

General Educator Perceptions of School Support in Teaching Students with an IEP

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Abstract

Historically, researchers have focused on the perceptions of special education teachers regarding inclusion. Research has shown that general education teachers who feel supported by their schools provide better classroom experiences for all students (Hwang and Evans, 2011). This study expanded upon this thinking by asking general educators what they felt were the most beneficial supports in meeting the needs of students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Results indicated that general education teachers viewed their ability to meet the needs of diverse learners positively. Respondents felt they had a positive relationship with special education teachers, even though little collaborative planning time was given. Respondents additionally affirmed that smaller class size, more paraprofessional assistance, and more individual planning time were needed. These findings powerfully suggest that general educators value collaborative and individual planning time to meet the needs of their students. Overall, this study provides tangible ways that school administrators can provide desired support to general education teachers.

General Educator Perceptions of School Support in Teaching Students with an IEP

Historically, researchers have focused on the perceptions of special education teachers regarding inclusion and, to a lesser extent, general education teachers. Research has shown that general education teachers who feel supported by their schools and administration provide better classroom experiences for all students (Hwang and Evans, 2011). This study sought to expand on this thinking by asking general educators what they felt were the most beneficial supports in meeting the needs of students with an IEP in the classroom. Administrators and policymakers can then use this information to influence how they best support teachers through desired resources and aid.

Synopsis

In classrooms across the United States from preschool through high school there are 6,464,000 students with an Individualized Education Plan (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that these students be placed in the least restrictive environment for their learning (Taylor, Smiley, and Richards, 2008, p. 20). Therefore, 95% of these 6.46 million students are served in a general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). With a shortage of qualified special education teachers these classrooms are being taught by general educators (Brownell et al., 2014, p. 2). How do these general educators perceive they are being supported by their schools in meeting the needs of a student with an IEP? What types of IEP classifications do general educators find most supported or least supported in teaching? Do general educators feel that their school is offering appropriate and successful special education related services? How can school administration and school districts best support general educators in meeting increased demands in the classroom? These questions were

answered in a survey which explored general educator perceptions regarding related services in their schools. The survey was administered through social media. The study itself was organized in such a way as to have the survey, literature review, results and discussion all follow the same five topic areas: (1) demographics and general information, (2) teacher perceptions on inclusion, (3) teacher perceptions of related services, (4) teacher perceptions of their own inclusive teaching practices and (5) teacher perceptions of school support.

Definition of terms

For the purposes of this survey and paper the subsequent definitions from Taylor, Smiley, and Richards (2008) were adhered to unless otherwise noted for important terminology.

- **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** - statement of a student's educational program written by a multidisciplinary team (pp. 20-21)
- **Inclusion** - the IEPs of students with disabilities will be implemented primarily by the general education teacher in the general education classroom (p. 51)
- **Pull out services** - a therapist or educator provides intervention to an individual or small group outside the classroom (pp. 228-229)
- **Push in services** - services or supports that are delivered to the student with a disability in their regular classroom (Tourette Syndrome Plus, 2002, p. 14)
- **Related Services** - those activities or supports that enable a child with a disability to receive a free, appropriate public education (p. 9)

Historical Findings

The researcher began a literature review investigating the previously referenced five categories, (1) demographics and general information, (2) teacher perceptions on inclusion, (3) teacher perceptions of related services, (4) teacher perceptions of their own inclusive teaching practices, and (5) teacher perceptions of school support. This categorical research ultimately led to the organization of the review. The researcher also used this research to inform survey questions. The goal of this survey was to either confirm or deny historical findings as well as expand upon the ideas previously researched.

Little research was found that spoke to the general educator's perceptions of inclusion and specifically how successful perceived related services were for students with an IEP. Most research found focused on special educator or pre-service educators' perceptions of inclusion. Any research that did address general educator's perceptions were from countries other than the United States. A lack of available information points to the importance of completing this study. This bottom up understanding of general education teacher feelings and attitudes towards inclusion and best practices will only strengthen the field of education for both students and professionals.

Demographics and General Information. There is a chronic shortage of qualified special education teachers in the United States based on recruitment and turnover issues (Brownell et al., 2014, p. 2). Many inclusive general education classrooms are being taught by general educators, not specifically trained or possibly enthusiastic about managing students in special education.

Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion. Research has shown that the number of inclusive classrooms has grown dramatically over the past two decades (Rosenzweig, 2009). In theory, most teachers believed that both special education students and general education students benefited from being in an inclusive environment, however, inclusion places additional burdens on already overtaxed teachers (Fuchs, 2010, p. 34). Logan and Wimer (2013) even found a correlation between student age and how positive teachers were towards the practice of inclusion. As students grew older teachers held a more positive belief regarding inclusion (p. 6).

