. We're where the outlets are. Yes, its old farm lands, where they are not putting up million dollar homes, so whatever that is.

RS And one more question before we go on – and that's the certification you're your preschool teachers? Are they dually certified or do you have a pairing of special and regular ed. or a teacher with aides?

In my self-contained special education classes, everyone is dual-certified as elementary and special education. In my new program, you know I never looked if the are P-3’s. Maybe they are. In my inclusive preschool, the teacher is certified as special education, regular ed. and P-3. I also have a, you're going to get to staffing, you don't care about that yet?

RS No, we can talk about that now.

I also have in my inclusive preschool, that's really the one, you want to zero in on right?

RS I'm interested in a little in all your preschool programs, but particularly your inclusive ones.

All of my preschool programs have a dedicated speech therapist. Let's see – in my new inclusive preschools, we are able to have, that I started with my grant, the assistant is also a certified teacher. So I have three certificated staff in that new inclusive room, my classroom for autism.

RS And I know it's early in your program, but how are you finding it working?

We all love it. I think that the kids, we are having a meeting on Thursday, to see it the kids can probably be included, even a little more. They are not included 100% full time as we have some logistic problems, which we are trying to work around. We are just trying to get the kids as much possible and give everyone of the kids the right kind of program.
RS  And is the general education program open to everybody or is it by lottery?

6  No, I’m having parents pay; the state is letting me have parents pay tuition for this part of the program, $100 per month. I have seventeen children whose parents are paying.

RS  And do they apply?

6  Yes they have applied and I am accepting three more for January 1st.

RS  And is this for three years or just four year olds?

6  I’m really only taking four year olds.

RS  And are they half day or full day programs?

6  I have two half day. The inclusive preschool goes to two separate sessions, 9:30 – 11:45 and 11:45 – 2:00. That’s two separate groups of kids. The preschool autism in that same building, those children go 9:30 – 2:30. Let me go back to the reason we picked fours; the point is to have positive verbal role models for the kids. So I wanted kids who are a little bit older. With the new program, quite honestly, I didn’t want to start dealing with toilet training so for the non-disabled peers and that includes the preschool; the requirement is that all the children have to be toilet trained. We just thought that then we could spend more times doing the play and social things, rather than spending the time required for toilet training.

RS  And so the size of the classes?

6  The morning I have about 8 typical and 2 autistic children who are in there part time. In the afternoon, I have nine typical and three autistic students who are in there part of the times.

RS  Many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice. Why do you believe they hold this view and how does this coincide or differ from your view?

6  I think that the children certainly have to learn to live in the world with both disabled and non-disabled people, so we might as well start early. I believe that the role modeling is often better and the kids just have a richer, richer experience. But I also think that there’s a feeling on some parents part – because I think that it’s hard to explain to some parents that their three year old is autistic or disabled and I think that some parents are of the belief that if they put them with regular education students, they are going to be regular education kids. So some of it is denial on the parent’s part.
I know that in one of my previous districts we set up the program because the parent of a special needs student, who was among the most impaired, was the one parent who did not want to put their child in a segregated program for students with disabilities. Rather than go to court, we used the resources to develop an inclusive program. It worked out very well, but that was our incentive for developing the program.

I think that there's a way to do it — in fact, I think that cognitively impaired student might be among the easiest one's to do.

Especially at that age — it sometimes gets trickier for that group when the curriculum demands become more challenging. And do you have special techniques that you are utilizing with the autistic students of preschool age.

Extremely. We do a lot of the Applied Behavioral Analysis, a lot of discrete trials. We utilize a lot of assistive technology such as “Boardmaker,” Talk and Go's, Talking Boards, that whole kind of thing. Lots of speech and language, including sign language, lots and lots of specialized stuff with the autistic kids.

That's great. So do you feel that inclusion is a benefit?

Yes, it is a benefit, but I do not feel that inclusion is the be all, end all, especially for this population.

I think that I have follow-up questions that address this, but if not please remember to come back to this point in the end. What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students with disabilities?

I think that you have to take a look at the individual child and figure out what their needs are. I think that that's some of the needs that the inclusion people don't necessarily what to look at. The child has been identified as needing a specialized or some kind of special education program. Then why don't we just eliminate or do with the preschool disabled program/population all together. Then theoretically, we could put everybody into the Goddard School, for instance. I mean, there is a reason for this and the reason is probably that the kids get a specialized program. There are times in which we should look and say, well why do we want to eliminate or do away with the regular program. If everyone should be in a regular or inclusive preschool, taught by a regular educator, then we could just do away with preschool disabled. Just tell everyone, Fine! You don't have to classify them — you're regular kids — just can keep them there. Then your situation is solved.

I think that in special education, we have gotten to the point that parents either feel that special education is either too special or not special enough. It's very hard to find that happy medium.
And ours - we are having trouble, trying to fit in all their “ABAs” and therapies. Because then, we have occupational therapy and speech therapy. And then some of the argument is then why don’t you just do it in the classroom. But then, why bother have them classified? If they don’t need speech therapy, or you don’t want to give them speech therapy or the speech therapy should happen in the classroom. I’m sure that you’ve seen as well, that speech therapists are wonderful, fabulous resources. I’m blessed. I’m fortunate, one of the people, blessed to have fourteen of the most fabulous speech therapists working for me. And believe me not everyone has that. And to say, just do in-class speech. You know what – for some children, that’s just now enough. Some children have significant speech issues and I think that the inclusion – the people who are total inclusionists, forget that children have different needs. Even our buddy, Piaget will tell you that not all kids are alike! They have different needs that need to be addressed at different levels and even the different stages. It’s just not so cut and dry to say that everyone is going to be included and to be happy. It just doesn’t work that way.

