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Principals' Knowledge of IDEA and Their Implementation of Special Education Services

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The University of Southern Mississippi

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AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

by

Karen Smith Collins

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

December 2008

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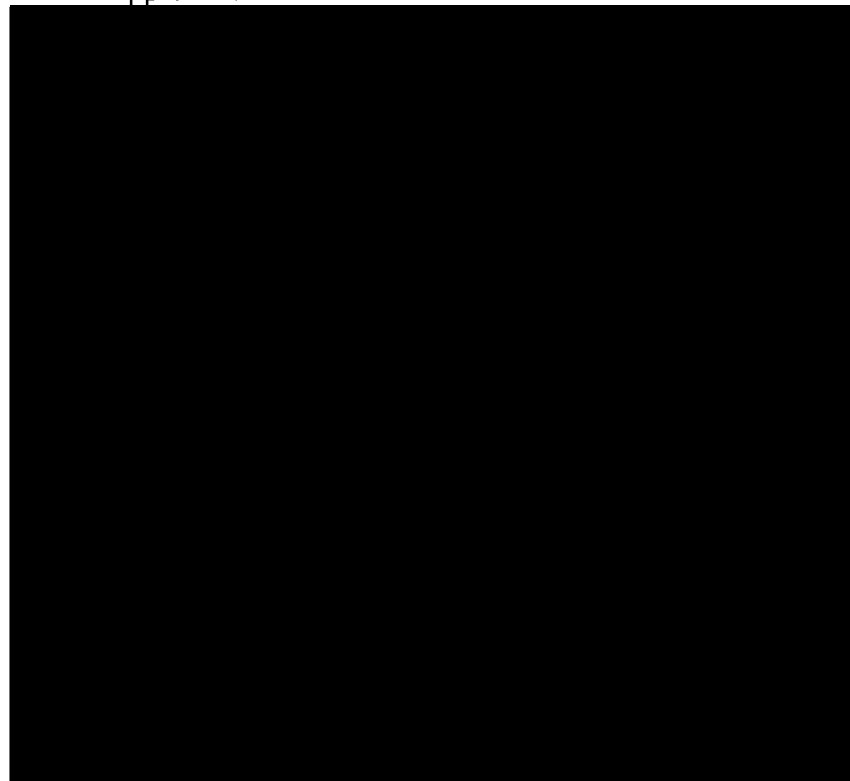
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ABSTRACT

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This correlational study was designed to determine the relationship between the principals' knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and their implementation of special education services, as well as to determine if there was a relationship between principals' knowledge of IDEA and their beliefs and practices; experience, training, and demographic characteristics. The respondents, principals in New Orleans area schools, were divided into three groups: charter, city/district, and state operated. Their knowledge of IDEA was measured using a survey instrument developed by Wakeman (2005) and Copenhagen (2005). It also included a small section on specific characteristics of the principals assigned to New Orleans schools. Of the groups, 52% were not principals in schools in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina and the majority of the principals had 1 to 5 years experience. The ANOVA results indicated there was significant difference in knowledge of IDEA between the type school districts. The Pearson correlation calculated on beliefs and practices of the principals, when measured against their knowledge of IDEA, showed beliefs had a weak correlation that was not significant. However, the results indicated their self-reported practices had a significant relationship to their knowledge of IDEA. The correlation between belief and practice was also significant. The regression model showed no significant relationship to training, personal experience or school demographics as predictors of knowledge of IDEA.

DEDICATION

My journey began with Hurricane Katrina of 2005, which brought me to The University of Southern Mississippi after losing my job in New Orleans as a public school principal. Although separated from family and loved ones as a result of events from the storm, I struggled to pursue an opportunity to use this life changing force as a positive venture. The wonderful individuals I encountered at USM, Dr. Lowrey, Dr. Manning and Sue, saw more in me than I could see in myself at the time.

Thank you, Dr. Kyna Shelley, Dr. Frances Karnes, Dr. David Daves and Dr. Rose Jones for the kindness and encouragement to continue with the process of earning the doctorate degree. You've blessed my life with hope. Your patience and advice was always timely, not only as it related to my studies, but also as it related to my future plans.

The love and endurance from my family, especially Mom, Lyndsay, and Kelvin brought me to the end of this journey. My father, had he lived to the end of my studies, would have had bragging rights, as he always claimed on my behalf.