Teachers may believe that inclusion is a positive concept, but be reluctant to put this concept into practice. Limited planning time, the demands and pacing of curriculum, lack of formal special education training, the challenges of collaboration have all been noted. As Logan and Wimer (2013) state, “Teacher attitudes matter in the classroom. Attitudes impact how teachers communicate with students as well as how curricular decisions are determined in the classroom” (p. 13).

Outside of the United States other countries each have their own perspectives on inclusion. A study in Korea completed by Hwang and Evans (2011) indicated that while general education teachers are favorably disposed towards the theory of inclusion, they are concerned about its practical implementation. Hwang and Evans (2011) went on to say, “the majority of teachers (75.85%) felt that students with disabilities would receive a better education in a special education classroom” (p. 140). Another study from Ghana identified barriers to inclusion in a preschool setting.

Even though teachers were positive about inclusion, the challenges they faced every day with children with less severe disabilities (in Ghana inclusion is only for those with less severe disabilities) made them feel that inclusion at this point in their classrooms was not working. The need to complete the syllabus makes it difficult to spend more time with those with disabilities. Teachers mentioned that because of their class size it was difficult to spend more time with those with special needs and give them one-on-one attention (Ntuli & Traore, 2013, p. 54).

What has also been shown to negatively affect teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion is the intensity of a student’s IEP classification and that student’s ability to affect the classroom environment. As Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin (1996) found in their seminal study, while 78.8% of 578 general education teachers in North America showed positive attitudes towards inclusion...this willingness appears to vary according to the type and severity of disability (pp. 29-30). Additionally, in a study completed in the United Kingdom, Avramidis, Brownell, Sindelar, and Waldron (2000) reported that regardless of the positive overall value assigned to the concept of inclusion, students with emotional and behavioral disabilities were seen as creating more concern and stress than those with other types of disabilities (p. 193).

A strong school community and administration can also greatly impact both a teacher’s view of inclusion and her very direct ability to effectively teach students with an IEP. School administration, responsible for both tangible and intangible items (such as morale and resource allocation), can influence feelings on inclusion. As Cook, Semmel, and Gerber’s (1999) study maintains “Principals held generally optimistic views regarding the benefits of inclusion. Yet it

should be recognized that although principals' positive attitudes may influence whether and how schools adopt inclusion policies, they do not guarantee that such policies are successful" (p. 205).

The educational system displays a discrepancy between the administrators' role, which directly affects the architectural, and programmatic factors of inclusion, and the teachers' role. The former is required to address the various needs of diverse populations, while the latter handles the needs of an individual child. This role discrepancy may affect teachers' versus administrators' viewpoints and attitudes, and those of the teachers' may well serve as distinctive factors (Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010, p. 91).

Both studies show the importance of administration leading with a positive attitude towards inclusion, but just as important is supplying teachers with desired types of support. More information on this topic can be found in a subsequent section of this study.

Teacher Perceptions of Related Services. General education teachers, special education teachers, and service providers must work closely to meet the needs of students with an IEP. Therefore, related services directly affect the teaching, scheduling, and planning of a general education teacher. Much discussion and research has been performed from the viewpoint of a special education teacher, but as Brownell et al. (2014) noted in their study 95% of students with an IEP spend most of their day in a general education classroom.

A positive working relationship between general education and special education teachers and service providers is key to successful teaching. As Vakil, Welton, O'Connor, and Kline (2009) observed, "Successful inclusive practice requires collaboration between the class teacher and the wider school community, including support and specialist staff, as well as parents/carergivers" (p. 53). Successful relationships thrive on non-intimidating conversation and mutual respect for abilities. Hwang and Evans (2011) found that 51.72% of general education teachers in their study were "sufficiently involved in the inclusion process" (p. 141), but 17.23% of survey respondents "reported feeling some degree of intimidation in collaborating with special education teachers" (Hwang and Evans, 2011, pp. 140-141).

As Hwang and Evans (2011) noted administrators can encourage a strong relationship between general education and special education teachers by allocating more collaborative planning time. A recent study completed by Mackey (2014) used qualitative interviews with teachers to explore this idea. In each example teachers who used collaborative planning time effectively felt more successful in their teaching than did teachers who were either not given time or used their collaborative planning time to discuss off-topic content. Effective collaborative planning time focused on differentiating lesson plans, considering roles and responsibilities of each teacher, and discussing the needs of special education students.

Little research was found that explored the idea of general education teachers' perceptions of specific related services. One could argue who better would know the positive, neutral or negative effects of services and service providers than the teacher of record in a classroom. This study attempted to supply this missing piece of key research, as the reader will find in the results section.

Teacher Perceptions of Their Own Inclusive Teaching Practices. Because of the push towards inclusion in recent decades, general education teachers "play a primary role in the education of students with disabilities...[but] often they report feeling unprepared to undertake this role" (Adams, Brownell, Sindelar, Vanhover, & Waldron, 2006, p. 169). Monson, Ewing and Kwoka (2014) stressed that "the success or failure of implementing inclusive educational policy and practice is dependent upon what the classroom teacher believes" (p.114). How teachers feel about their own inclusive teaching practices offers administrators another glimpse into how best to support educators in successful teaching.