They are too young and they come in with too many needs. They come in with everything from English as a Second Language needs to having been born drug addicted to kids who are early autistic, brain trauma. Some kids who were low birth weight at 1 1/2 pounds – they were simply born to early. You just can’t simply say, that all three year olds are the same. They just haven’t had enough. I think that this is where my frustration comes in. Well just include everybody – include everyone. I just think that that is a shortsighted, foolish way to address it!

**RS** And do you feel that there’s a lot of pressure from the state, or external forces to go in that direction?

**6** Yes. I feel that there is a lot of pressure – beyond what is appropriate.

**RS** Beyond what’s appropriate?

**6** Yes.

**RS** Some of your concerns....

**6** Can I just go back to the pressure? Yes, I think that there is a lot of state support and where the state is remiss is that there is not a lot of state support. In private programs, the teachers are not even certified. That is just bizarre. They make us, find that just simply to have the child included in a nearby private school, which may be wonderful places, but where the teachers are not even certified, have no approved curriculum and just by rubbing elbows with non-disabled children, something wonderful is supposed to happen. I just think that that is really stupid. The state has been very shortsighted. They have not provided districts with meaningful training in curriculum. They say that there are only two approved curriculums, which they want you to use, but just try to get training. Try to schedule training. I have a grant and I have money for the training, and I can’t
schedule them to come and do training. I think that the state wants you to do it, but they are certainly not backing it up.

RS  They are not necessarily backing it up with funds, either.

6  No funds, no training, no nothing and yet they are certainly critical when they don’t like what districts do.

RS  Critical in terms of monitoring...?

6  Yes, monitoring and publishing statistics in the newspaper, being somewhat punitive.

RS  And now they are actually gathering statistics in different way, for the first time. Do you think that will have impact?

6  Yes, that’s my point. You simply can’t say that all three year olds are alike. You can’t even say that all ten year olds are alike and they have ten years theoretically to become more alike – ten years of school, of living and ten years of common experiences. So why would you say that children that were only alive with only thirty-six months of experience should be all alike and only need the same thing. That’s what I don’t get.

RS  So what would be your response to the statement, all preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others – which is an extension of what you are saying.

6  I think that’s an ideal – that can certainly be a goal, but to start off that way is unrealistic. Maybe they’ll get there, but not all kids will get there, even by fourth grade. Even by fourth grade, you still have students who need resource center, or self-contained classrooms. That’s my response. That’s why I think that the whole continuum of services is so important. We still need that.

RS  Do you think that some of these issues are intrinsic to NJ?

6  I couldn’t speak to that because I really have not experience outside of the state of New Jersey.

RS  Do you think that the area of disruptive to self or others is particularly critical?

6  No, because some kids have different needs. For instance, I have kids who are now six or seven. We did include them in the preschool. And they were not autistic – not our worst kids. But all they did was lay there for two years. They were spastic cerebral palsy children. They literally lay in the strollers for two years. They got OT and PT. Now if you think about it, and this is just me, is it
more important that we try to get these children special help? That we try to get
them some feeding therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy to try to
loosen up their muscles so that maybe by the time that they are five, they can sit
up, so they can be in a classroom. Or, is it more important for them to be in a
classroom and we all pretend that they are making a Christmas tree for mommy
for Christmas, and have the aide do it? That’s my point! Whereas, now my
children are able to use switches and all sorts of things, but they lay there for two
years before that.

RS  And were you able to maintain them in district?

6  Yes these kids are in district. No these kids are absolutely in district. They are
better. They are seven and ten; they don’t speak; they are not toilet trained and
have no use of their hands and legs and can’t walk. Half of their day is physical
therapy, but they are great kids! They smile and they are just nice kids. So, do I
want to compromise that? Or do I want physical therapy going on and disrupt the
reading group? It’s not disruptive in that they are going to have a tantrum or
something like that. I just think that we have to me a little more sensitive. Is it fair
to have these kid’s diapers changed. I have three kids who need rectally
administered medication for seizures. Do I want that to happen in a classroom,
with non-disabled peers? Do I want them to be on display like that? I mean let’s
get real! I’m passionate about this, by the way.

RS  I hear that.

6  I do think that - I do believe in mainstreaming and I think it’s the right thing to do,
but when it’s the right way to go, but when it’s right! That’s my point. When it’s
right. You don’t just throw kids into classrooms. And I just came from training - I
train teachers in inclusive practices. I go to other districts and they pay me to do
this. So I know what I’m talking about. I just don’t think it is always the right
thing to do for all the kids. You have to make some good decisions and you have
to make sure that you have the staff that is trained appropriately to do this because
otherwise it just becomes a dumping ground, and I’m sure that you’ve heard this
as well.

RS  You led exactly into my next question. Should all preschool teachers be
trained to teach students with disabilities and what do you feel that entails?

6  Absolutely! They need to be trained in instructional modifications. You have to
be sure that they first of all know, what the mainstream curriculum is. They have
to know how to adapt their curriculum. They have to understand the needs of
children – the needs of the disabled kids as well as the needs of the general
education kids. And they have to know how to work together as a team – with the
parents, with the occupational therapist, with the speech therapist, in order to meet
these kids needs.
RS And do you find that you need to give them specialized tools?

6 Oh yes, my teachers have what they need; I can’t speak to others.

RS And active professional development and consultation program is part of that process.

6 Absolutely.

RS I forgot to ask you, how many years you have been involved as a director of special education?

I#6 Twenty-one years as a director.

RS And has that made a difference in terms of your forming your ideas?

6 Yes. In twenty-one years, I have become a lot tougher. I think that I am more willing to take appropriate stands.

RS And has that required court involvement?

6 I’ve been taken to court two times; not by preschoolers, I prevailed both times; we won both times and they were both cases where parents wanted their children out-of-district and we won.

RS So you can obviously demonstrate that you have appropriate programs within the district.

6 Absolutely.

RS Because the common experience is not law and order, so you’ve done well. I guess your answer but I need to ask anyway. Would you like to work in a “full inclusion” district? Why or why not?