This study was more than research. It was a journey of faith, a passion for the area I studied, and proclamation of persistence. I am truly blessed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Principals' background experience and knowledge form their ability to design the learning process in the school (Fullan, 1993, 2006; Foriska, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1995; Hughes, 1994) and this instructional leadership must be all-encompassing for the students served in the school's inclusive environment (Council for Exceptional Children, 1998; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 1999). The role of the principal is particularly crucial in implementing an educational program for students with disabilities. School principals guide the implementation processes as detailed in educational policy and federal law as indicated by Council of Exceptional Children (CEC) and National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2001). They noted:

All issues in the school affect the principal, and all issues are affected by the principal. Therefore, the principal is the key to ensuring that all children participate and progress to the maximum extent possible.

Principals must guarantee that the school addresses the diverse needs of children and their families through major elements of the school... (p.6)

According to CEC and NAESP (2001), school principals supervise the provision of specially-designed instruction based on their knowledge of general curriculum and available district resources. Yet studies of principals' knowledge of special education law by Hirth (1988) in Tennessee and Copenhaver (2005) in North Carolina indicated principals were significantly weaker in their knowledge of educational services for students with disabilities than of the procedural safeguards defined in the law. Consequently, it appears that principals may have inadequate knowledge of special

education procedures and understanding of how to implement services to provide specially designed instruction for students with disabilities. This possible gap in knowledge may also encompass not only a poor understanding of the nature of specific disabilities (Mayrowetz & Weinstein, 1999; Hirth & Valesky 1989) but also of the law that governs the educational services for students with disabilities. This law, updated over the last thirty years, is currently the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEIA 2004), subsequently referred to as IDEA.

One source of knowledge for administrators is their academic training, however, but, based on findings from previous studies, principals are not necessarily required to have extensive course work in special education (Kaye, 2002; Powell & Hyle, 1997; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). For example, in a study by Bateman (1998), aspiring principals were required to have a minimal knowledge base in special education, which usually was only an introductory course. Further, the principal licensure course work requirement related to special education differs among states (Kaye, 2002; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). According to Crockett (2002) in a survey of states regarding college course requirements, nine states required college students to meet competencies in the principalship and special education, eighteen states required a special education introductory course, and twenty states had no special education course requirements for licensure as a school principal.

Not only are there no universal standards for training principals in special education, but in addition, knowledge of the specifics of special education law is not a requirement for a school principal (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers & Ahlgrin-Delzell, 2006; Powell & Hyle, 1997; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). Hence, there is wide variance in

principals' knowledge of laws and policies governing implementation of special education services. This possible lack of preparedness is further noted in research by Crockett (2002) and Powell & Hyle (1997) that education for students with disabilities has been guided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990) for three decades, yet many school site administrators have limited knowledge of the law.

Similar to the varied requirement for courses in special education and special education law, the process of providing educational services in IDEA can be different from school to school and principal to principal (Crockett, 2002). Whereas research supports the need for principals' knowledge of special education laws and policies, there is no single model that identifies what principals should know to carry out their responsibilities for implementing services. According to Powell and Hyle (1997) the lack of a knowledge base in special education law and a poor understanding of services provided by the law may result in oversimplified or illegal implementation of services for students with disabilities. In addition, principals' limited exposure to the details of special education policy and procedures inhibit the principal's ability to provide the guidance necessary to foster educational services for students with disabilities (Copenhaver, 2005; Hirth, 1988). Along these same lines, even with knowledge of the relevant laws and policies, interpretations about implementation are not consistent. Copenhaver (2005) and Hirth (1988) for example noted that the concept of least restrictive environment had different meanings among principals.

However, in the area of special education, school principals must be consistent in providing opportunities for students with disabilities so the students may function within the environment of their regular education peers. Chapple, Baker and Bon, (2007) found

it takes more than simply understanding the legal implications of the rules and regulations of educational laws in isolation. Acknowledging and addressing the individual needs of students with disabilities requires the knowledge and understanding of IDEA in order to use the information to implement policy and procedures for special education services (Copenhaver, 2005; Wakeman, 2005; Hirth, 1988). Though this knowledge of special education policy and practices can be acquired from earned college degrees, there are other sources for this information: courses for certification, field experience as a special education professional, or from professional development seminars. Therefore, to create successful opportunities for students with disabilities, school principals have multiple sources from which to gain the necessary in-depth information regarding special education provisions so that they are prepared to participate in the process of educating students with disabilities (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers & Delzell, 2006; Brookshire & Klotz, 2002; McDonnell & Hardman, (1989).

The principal's leadership in each school should also be consistent with leadership in other schools within school districts for the implementation and delivery of special education services to students with disabilities (DiPaola, Moran, & Thomas, 2004). These services include providing a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment as well as related services such as speech or physical therapy (IDEA, 2004). Only then are students guaranteed the appropriate level of service when they move to another school. The need for consistency is suggested by a report prepared by the Boston Consultant Group (2007) which proposes schools in New Orleans reflect a variation in service implementation for students with disabilities since Hurricane Katrina of 2005, not only within individual schools, but within school districts. This variation in

how services are provided is due in large part to the existence of four different types of school district organizations within the city. Once a city having a public school district with one school board who operated 120 schools, New Orleans is now divided into several smaller districts (Boston, 2007).