Teacher attitudes towards their own inclusive teaching practices have grown more positive over the past two decades. Center and Ward's (1987) study of general education teachers "indicated that teachers' attitudes to the integration of individual disabled children reflected lack of confidence in their own instructional skills" (p. 41). Avramidis, Brownell, Sindelar, and Waldron (2000) then found that "teachers with active experience of inclusion held significantly more positive attitudes" (p. 200). These two viewpoints, 13 years apart, illustrate that the mandate of least restrictive environment has compelled teachers to learn to differentiate and with this experience came a more positive reflection of their own teaching practice.

Key to increasing teacher competence and confidence are professional development opportunities and planning time. As Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) found "high-quality professional development results in the acquisition of teaching skills necessary to meet the needs of all students" (p. 205). Their study, showed that teachers who had been trained to teach students with learning difficulties expressed more favorable attitudes and emotional reactions to students with special education needs (SEN) and their inclusion, than did those who had no such training. "Our study supports these findings because it not only revealed that teachers with substantial training were more positive to inclusion, but also indicated that their confidence in meeting IEP requirements was boosted as a result of their training", (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000, p. 207).

Planning time, too, plays a crucial role in teacher perceptions. Time needs to be given to meet the extra demands of quality differentiation. Maeng (2011) found, "lack of planning time was a barrier to full enactment of differentiation" (p. 40). Mackey's (2014) study also provided a qualitative illustration of this statement:

The math teacher felt that the hour of planning she was allotted each day was woefully inadequate...she acknowledged that the inclusion of students with disabilities in her classroom forced her to think through her lessons more thoroughly in order to make sure she presented the material in such a way as to help every student understand it. (p. 10)

Teacher Perceptions of School Support. Numerous studies conducted over the last 20 years have come to the same conclusion - teacher attitudes towards inclusion become more positive the more support they receive from schools. As Monsen, Ewing, and Kwoka (2014) illustrate: findings suggest that teachers who feel inadequately supported are less likely to hold positive attitudes towards including pupils with special education needs (SEN). Those with less positive attitudes are also less likely to provide classroom learning environments suitable for pupils with SEN (and all pupils). It is therefore imperative that

adequate internal and external supports are made available to teachers to mediate these effects. (p. 124)

The options for teacher support vary widely and are based on many factors including teacher willingness, administrative support, and school district funding. Studying perceived adequacy of support would enable school administrators to find the most meaningful and appreciated practices in which to focus time and effort. Burnstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, and Spagna (2004) observed that teachers felt they lacked the in-class supports necessary to implement the practices that characterize inclusion. Alternatively, Campbell, Gilmore, and Cuskelly (2003) found preservice teachers' attitudes were more positive immediately after completing coursework. So, what are the best ways to provide support for inservice teachers? Fuchs (2010) attempted to answer this question by highlighting areas of needed support. These included inservice training, smaller class size, more collaboration and planning time, less curriculum demands, better college training in special education, less struggle between special education and general education teachers, and a higher quality of assistance offered by special education support staff in classrooms. Hwang and Evans (2011) surveyed teachers in Korea who reported that "they needed more systematic support and resources such as teaching materials, training and smaller class size" (p. 141). Smith and Tyler (2011) found that as "teachers gain experience, professional development activities enhance their ability to apply research to become more effective instructors, resulting in increasingly better outcomes for their students. Web-based technology is one vehicle through which current information on evidence-based practices can be disseminated" (p. 336).

Historical context provided, the reader will now find information on the organization of this study's survey in the following section.

Methodology

Participants. Demographic information was found within the first section of the survey and was used to determine if there was a link between age, gender, experience or education, and participants' feelings on inclusion and school support. Survey participants provided their own demographic information. The first question asked was age. Fifty-four point five percent of participants were 35 - 50 years old, 40.9 percent of participants were 26 - 34 years old and 4.5 percent of participants were over 50 years old. No participants were under the age of 25. The second question asked gender. Ninety-five point five percent of respondents were female, and 4.5 percent were male. Graduate degree holders accounted for 86.4 percent of respondents with 13.6 percent undergraduate degree holders making up the rest of the sample. Participants were well balanced regarding teaching experience. Thirty-six point four percent of respondents have taught for 4 - 6 years, another 36.4 percent of respondents have taught for over 15 years, and 27.3 percent of respondents have taught for 7 - 15 years. Finally, this sample was most represented by elementary school teachers. Sixty-one point nine percent of respondents taught Kindergarten through 5th grade, 23.8 percent taught 6th through 8th grade, 9.5 percent taught 9th through 12th grade, and 4.8 percent taught preschool.