6 Well I am working in a full inclusion district – by choice, yes. I think I am. The twelve children that we have placed out of district are children with such significant behavior problems that they have thrown furniture at the vice principals, they are self-destructive, they have cut themselves, have set fires. Their parents have had to call police to their homes. Those are the children who are out of district and those are children – talking about being disruptive in a classroom. They need a psychiatric base to their program. They are not learning and they need psychiatric care at this point. So those are the kids who are out of district. I really feel that I am in an inclusive district. I don’t send out any autistic kids. I don’t send out any multiply disabled kids. I don’t send out any learning disabled students. I have blind kids, deaf kids, cochlear implant kids, sign language kids, but I hope I don’t have fire setters. I have to protect the 3600 other kids.
RS Well, the law definitely says, disruptive to themselves and others; that's certainly what you are describing.

6 Yes.

RS You are right on theme here! What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated and is there criteria employed in your district?

6 I have sent two out and I told the superintendent that it was a real big waste of money, because I was sending money out, and the program was not as good as what we offered. That's when I got approval for the inclusive preschool program. I was sending $45,000 to places where the teachers weren't certified; I had no control of the curriculum and had no idea what I was doing; yet I was the one who was signing checks. It was an absolutely stupid idea. So I said that we have to start our own so I could have control; we're doing high level curriculum and we know what's going on.

RS Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

6 I am not so sure; we don't necessary do it in their neighborhood school because I have four elementary schools. One is completely barrier free and handicapped accessible. It was built for wheel chairs and Rifton chairs and all that. So we have kids, in their district, but not necessary in their neighborhood school.

RS So neighborhood district then?

6 Yes neighborhood district with non-disabled peers.

RS And is the word "restrictive" in least restrictive environment synonymous with "segregated"?

6 No! I would think that it's individualized; that is what I'd really like to see. It's got to be individualized and appropriate. And I keep telling my team members that the word is not best.

RS Yes, it's most appropriate.

6 Right!

RS Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and will this lead to a more inclusive society?

6 I hope it would lead to more inclusive society. But I'm afraid that people are losing track of what children need. I think that some of the push is coming from
parents who feel that if their children are in a regular program that they will grow and make better gains. That they will be less handicapped! They can say that they are in a regular school – they don’t have to say that they are in another school. Quite honestly, in my district, not the politically correct thing to say, but I think some of them seek the classification because of finances. Why should they have to pay, if public schools will provide a program for their kids with the occupational therapy and physical therapy and speech therapy in classroom? Why should they pay $9000 a year when they are already paying $20,000 per year in taxes? So I think that some parents can say my taxes are so high, let them do it.

RS  Do you think that in an ideal world there would be universal preschool, like we now have kindergarten?

6  Oh yes. I really think that everyone should go to preschool; that would solve a lot of the problems.

RS  Because that’s part of the reason that its so much more complex problem. The mandate is really coming through special education rather than regular education requirements. That’s why I’m looking at the attitudes of special education directors, rather than superintendents or principals or others might not know why or perhaps, even that there is this requirement.

6  I think that everyone should have the opportunity to go to preschool. It’s wonderful for everybody. But I think it’s just – the job is to find the right program for everybody.

RS  Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education? I can guess what you might say.

6  I think that they should receive a program, which is appropriate to them and one where they could be successful. I wouldn’t want them frustrated and wouldn’t want it “dummied” down for them.

RS  Yes, I’ve seen kids sitting in general education, where they may not truly be learning and participating. But if the education is truly above where they are at, they may not be getting what they need.

6  Well, I have got one little guy who doesn’t speak. He’s seven and he was in a first grade classroom last year. He was in that morning meeting responsive classroom. It’s kind of like that show and tell kind of thing. And for the end of the school year play, he was the narrator because the teacher and the mom prepared his piece and put it on a tape. But he was able to hit the switch when it was his turn to talk. That was really nice to see. Could he participate? Yes! Was he disabled? Oh yeah? He probably will never walk or talk. He is severely cerebral palsy. His arms and legs are just locked. He is a great kid!
And the other students and parents are accepting of this youngster?

Oh yes, I’ve never had a problem or a question.

How is the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms progressing? Do you think that we are where we should be?

I think that I’m okay but I think that some other places could probably come along. But I also think that we probably need to look at the whole preschool classification? If the goal is for them to get a general education program, then is that the role of special education?

And do you think that all preschoolers should be lumped into one category, unlike children of school age?

Even though they have the same classification, we really look at the different needs of the kids. Even some of the kids in the other preschools get OT or speech. It really makes a difference. Just because you come into the program doesn’t mean you’ll get related services. So we really do look at the needs of each child.

Do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms? It sounds like you do?

Yes, we’ve been pretty good! Even when I tell the regular education parents, when I tell them that their children will be included with children with autism. They don’t really bat an eye. They say, ok that’s fine.

They know what they are getting into.

Yes and they are fine with that.

And do you have projections or future plans to add to or change what you are providing? And is the grant short term?

I am begging the school board to pick up the costs for next year.

So your grant was one year only?

Unfortunately!

And how does it look?

I don’t know – I’ll tell you in three months.
RS  Ok. Do you see major obstacles to the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?

6  Lack of training by state. Facilities — schools don’t have a lot of room for these kinds of programs. You need a lot of space. You need a bathroom. Certainly finances. You need to have teacher, teacher assistants, sometimes transportation, specialized equipment. Certain kinds of toys and playthings are expensive. I’ve spent $40,000 just setting up my classroom. If a district’s going to spend that much money setting up one classroom and you have to set up staff — it’s just crazy. We haven’t even hired a teacher yet.

RS  And how many classes would you need — you’re a big district.

6  I think I’m ok; I’m not full yet, so I think that I’m doing well.

RS  Any other obstacles, which you see — we spoke about training facilities and finances. These are common things that I’m hearing. You feel that in your district that you have administrative and teacher support?