Survey organization. This survey was created to ascertain general education teacher perceptions regarding special education support services from their respective schools. Research

conducted in the literature review was used to inform survey questions. Based upon the literature review, questions were asked to confirm previous findings and to expand upon ideas touched upon in other studies. Anonymity was guaranteed to ensure open sharing from participants regarding their feelings.

The survey opened with a statement on participant requirements and participants determined their own eligibility. The survey asked for general education classroom teachers of record, preschool through high school, who teach students with an IEP. Next the purpose of the survey, to ascertain general education teacher perceptions regarding school support in teaching students with an IEP, was highlighted. A disclaimer followed stating that results were aggregated and there were no benefits or punishments for completion of the survey. To ensure shared common knowledge, the survey then defined certain terms used within the questions. Defined terms included: IEP, inclusion, pull out services, push in services, and related services.

The survey focused on 36 quantitative questions and was broken down into five sections. The first section (1) focused on demographic and general information including age, gender, highest level of education achieved, current grade level taught, “how many students in your class require mandated special services” and “how many students need additional help not mandated by an IEP”. The survey then moved on to cover four additional categories: (2) teacher perceptions on inclusion, (3) teacher perceptions of related services, (4) teacher perceptions of their own inclusive teaching practices, and (5) teacher perceptions of school support. These categories reappear within the body of this text for organizational purposes. Within each category it was important to formulate two types of questions. Type one established the current situation of special services in respective schools. Type two then asked respondents for their opinions on how to improve the situation. The dichotomy of these question styles was intended to fulfill the goal of this paper.

This survey used a Likert scale style of responding. The most common scale used was 1 - 5 from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree”. By using a Likert scale style of responding the researcher was able to mathematically analyze the feelings and emotions of general educators to create trends. This survey also asked a 6-point Likert style scale question with possible answers ranging from “Extremely Effective” to “Extremely Ineffective” to “Not Provided”. “Not provided” was an important option as the intent of this question was to discern teacher perceptions of how effective different services were for special education students. Also included were “check all that apply” multiple choice questions. These questions allowed multiple answers where respondents could have felt there was more than one disability category or more than one special service to be affirmed. Finally, there was one “fill in the blank” question. Respondents could include any service they wished their school offered, whether a commonly occurring related service or a need that the teacher had witnessed.

Survey Creation and Dissemination. The survey, General Educator Perceptions of School Support in Teaching Students with an IEP was created using Google Forms. As stated above, survey questions were created from research found within the literature review. The survey was anonymous, and results were aggregated. No IP addresses were captured, and no identifying questions were asked of respondents. There was no reward for taking this survey nor was there a

penalty for non-completion. The survey was distributed through social media using the Google Forms link on October 23, 2017. The survey closed on November 2, 2017.

Data Collection and Analysis. Survey data was collected using Google Forms. The survey was open for responses for ten days. After ten days the survey was closed, and Google Forms aggregated the data by item. Google Forms presented findings in figure form for 35 questions and as a list for one fill in the blank question. The researcher analyzed trends in the data to shape a discussion. Aggregated data was also reviewed to either affirm or attest statements that were made in multiple studies in the Literature Review section. Examples of these statements include such questions as “I believe my school administration tries to provide support to teachers” and “I believe inclusion in an effective practice”.

This study's survey provided relevant data that aligned with previous research and contrasted other research. The next section will offer a narrative of survey findings organized within the same five categories as the literature review and survey.

Results

The purpose of this study was to ascertain general education teacher perceptions regarding school support in teaching students with an IEP. Twenty-two people responded to the survey. Results of the survey were organized within the same five recurring categories seen throughout this study. Results from the anonymous survey were aggregated by Google Forms and reported below.

Demographics and General Information. Survey respondents were overwhelmingly female with only one male respondent. Over half of survey respondents, 54.5%, were between the ages of 35 - 50. Forty point nine percent were between the ages of 26 - 34. Eighty-six point four percent of people held graduate degrees. “Years of teaching” was almost a complete three way split between the categories of 4 - 6 years, 7 - 15 and over 15 years of experience. Grade level taught was also scattered between nursery school and high school with the highest category, 3rd - 5th grade, representing 38.1% of respondents.

Over 80% of respondents' classrooms contained 1 - 6 students with an IEP. All classrooms had at least one student with an IEP. All but one respondent reported that their classroom contained students in need of additional help not mandated by an IEP. Forty-two point nine percent of respondents reported that they had over six students in their classroom in need of additional help not mandated by an IEP (see Figure 1 on the following page).

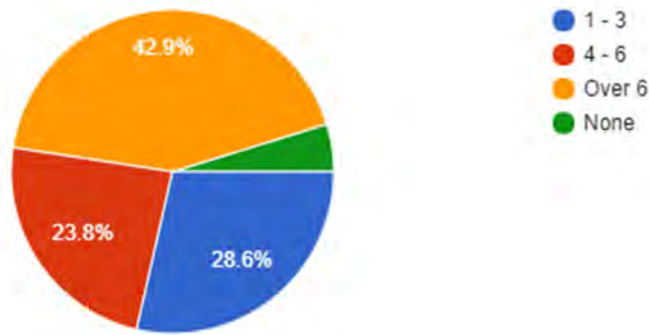


Figure 1. How many students in your classroom need additional help not mandated by an IEP?

Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion. Overall, 54.5% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that inclusion was an effective practice. The survey then broke the effects of inclusion down between students with an IEP and general education students. Sixty-three point seven percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that inclusion benefitted students with an IEP in a classroom setting, however, only 54.4% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that inclusion was beneficial for all students in a classroom. Based upon the ultimate purpose of this study the survey then moved on to target questions regarding school administrations' attitudes towards inclusion. Seventy-seven point two percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school administration valued inclusion. Almost all of those who indicated that their school administration valued inclusion also strongly agreed or agreed that they supported inclusion. Thirty-one point eight percent disagreed with the statement "I believe that my school administration does not understand the pragmatic concerns of inclusion". Since inclusion aims to foster the idea of least restrictive environment, respondents were asked to indicate which official IEP classifications they felt would be better served in a special education classroom or school. Respondents could choose more than one category. Eighty three point three percent of respondents indicated that students with an Emotional Disturbance would be better served in those alternative learning environments. There were also four classifications (Hearing Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment, Visual Impairment and Other Health Impairment) that no one felt would be better served outside a mainstream classroom (see Figure 2 below for a detailed list).

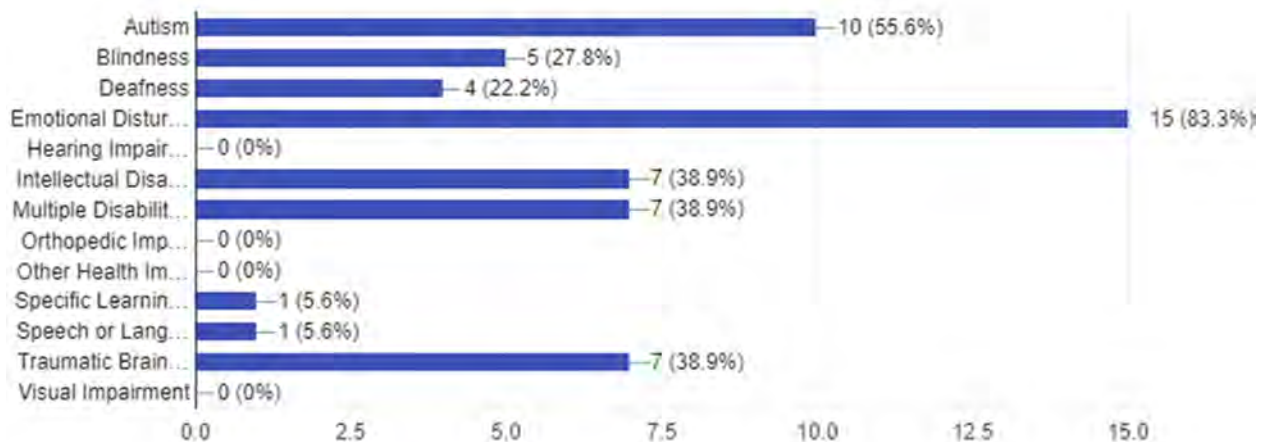


Figure 2. I believe students with these IEP classifications would be better served in a special education classroom or school. (Check any or all that apply.)

Teacher Perceptions of Related Services. This section asked respondents to reflect upon the effectiveness of related services within their school and the respondents’ relationship with related service providers. Sixty-three point six percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that related service providers provided the mandated services listed on their student’s IEPs, however, 59.1% of respondents also disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. “Push in or pull out services are provided on a set schedule and are not affected by other meetings or teacher absences”. Furthermore, 54.6% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that special education teachers and service providers provided quality push in or pull out services. Eighty-six point four percent believed that they have a positive working relationship with special education teachers and service providers.

Ninety point nine percent of respondents were given less than one hour of planning time per week to collaborate with special education teachers and service providers. Responses to the question, “I use collaboration time with special education teachers and service providers to focus on the needs of students with IEPs” were scattered across the response categories with the highest response, 36.4%, being in the neutral category. Eighty-six point four percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the belief that collaborative planning time produced better overall teaching for students with an IEP. Respondents also felt strongly with 90.9% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement, “I feel intimidated in discussing special education topics with special education teachers and/or service providers”.