6  Yes. I have a fabulous superintendent; assistant superintendent and my principals have embraced this. So I’m lucky with that.

RS  And parents — have they been supportive?

6  Yes.

RS  Any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool student with disabilities, which you would like to share?

6  No, I just go back to what I said before. It just has to be appropriate, designed for the child. To put in a general education classroom without certain kinds of things, I just think that you have to figure out why are the kids classified in the first place — that would be it. Will we get a copy of your dissertation?

RS  You will get a summary of the findings and eventually, when completed, it will be available on line, through the university’s library.

6  Fabulous — good luck and if you need anything else, I’m happy to help.
Interview 7
Atlantic County: Rural
Date: 12/7/07
Time: 8:00 - 8:36 PM

RS Tell me a little about your district, location, etc.

7 We're a small rural and serve children from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. We have approximately 780 pupils. We are Group B, where A is the first lowest and we are the second lowest. The free and reduced lunch, I would say that 40-50% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. With that said, statewide testing we do very well. We are at the top, if not the top when compared to districts that are of greater socio-economic level, and we do a good job here.”

RS And do you receive any “Early Childhood Program Aid” specifically oriented for public preschool?

7 No we do not – I do not believe that we get any special funds other than through IDEA special education preschool funds. I don’t believe there is extra funding.”

RS I do know that some districts, with similar “dfg” grouping receive special funds earmarked for general education program funds. So as far as you know, your district does not qualify?

7 No, and I don’t know what the specifics are, but our preschool is actually an inclusion preschool already.”

RS Do you have a general education or a preschool disabled program?

7 No, we just have the inclusive program.

RS And about how many students do you serve?

7 Currently, we have 6 preschool disabled students.

RS And then how many non-disabled students are in the class.

7 The six of them are split up between a morning and afternoon class and then there are about 13-14 non-disabled students in each of the classes also.

RS And how do you get the general education students – can anyone attend or is it a lottery?

7 Four year olds – anyone can attend in the district. Then we build it up, when we originally started, it was on a need basis for those who qualified for free and
reduced lunch. Now we've opened it up so that anyone who resides in the district can send his or her four year olds here and it's a half-day program.

RS  So there's no screening and you can take anyone, so numbers is not an issue.

7  No.

RS  And the three year olds?

7  The three year olds—that's based on disability. If they are classified students, if their found eligible, they can come; there are no general education right now for three year olds."

RS  So are the three's integrated with the four year olds?

7  Yes, the three's are in with the four's.

RS  How would you characterize you district in general, not just for preschool, with regard to students with disabilities?

7  We try to do as much inclusion that's good for students as we can. We do have on the primary and middle school level we have a self-contained class, but like we have said, we try to include them as much as possible, especially in the upper grades. We have inclusion classes in all the academic classes in seventh and eighth grades.

RS  Inclusion classes, meaning a special and general education teacher together?

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So there’s no screening and you can take anyone, so numbers is not an issue.

No.

And the three year olds?

The three year olds – that’s based on disability. If they are classified students, if their found eligible, they can come; there are no general education right now for three year olds.

So are the three’s integrated with the four year olds?

Yes, the three’s are in with the four’s.

How would you characterize you district in general, not just for preschool, with regard to students with disabilities?

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RS  **Inclusion classes, meaning a special and general education teacher together?**

7  Yes. We do pull-out resource for reading and language arts in the primary grades and in pull-out math in seventh and eighth grade upper level."

RS  **Do you serve as a member of the Child Study Team as well?**

7  Yes, I am the learning consultant and also the child study team chair.

RS  **That’s a fun job, right.**

7  Yes, (laughter) Yes it is.

RS  **And many educators indicated that they believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice. How does this coincide or differ from your view?**

7  I agree that inclusion is good for most student unless they have such significant needs that they require a more specialized program."

RS  **What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students?**

7  I think that they are general education teachers and I don’t know how they are coming out of college, because unfortunately our general education teachers that are working in the inclusion classrooms have been teaching awhile and they don’t have a lot of experience with it. I think that’s where part of the problem lies. The general education teachers need more exposure and training in what to do with these kids. It’s the wave of future, they are going to be there and they need to be included.

RS  **Do you know if the schools in your area do dual certification?**

7  I’m not sure. We have Rowan University and the College of New Jersey; those are the schools, which offer teacher education in our area, but as I said, our teachers are mostly out of school for quite a while. I haven’t looked into it to see if our schools are starting to do dual training of teachers.

RS  **So teacher training is one thing; any other concerns regarding inclusion in general?**

7  Also I think parental – I don’t even know whether to call it concerns or conceptions. Occasionally we still have, I don’t want my child with them type of attitude for the regular education parents.
RS And any things which you have found to overcome that attitude? It’s obviously an issue for many special educators involved in inclusion.

I#7 It depends on who it is coming from. There have been parents for whom talking with them makes a difference. There has been some, where we have ended up having to switch the children out of the class. We do that, not penalizing the special education child, but if you have a problem, and you’re a general education student, we can put you in a different class.

RS What do you believe about the statement: All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others.

7 (laugh) As soon as I hear “all” I keep saying is there an “agree somewhat!” Ok yeah – because there is the phrase that unless there is a disruption…but even with that, there are some students where maybe a pull-out would be better for them, even if they are not a disruption. I believe that it is a case-by-case decision that you have to look at.

RS Have you ever had court issues where the parent felt one way and the district felt another?

7 Specifically for preschool or at any level?

RS I guess for either

7 Well, we had one; I guess he was actually aging out of the preschool. And then we’ve had and maybe one other that wasn’t a preschool aged dispute.

RS And were they looking for more inclusive or less inclusive – because parents of special needs students are known to have strong opinions in both directions.

7 Yes, they were actually looking for more specialized services.

RS Yes, I’ve hear from a lot of directors, that ‘special education is either too special or not special enough – it’s hard to get it just right.’

7 Oh, yes I know – definitely.

RS Should all preschool teachers be trained to teach students with disabilities?

7 It would definitely make it easier for inclusion, yes.

RS And do you have any formal relationships with private or public preschools in your area?
No, in our district we don’t have any formal relationship outside of our program.

So must of the kids in your area come to your public program?

Probably about 50% of them come because it’s a half-day program; some need a full day program so they go to more of a daycare setting. Although with what I’ve read about restructuring funding, in the next few years we will be required a full day. Then our numbers will increase significantly.

And will you, because of you district factor grouping keep your funds, because a number of the wealthier districts expressed that they’ll be loosing their special education funds.

From what I’ve read, they say we are supposed to keep the level we have now. I’ll believe it, when I actually see it.

But it doesn’t cover your costs?

No, it definitely doesn’t.

And would you like to, or do you feel you already work in a “full inclusion” district?

Yes. I feel we do, because again we go, based on the needs of the students in mainstreaming whenever we can.”

What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated and what is the criterion employed in your district?

We look at the needs of the student. We have one actually who is out of district because of medical reasons. We just felt that her medical reasons are so severe that we felt that she required a specialized medical preschool program in a private setting.

So, basically, you are saying that it would be for safety or health.

Yes.

Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

Again, I feel that medically is the major part of it, because especially when they are that little. I think that they should be exposed or given as many chances to be with the general education students as they can. At that level, it’s really not academic, its social and I think that’s important for them. In a
specialized setting, they wouldn't get the role models and interactions with the general ed. kids.

RS And so you feel that it's an advantage to have the inclusive setting for your district to provide students with those opportunities.

7 I think so, definitely.

RS This is one of the aspects that my study is targeting. For all other grade levels there is a mandate for general education and the population is already there. In preschool the mandate stems from special education. Whether the presence of a general education setting opens opportunities for inclusion for students of preschool age. Not all districts have such programs.

7 I agree with that statement. We have actually had our preschool program for years now. Our teacher is dually certified – she is preschool general ed/special education certified, so it works well for our programs.

RS Is 'restrictive' in least restrictive environment synonymous with 'segregated'?

7 Yes, I think that's the way it's used.

RS Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and do you think this lead to a more inclusive society?

7 Hopefully, with the little ones, they are more open to differences. And with everything, the younger you start them, the more receptive they will be for people who do have problems.

RS So you think that they are building some bonds that will help the in future interactions with people with disabilities.

7 I think so – they've always been in class.

RS Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education?

7 A lot of times, I think so. Because they have other issues – it's may be the medical piece or there may be other issues, such as behaviors. I think that they don't always get around to the academics, which they could if it were an inclusion type of program because they are so focused on the other problems.

RS How is the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms progressing? It sounds like you've had your program for a long time.
Yes, we’ve had it. I think that it’s slow. I know I talk to directors in larger districts and they have more programs than we do and they look at it as a problem because they have more. We are smaller and we don’t have as many, so it’s manageable. But I think that overall, it’s been a slow progress. We are one of the few in our area that has the type of setting that we do."

RS And what county are you in?

We’re in Atlantic County.

RS Do you see major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?"

Some of obstacles, I guess would be the facilities. That’s one of the problems we have right now. Our preschool program is off-site, in a little two room school, which is very nice. It presents a problem with some of the medical issues. The one student that we have out presents issues – not having a nurse, right there. It’s also an older building; while its handicapped accessible, but totally for what she would have needed. Facilities are one of the problems. Parental and teachers’ perceptions of what inclusion is and what it isn’t. Can they handle the problems that the children are bringing in?

RS And any particularly issues specific to preschool and funding?

There’s never enough, when you bring in inclusion, depending on the needs of the student, you need more aides, and then it comes up as to where is the funding going to come from, which we juggle all the time.

RS And do you charge tuition for the general education students who participate in your preschool program?

No, we do not charge tuition.

RS Do you see major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms?

No, our program has been stable. The only change will be in the next few years, if it goes through for a state mandated, full-day program.

RS Do you have any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool student with disabilities, which you would like to share?

No, I don’t think so; I think that’s about it. Yes. We do pull-out resource for reading and language arts in the primary grades and in pull-out math in seventh and eighth grade upper level.”
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RS **Have you ever had court issues where the parent felt one way and the district felt another?**

7 Specifically for preschool or at any level?

RS **I guess for either.**

7 Well, we had one; I guess he was actually aging out of the preschool. And then we’ve had and maybe one other that wasn’t a preschool aged dispute.

RS **And were they looking for more inclusive or less inclusive – because parents of special needs students are known to have strong opinions in both directions.**

7 Yes, they were actually looking for more specialized services.

RS **Yes I’ve hear from a lot of directors, that ‘special education is either too special or not special enough – it’s hard to get it just right.’**

7 Oh – yes I know – definitely.

RS **Should all preschool teachers be trained to teach students with disabilities?**

7 It would definitely make it easier for inclusion, yes.

RS **And do you have any formal relationships with private or public preschools?**

7 No, within our district we don’t have any formal relationship with any outside of our public program.

RS **So must of the kids in your area come to your public program?**
Probably about 50% of them come because it’s a half-day program; some need a full day program so they go to more of a daycare setting. Although with what I’ve been reading about how they are going to restructure the funding, it’s looking in the next few years we will be required to do a full day. Then our numbers will increase significantly.

RS And will you, because of you district factor grouping keep your funds, because a number of the wealthier districts expressed that they’ll be loosing their special education funds.

From what I’ve read, they say we are supposed to keep the level we have now. I’ll believe it, when I actually see it.

RS But it doesn’t cover your costs?

No, it definitely doesn’t.

RS And would you like to, or do you feel you already work in a “full inclusion district”?

Yes. I feel we do, because again we go, based on the needs of the students in mainstreaming whenever we can.

RS What is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out district to be educated and what is there a criterion employed in your district?