Finally, respondents were asked how helpful they felt specific related services were for students. Answers can be viewed in Table 1 below. Respondents were then given the opportunity to list any services they felt were missing from their school that would be valuable for their students. Only one person responded commenting, “We have inclusion classrooms, but I would love to see more co-teaching models.”

Table 1
How helpful is this specific special service for your students?

Classroom Aides/Paraprofessionals	50% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Student Aides (1:1, 2:1)	50% responded with Not Offered
Resource Room/Pull Out services	72.8% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Push In services	40.9% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Collaborative teaching with a Special Education teacher (one or more periods a day)	40.9% responded with Not Offered
Co-teaching	47.6% response split between Extremely Effective/Effective and Not Offered
Speech and Language services	59.1% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Occupational Therapy	59.1% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective

Physical Therapy	50% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective
Behavioral Counseling	54.5% responded with Extremely Effective or Effective

Teacher Perceptions of Their Own Inclusive Teaching Practices. This section began by asking respondents for an honest reflection upon their own teaching practices. Beginning historically, respondents were asked if their undergraduate/graduate work prepared them for working with students with an IEP. Answers were almost evenly scattered across response categories strongly agree, agree, neutral and disagree. Only one respondent answered with strongly disagree. Moving to the present situation, 86.4% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they effectively taught students with an IEP in their classroom. Ninety-five point five percent of respondents also strongly agreed or agreed that they have improved in teaching students with an IEP over the course of their teaching career. Seventy-two point eight percent strongly agreed or agreed that one way to improve, “professional development opportunities related to special education”, allowed them to be more effective teachers.

The survey then moved on to more straightforward questions on allocated planning time. Fifty-nine point one percent of respondents were given 2.5 - 5 hours of planning time each week. Drilling that down respondents were then asked how many hours of planning time they spent differentiating lesson plans for students with an IEP. Sixty-six point seven percent of respondents spend 1 - 2 hours of their allocated planning time differentiating lesson plans (see Figure 3 below). Finally, 77.3% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, “I feel that curriculum demands and pacing make it hard for me to differentiate”.

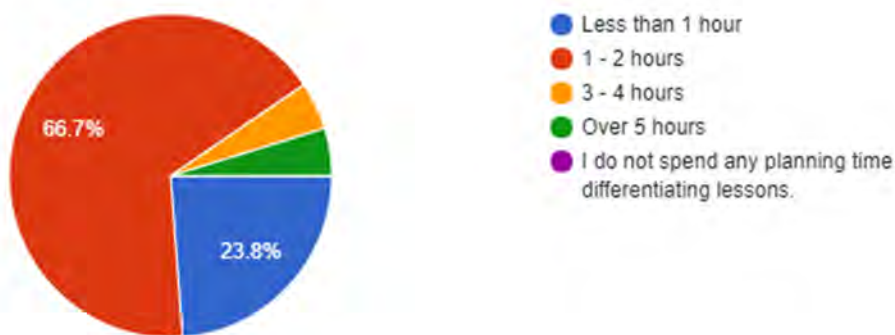


Figure 3. I spend ___ hours of my planning time each week differentiating lessons for students with an IEP.

Teacher Perceptions of School Support. This section began broadly by asking respondents about their school community and administration. Over half of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school community was supportive in teaching students with an IEP. Additionally, 59.1% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school administration tried to provide support to teachers. Narrowing down questions to the classroom, an even 50% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that they had access to necessary technology and material resources to effectively teach students with an IEP. Respondents were then asked to indicate by recognized disability category which students they felt most supported by their schools in teaching. More than one category could be chosen per respondent. Seventy percent of teachers

felt supported in teaching students with an Intellectual Disability, followed by 55% of teachers feeling supported in teaching students with Autism and students with Other Health Impairment (see Figure 4 below).

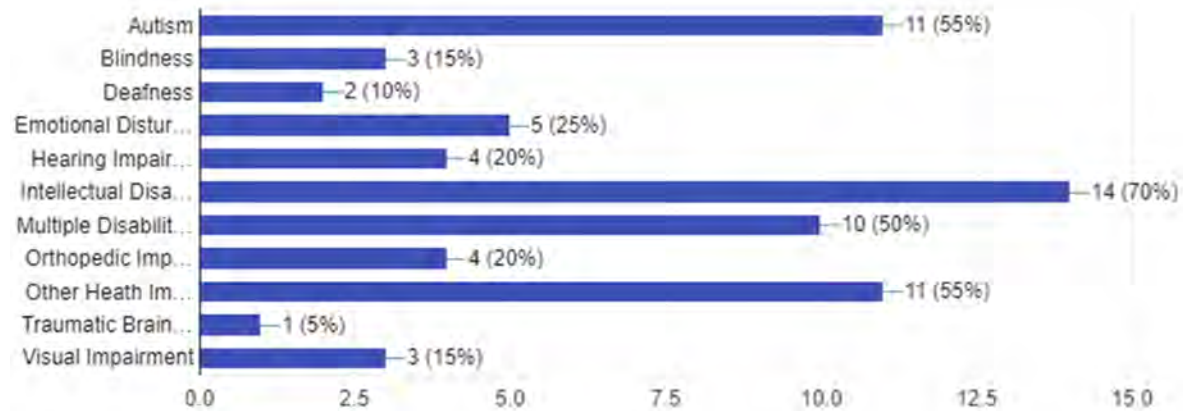


Figure 4. I feel most supported by my school in teaching students with (check any or all that apply)