We look at the needs of the student. We have one actually who is out of district because of medical reasons. We just felt that her medical reasons are so severe that we felt that she required a specialized medical preschool program in a private setting.

RS So, basically, you were saying that it would be for safety or health.

Yes.

RS Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

Again, I feel that medically is the major part of it, because especially when they are that little, I think that they should be exposed or given as many chances to be with the general education students as they can. At that level, it’s really not academic, is social and I think that’s important for them also. Where in a specialized setting, they would get the role models and interactions with the general ed. kids.

RS And so you feel that it’s an advantage to have the inclusive setting?
I think so, definitely.

This is one of the aspects that my study is targeting. For all other grade levels there is a mandate for general education and the population is already there. In preschool the mandate stems from special education. Whether the presence of a general education setting opens opportunities for inclusion for students of preschool age. Not all districts have such programs.

I agree with that statement. We have actually had our preschool program for years now. Our teacher is dually certified – she preschool general ed/special education certified so it works well for our programs.

Is ‘restrictive’ in least restrictive environment synonymous with ‘segregated’?

Yes, I think that’s the way it’s used.

Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and do you think this lead to a more inclusive society?

Hopefully, with the little ones, they are more open to differences. And with everything, the younger you start them; the more receptive they will be.

So you think that they are building some bonds that will help them in future interactions with people with disabilities.

I think so – they’ve always been in class.

Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education?

A lot of times, I think so. They have other issues. It may be the medical piece or there may be other issues, such as behaviors. I think that they don’t always get around to the academics, which they could if it were an inclusion type of program because they are so focused on the other problems.

Do you have any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool students with disabilities. you would like to share?

No, I don’t think so; I think that’s about it.
Tell me a little about your district.

It is a pre-k to 8; we are in a send-receive relationship with another district, so our children go up there for grades nine through twelve, for high school. We are approximately 520 students and the percentage classified is approximately 11-12%. This is an "I" district. This is a homogeneous population—we are not very diverse.

Would you characterize it as suburban, urban or rural?

I guess suburban. I guess, there might be some people who might say rural, but I think that suburban sprawl has characterized the area. So we are suburban.

How would you characterize your district with regard to inclusion of students with disabilities?

Not just in preschool, you mean overall; I think it's very inclusive. The recent reports came out, where we had to do a performance assessment for the state. We're far above the number, including the students more than 80% of the time in regular ed.

Do you mean on the Dec 1 count?

Well, yes, but actually the state just published statistics for the year 2005-2006; they had to give those to the federal government. That's probably going to be publicized, but we just got a first peak at it. We are far above in that area, but also you are right. With the report we are compiling, we continue to be very good in that area.

And in terms of preschool?

With the preschool, it's interesting because I was looking at how the statistics change. At that level, although at every level it is individualized, preschool, I think it's even more so. When I go back to look at the 2005-2006 performance report that the state just provided to me, that group, they were children that were a little older, it was like four going on to five. We had a large number of them being included with general education. What we've done here is that we've made a relationship with an area preschool. So we have been sending a lot of our students that year to that preschool. What they would do is go there for half the day, and come here for half the day. This year, the students, it's a different population. So
we have all of our students being here. We are a general education school, but there is no general education preschool here; they are all in a special, self-contained class. So it just changes, you know, depending on the children and their needs.

I think it depends on children. From my perspective, I think that a large percent of the children that get referred at that age, it's because of language. That's the missing piece. When they first come to us, many of them have been in some sort of two-year-old program, maybe even the beginning of a three-year-old program. They are not learning language experientially. That's the problem. So that initially, we sometimes do pull them into special class because it's so intense. We can just flood them with language. Once they develop some language, then we begin to model inclusion into general education to help them apply and then generalize into all situations. But just leaving them in general ed alone and trying to provide the services there, doesn't always seem effective enough to develop the impetus they need to develop their initial language. That's the problem!

RS And you do not have an inclusive preschool program in your district?

8 No.

RS Many educators believe inclusion of students with disabilities to be good educational practice. How does this coincide or differ from your view?

8 Well I think that definitely everyone's view is that's our end goal. Our end goal is that all our children will be included in general education – that's what we're getting them ready for. So I guess that the only way that it differs, as I said previously, is that I feel that for many of the children that initially, we need to do some sort of separate education, just to provide them with that basic foundation that they need, and then put them in the inclusion. Because it doesn't seem that many of these children, well the big key for me, is they're not learning experientially. I know that the theory is that the theory behind the general education especially in preschool is that those children are going to learn by regular ed. models. But unfortunately, the fact is that for many of our children, the fact that they haven't developed their language, means that they're not likely to learn that way. They are not just learning form regular ed. models - otherwise they would be learning from mom and dad and all those other people in their family talking. Therefore, I really feel that initially, we have to give them some mechanism to communicate; then once they break through their barrier and then they start that whole communicate piece, then I do agree. You put them in that general education and then they can learn experientially. Ten it just explodes. They hear the non-disabled peers talk, and they want to communicate, and then they're on their way.

RS And so the students that you have in private preschool – were you paying tuition for them?
Yes, if it's part of their IEP, yes we were.

RS What specific concerns should educators have regarding inclusion of preschool students? – I guess you were starting to talk about that.

It's just that I feel that sometime the only issue is that it's just not intense enough. Unless, if you had the resources to provide the speech/language therapist there all the time, but that would be very difficult to do...someone that could really get that child to develop all those beginning skills that they need. And really, it isn't just speech, I'm saying speech, but really, it's all those kinds of social skills. In our special class, there's a constant focus on all those beginning skills that child has and pushing them to develop them. I see that when they are in their general ed., just by nature of the program, the ratio of teachers to children is much greater and the regular education teacher just can't give them the constant prompting they need to force them to communicate, or force them to socialize or any of that. Whereas in a small group, we can set up a model where they are going to have to respond and that encourages them to develop the skills, which we want them to acquire. Just in general ed., you can't develop the missing skills as well. I believe that's the answer.

RS What do you believe about the statement, “All preschool students with disabilities should be educated in general education classes, unless disruptive to themselves and others?"

No again, I don't. I don't feel there that mechanism to develop, to really overcome those specific deficits that those children have. It's not intensive enough, sometimes, to really help them develop those skills. I guess that there could have been a model somehow, where this could be something to consider in the future, where if they simultaneously when to the which could went to the general ed, and then you provided them some kind of mechanism to develop those skills...but it's sort of what we do, because then their going to general ed half of the day, and special ed, the other part.

RS I guess you are doing that because you are actually providing your children with more hours than the state requires in preschool.

Correct, I am. Or I would be providing the full day!

RS Do you think that all preschool teachers be trained to teach students with disabilities?

I do, really do think that would help a lot. I think that in this day and age, unfortunately, the percentages of students with special needs are increasing. I think this would not only give that teacher a better bag of tricks, because with a special education background, it only makes you more effective with all children.
But it would also help teachers to recognize quicker problem areas sooner, and the sooner you get a young child help, research shows that the prognosis is better.

RS  ...and in the preschool which you are utilizing, do they have special education knowledge?

8  Typically not. They really don’t. So in some of the cases, what I actually do is send an instructional aide that we had trained at to be there, at least in the beginning when the children were transitioning in, so they could kind of train them. My special education teacher would also go to train them in techniques which would be a good way to deal with the child, prompting them, whatever the issues were, depending on the specific children’s needs. The solutions depend on what my population of kids is like in any given year.

RS  Would you like to work in a “full inclusion” district? Why or why not?

8  I don’t think I would. I think that I’d be frustrated because I don’t think I’d have the options I needed. To say that you’re going to be full-inclusion, that’s taking away the whole gamut, the continuum of options from me. I would just feel that I wouldn’t want to be in a district where the only option was restrictive either. It takes all the options away. I really believe strongly in the individualization of it so I want the option for this kid to be able to have a special class and maybe another I want them to be included. No, I don’t want it to be that or nothing.

RS  This is the opposite, I guess, but what is your view on sending preschool students with disabilities out of district to be educated and what are the criteria employed in your district?

8  We very rarely send out, I can’t even think of a preschool that we’ve sent out of district. I guess my criteria would only be if that child was one of two things: either they were being so disruptive to themselves, let’s self-injurious, but even that though, I’d probably just put a one-to-one aide with them here. If they were so changing the tenor of the classroom that it was affecting the program for all the students, maybe that would be my only criteria for send a preschooer out, was if it was greatly effecting the education of the other seven children in the class, then I’d have to make that decision for the other seven. Because otherwise at that young age, I can’t really think of a situation where I wouldn’t be able to deal with it by giving them a one: one aide would at least get us through that. And using all my resources, I couldn’t get that behavior under control.

RS  So you have included children in your self-contained classroom kids with autism?

8  Oh yes, we have included everything kids with autism, medical problems, everything.
RS  And how long have you been director in your current district?

8  Ten years.

RS  Previous work in special education?

8  Previous to that, I was a learning consultant in another district.

RS  So do you think that your experiences have affected your attitudes regarding special education?

8  Oh, sure, absolutely. My previous district was totally different from here. But, I still think it was still looking at the continuum of options. It’s just that as a much bigger district, I had more options there. So it was just trying to figure out the different scenarios which one was going to serve that child best. My whole philosophy is really based on focusing on the child. Then it’s really driven, so I say, what is the real need. What are the skills, which I need to give that child? My end goal is that that child will be successful in general education now and later, as in society as a productive citizen. So that’s always my end goal. That’s just the nature of who I am, in every district I’ve been – that’s the way I approach it.

RS  Why do you believe or not believe that preschool students with disabilities should always be educated in their neighborhood school?

8  No, I think that I do believe that. It might not be in a fully general education program. But I don’t know why, except as I said, if they were incredibly violent to those around him, or I guess, if the child’s condition was so specialized that I didn’t feel that I couldn’t bring in a specialist that could serve that need, then maybe I would seek a specialized placement. I think it does well for everyone in the building. Our preschool has helped to make the preschool kinder. I do think that children should be in their neighborhood school.

RS  Is “restrictive” in least restrictive environment synonymous with “segregated”?

8  As you move down that continuum of least restrictive options, it gets more and more segregated. Do I believe that restrictive is synonymous with “segregated”? Well no, there are gradations on that continuum. Do I really believe that if I pull out a kid for one period of reading to give him a Wilson program, that I’m being more restrictive. I mean he’s segregated, and it is more restrictive than having reading with his grade, but that’s a tough. I guess it is, yeah, I guess it is, but you keep moving along that continuum it does get more restrictive and segregated. Yeah.
Some people have also told me the opposite — that if you are not giving a student what he needs but insist on services in the mainstream, then that’s more restrictive, so it is controversial.

But I guess, truly, truly, yes, it is its getting more and more segregated, and restrictive - it is.

Why do you believe that there is a push for inclusion of preschool students with disabilities and do you think this lead to a more inclusive society?

It’s so complicated. Why do I believe there’s a push? I think that overall, not just for preschoolers, because I don’t think it began with preschool. The real push began — there was statistics done which showed that children in elementary and secondary education that showed that special education was not always being effective. And maybe that trickled down to the preschool level. Yeah — there are so many factors running through my head right now, I don’t know what the single factor was. I’m sure that part of it was parentally driven. I’m sure that there must have been some programs where, like with the boom of autism. Maybe parents of children with just language problems delays, those parents wanted their children in inclusive settings. I’m really not sure. I don’t think it was financial. I don’t know what caused the sudden push. The only thing that I can think of was that ten to fifteen years ago, the statistics came out showing that special education was not that special. That’s the only think that I can think of that started the whole pendulum swinging. You know we really have to get the kids in general education, because it wasn’t equivalent. Yeah, I think that’s what started it - that they weren’t equivalent and are they equivalent - and that is the harder thing — that’s the key. If you are going to have a good special education program, you have to make sure that it is equal or better and sometimes it’s not. Maybe that’s what drove the push to put everyone back into regular ed.