In a similarly formatted question, respondents were then asked to indicate which offered supports they would find most effective in helping to teach students with an IEP. Over 90% of respondents indicated that they would like more collaborative planning time between teachers and special services. Seventy-one point four percent felt that smaller class sizes would be beneficial and 66.7% felt that more classroom aides or paraprofessionals would help in teaching students with an IEP. On the other end of the spectrum the options of web-based professional teaching tools, a more involved administration and supported interactions with parents garnered very little interest with the former at 4.8% and the latter two at 14.3% each.

A discussion of these findings can be found in the next section.

Conclusion

The conclusion is organized within this study's five recurring categories.

Demographics and General Information. Supplied demographic information both agreed and disagreed with other studies. While the male/female ratio of 4.5% to 95.5% was comparable to the field of education and other studies, including Hwang and Evan's (2011), the level of education did not correspond. Survey respondents overwhelmingly held graduate degrees (86.4%). In other studies, like the one completed by Fischer (2013), the balance between Bachelor's degrees and Master's degrees hovered around 50%. This demographic was notable because it could explain further findings in the study such as a "higher perceived level of successful inclusive teaching" and the "lack of intimidation in discussing special education topics with special education teachers", as further study would expose teachers to more (and arguably more current) special education training.

Additionally, a question missing from other literature and highlighted in this survey was the number of students receiving mandated special services and the number of students needing additional help in the classroom not mandated by an IEP. Over 80% of respondents had between 1 - 6 students in their classroom receiving mandated services. In addition to these students, 42.9% of respondents had over six students in their classroom needing additional support not mandated by an IEP. This finding is astonishing when one contemplates the average class size. Within a classroom community a teacher could have nearly half the class needing differentiation to better learn curriculum. This study's findings on the lack of given planning time, discussed later, further exasperate this situation. Teachers are not given enough time to meet the needs of diverse learners and students are the ones missing out.

Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion. As expressed in the Literature Review, inclusion in the United States is largely viewed as a positive concept that is difficult to implement. The first three questions in this survey section asked teachers their perceptions on inclusion. Each question had roughly the same support from respondents, 54.5% found inclusion an effective practice, 54.5% found that it benefited all students and 53.7% found that it benefitted students with an IEP. These findings align with other research and the idea of concept vs. implementation; as noted by Hwang and Evans (2011).

This study did not correlate grade taught with feelings towards inclusion, but as Logan and Wimer (2013) found a correlation between older students and more positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion, it would have been an interesting question. As noted in the demographics of this study 85.7% of respondents taught students in grades K - 8. Perhaps this study's perceptions of inclusion would have been more positive if there had been an equal number of respondents from each grade level, rather than a majority representing younger grade levels.

School administrative and its perceived support of inclusion also greatly affects schools. As pointed out by Gal, Schreur and Engel-Yeger (2010), role discrepancy may affect teachers' versus administrators' viewpoints. In terms of inclusion this survey's respondents stated that there was no discordance between administrators and teachers. Respondents were positive regarding inclusion and school administration from concept through application. Seventy-seven point two percent of respondents felt their school administration valued inclusion, 68.2% reported that their administration supported inclusion and respondents overwhelmingly felt that administration did understand the pragmatic concerns of inclusion in a general education classroom. No research could be found to corroborate or contradict with these statements as other studies did not address teacher perceptions of their school administration.

Finally, perceptions on inclusion also vary based upon the special education classification given to a student. Respondents of the study were asked by category which IEP classifications they felt would be better served in a special education classroom or school. This study's findings correlated with other studies, like Hwang and Evans (2011). Eighty-three point three percent of respondents felt that students with an Emotional Disturbance would be better served in a different environment. Given the nature of Emotional Disturbance and the impact this student could have on classroom management this finding could correlate with later findings that respondents wanted a smaller class size and more paraprofessional help.

Teacher Perceptions of Related Services. This section of questions was often overlooked in previous research studies. The feelings of general education teachers towards related services has a direct impact on special education students. This survey's questioning began with the relationship between general education and special education teachers and service providers. Unlike Center and Ward (1987), almost every respondent (86.4%) affirmed that they have a positive working relationship with their counterparts. Concurring with this was another question that asked respondents if they felt intimidated in discussing special education matters. Only 9.1% of respondents felt intimidated in discussing special education topics with special education teachers and service providers. High confidence levels could correlate to the large number of survey respondents with an advanced degree and more time spent in formal education. General education college coursework has evolved to include differentiation and teachers are becoming more prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners, IEP or not.