And do you feel that it has brought about positive changes, as a director?

Well, it’s complicated. I’ll tell you where I feel it’s positive. There was a time, when I started in this business, before there was this push toward inclusion, that regular education teachers as well as child study team members had a philosophy that this kid is having trouble, so get him out. I think that the inclusion model has really broadened the educator’s minds. That’s the biggest value. Now a regular education teacher needs to say to himself, I don’t know what to do with this child — so just get him out. They know its not going to be that easy. So its really forcing everybody to say what can I do to keep the child in the general education population. I’m only going to pull him out at last resort, or I’m only going to pull him out to give him specific skills to take back into the general education classroom. It makes everybody less likely to segregate him or her. I do think that overall, philosophically, it has changed the whole idea of regular and special education. It has really broken down that barrier so that now special education is sometimes in regular education. Special education is sometimes in the regular ed.
so you're not just thinking that special ed. is separate and apart. I guess I believe that the concept has been powerful, and unbelievably valuable to education as a whole."

RS  You've given me some good quotes there.

Both laughing

RS  Do preschool students with disabilities receive a less rigorous education outside of general education?

8 No -- not for preschoolers, especially. I really don't. For preschooler, I think our special education preschool is ten times more rigorous than the general education preschool. I think that you have more of that problem as you go up into middle and high school, quite honestly. That's where I feel that the rigor in the special ed. is not going to be as strong as in the regular education. But down in preschool, I think it's actually more. Our preschool program, they walk in that door it is planned and prescriptive of activities and here we're going to do this. Even the play, which we call "free play," is clearly focused. There are a lot of adults in that room saying "Oh come on, let's play pretend here, encouraging language and social interaction, where in a general education, it's just not that focused. It's so complicated. For preschool, I'd have to say that the special education program is much more rigorous.

RS  Ok, and do you think that would be the case if special education were scripting the regular education program?

8 Then they would probably be equal. If my regular ed. program, and its not even the scripting, its just that the general ed. is just looser. It's not that they are just playing, again, its kids that are learning experientially. By the nature of regular ed. preschooler, they can come in and benefit from being with others- they can think for themselves that maybe I could try that. They are exploring their environment - seeing toys and saying how can I use this independently. He can come into that environment he's going to come is watch others. The basis is to allow children to have contact with other children and learn from them. The problem is for the special ed. preschooler - many of them can't do that yet. They can't walk in and just look and say to themselves, oh wow, he's play - house, maybe I should do that - making believe and listening and talking. So they kind of stand there and not using the toys, as we would want, or they are just not modeling or gaining from that model. So its just that its much more scripted or tighter in the special education.

It's just looser - its not worse - its just more appropriate for general education students whereas the special education is more structured and scripted because that's what those kids need."
RS  How do you feel that the movement of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms progressing? Is it progressing at the appropriate rate?

8  I guess, I'm being idealistic, but I hope that everyone is going thru same process as I, saying gee, this kid be could they be serviced in a general ed with just putting some supports in or sending in the speech teacher, as a for instance, and then continuing down that continuum. I think that hopefully, ideally, it's going at the appropriate rate to the needs of the individual child. At least we have those options available - that's what I think is the best. When I first started in this business, as a special ed. teacher in 1977, so there was no in-class model and at preschool, there was none of that. Nobody was even thinking of an inclusion model. Just having the options available and to discuss the child with an open mind - that's the value of it. That's what's exciting - just to have the options.

RS  What are the major changes occurring in your district concerning inclusion of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms? - You spoke about utilizing the option of a regular preschool, when they are able.

8  No real changes. I don't see us, maybe they'll include a lottery system with our own regular ed class, but I don't see that in the near future. Our class is a little different. One of the things I do believe in, is that if I'm going to have that special class, I really want to make sure these kids get a lot of individual attention, so I have a two: one or three: one ratio and they are here for a longer day, from 8:30 - 1:30. Again they may go out to general education some days. The program is offered five days a week.

RS  And the therapies are they pull-out or integrated?

8  Both, there again I'd have to say they are doing individual skills in a pull-out and then they are having group to have them transfer skills they have been working on in individual services.

RS  And how many are you servicing?

8  This year, 8, usually between 6 and 8.

RS  What are the major obstacles to the including of preschool students with disabilities into general education classrooms? You said that it's the kids skills and abilities?

8  Yes, I would say that's the only obstacle that I see.

RS  You don't see funding, staff or administrative attitudes or space impacting on your ability to offer programs.
8 What was the last thing? If I had space, then I'd start up a general education program? Hm, I'd have other things that I'd want to start, before I'd choose an inclusive preschool. I don't know, this model has served me well. Well, I guess it would be nice to have another classroom, I guess it would be convenient to have my own setting. Maybe you are right - space. Do most people do it by lottery because if I opened a program, we would be inundated with more students than we can handle?

RS Yes, a lot of districts use a lottery system. And some districts are also charging tuition for general education students – the state allows this now. But that gives you control of curriculum, staff, training and numbers.

8 Right! That could help offset some of the costs. Yes, that would be wonderful- but I definitely don't have the space.

RS Do you have a full day kindergarten or half day?

8 And that's something we do. For the children who will be moving into the kindergarten – somewhere between January and June, we begin putting them in kindergarten for a portion of the day to get them acclimated to the program and routine to help with them with the transition. So it's not really academically based as much as exposure and socialization.

RS Ok. Do you have any additional input regarding the inclusion of preschool student with disabilities, which you would like to share?

8 No, I think I covered it all. Well listen, good luck with your study.