The ability to collaboratively plan with service providers and special education teachers was strongly affirmed by survey respondents, just as Mackey (2014) found. Eighty-six point four percent of respondent believed that being given time to collaborate produced better overall teaching, but 90.9% of respondents were given one hour or less per week to achieve this ideal. Collaborative planning time would be an easy solution for administrators seeking better teamwork within their schools as there was a clear desire for time and a clear belief that all parties benefit from collaboration.

Finally, respondents were given a list of related services and asked which service they found most effective for their students. Seventy-two point eight percent of respondents felt that Resource Room/Pull Out instruction was beneficial. Interestingly, even though respondents voiced a positive association with inclusion and felt that they met the needs of their students with IEPs, the idea that the Resource Room/Pull Out services was most impactful could stem from the old ideal that someone else, more qualified, was better suited to instruct students with an IEP.

Teacher Perceptions of Their Own Inclusive Teaching Practices. This survey asked respondents to self-reflect on their own inclusive teaching practices. Eighty-six point four percent of respondents felt that they effectively taught students with an IEP in their classroom and 95.5% believed that they have improved in teaching students with an IEP over the course of their career. As found in the demographics of this survey, over half of respondents were between the ages of 35 - 50 and had taught for several years. This fact agrees with the argument made in this paper that as inclusion becomes more commonplace, teachers have more experience in differentiating, thus leading to a positive outlook and improvement in effectively teaching diverse learners.

Respondents also reflected upon professional development related to special education. Consistent with the findings of Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000), 72.8% of respondents agreed with the statement that professional development allows me to be a more effective teacher.

Finally, the importance of collaborative planning time has been addressed between general educators and special educators; so to is the importance of individual planning time, especially for the purposes of differentiation. Fuchs (2010) recorded that teachers expressed a lack of

planning time. Correspondingly, 59.1% of this survey's respondents stated that they were given 2.5 - 5 hours of planning time a week and 66.7% of respondents used 1 - 2 hours a week of this planning time to differentiate. For the majority this means that they spent roughly half of their planning time each week differentiating instruction. Like collaborative planning time, teachers need to be given adequate time to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Teacher Perceptions of School Support. Study after study has noted the positive effects of school support for educators. Overall, 68.2% of respondents revealed that they were supported by their school community in teaching students with an IEP. This positive response could be affected by this study's other findings that teachers feel that they have a positive working relationship with special educators and they do not feel intimidated in speaking about special education topics. Respondents felt supported by their coworkers thus affecting the whole school community and the learning that takes place there. This agrees with Monsen, Ewing and Kwoka (2014) who found that teachers who feel supported by their community provide better classroom learning environments which create better outcomes for their students.

No previous research was found that addressed the question of IEP classification and support felt by teachers. This survey question asked teachers to indicate how supported they felt by their school community in meeting the needs of students with different IEP classifications. Respondents felt the most supported in meeting the needs of students with an Intellectual Disability. This question aligns with respondents' own feelings in teaching students with different IEP classifications. As stated in 'Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion', respondents felt the most hesitant in having a student with an Emotional Disturbance in the general education classroom due to disruption. Perhaps schools as well are first addressing the needs of students felt to be 'easier to manage' and 'more difficult' students are being left out.

This study then went on to ask teachers to choose from a list of supports typically provided in a school and indicate which were most beneficial for them. Ninety point five percent indicated that they valued collaborative planning time between teachers and related services. This corroborated with earlier responses to collaborative teacher planning time and the benefit of this time in the 'Teacher Perceptions of Related Services' section. Seventy-one point four percent of respondents valued a smaller class size. Whether smaller class size is a viable option or not for a school, it has been voiced by many studies, including Gal, Schreur, and Engel-Yeger (2010).

Limitations

As with all studies, there were limitations that should be considered when interpreting these findings. Survey sample size was small with only 22 respondents. The survey and study were completed within a 13-week time frame, allowing only ten days total for the open survey. Very little United States based research for a literature review existed on this topic. However, many studies and much research has been completed trying to understand the perceptions of special education teachers and pre-service teachers. This study begins to fill the hole regarding the perceptions of general educators. As stated in the purpose of this paper, when general educators feel supported in teaching students with an IEP then more effective teaching takes place. As well, when administrators understand the needs of their general education teachers then resources can be allocated in a meaningful way.

Recommendations for Future Research

A beneficial follow up to this study would be to further examine general education teacher attitudes with a larger and possibly more diverse sample population. Additionally, an examination of school administrators' perceptions of support services would complete the picture of general educator, special educator, support staff and administration working towards the common goal of successful inclusion.

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