Problem Statement

Principals need at least a basic knowledge of special education and special education law to provide quality programs and services for students with disabilities (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). This basic knowledge includes the ability to: a) identify characteristics of disabilities, b) to collaborate with teachers and parents, and c) to identify the principles of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Wakeman, 2005). Without knowledge of IDEA, school principals are unable to function as the supportive leader in the development of the implementation of services for students with disabilities, which can be offered in the least restrictive environment (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). Because the principal is charged with the responsibility of assuring that students with disabilities are educated in their least restrictive environment, the school leader is also responsible for creating a climate that responds to the changing needs of those students (Doyle, 2001) and to facilitate a change in services as the individual need arises for each student.

Determining what or how much principals know regarding IDEA 2004 and implementing services for students with disabilities is difficult. There are many studies regarding the attitudes of principals toward the education of students with disabilities, however, studies and surveys are limited in the area of actual principal knowledge of IDEA. Previous research has shown that what principals know about special education is reflected in their attitude about implementing

services for students with disabilities. For example, Praisner (2003) studied the attitude of school principals toward implementing special education services which was reflected in the behavior the principal exhibited that advanced integration of students with disabilities, as well as the acceptance of the students in general education classes. She concluded the factors related to the principals' attitude toward special education services impacted the placement decisions for the students. Praisner also found a lack of specific training for special education among the principals. She noted further research is needed to replicate findings of the relationship between training content in special education and preparation to become a school principal (Praisner, 2003).

Research by Wakeman (2005) addressed the comprehensive knowledge base of national secondary school principals related to special education issues. The study yielded mixed results. Principals reported limited experience and training in special education. However, principals who indicated having more knowledge were more involved in more aspects of special education services in their schools. Whereas the school principal must knowledge of the regulations of IDEA to ensure that school staff provides services for students with disabilities, knowledge of IDEA alone may not be sufficient to explain the principals' implementation of special education services. Indeed, other factors such as training or experience may determine how services will be provided (Wakeman, 2005).

Walther-Thomas and Brownwell (2001) found the principal's experience and the ability to arrange for delivery of service at the school level was key to the development of instructional services for the students with disabilities. They noted principals need to engage others, including classroom teachers and parents, in the decision making process

of educating students with disabilities in order to choose instructional approaches help students with disabilities be successful in school. As noted by National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001), the principal and members of the instructional staff must have knowledge of the IDEA to communicate strategies of instructional practice. They must be aware of the policies and procedures set forth in IDEA to provide services for students with disabilities on an individual basis in a free and appropriate public educational setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine the relationship between the schools principal's knowledge of IDEA and the reported implementation of IDEA services for students with disabilities. This study also seeks to determine if there is a relationship between school principals' knowledge of IDEA and their beliefs and practices for the implementation of special education services. According to NAESP (2001), "Although principals certainly cannot be expected to demonstrate expertise about the intricacies of special education law, they do need a working knowledge of the issues that affect their school on a daily basis" (p. 4). They need to have a basic understanding of special education law and implementation, be familiar with characteristics of students with disabilities, and be compliant with IDEA. The knowledge of special education policy is essential for principals to promote a positive least restrictive environment, collaborate with building staff, design relevant professional development, as well as maintain positive relationships with individuals who assist students with disabilities (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrin-Delzell, 2006). The consistency in services for students with disabilities needs to come from a leader with knowledge of IDEA.

Similarly, DiPaola, Moran and Thomas (2004) recognized components of IDEA that principals should understand. According to these researchers, principal knowledge of IDEA has to include understanding least restrictive environment of students with disabilities in regular education classes, the principal's role in collaboration with special and regular education teachers, procedural safeguards for implementing services, and the functions of the principal in professional development activities to facilitate services (DiPaola, Moran & Thomas, 2004).

Research Questions

This correlational research study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of principals in the New Orleans school districts and does this knowledge level vary among districts?
2. Is there is a significant relationship between the principal's knowledge of IDEA and their beliefs and practices about opportunities to implement special education services for students with disabilities?
3. Is there a relationship between principal's knowledge of Individual's With Disabilities Education Improvement Act and
 - a. principal's demographics, including age, gender, percentage of school's enrollment of students with disabilities?
 - b. self-reported experience and training?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as they relate to the purpose of this study:

Beliefs and Practices: the self-reported acceptance and opinion regarding access and services provided for students with disabilities in public schools.

Experience and Training: formal years of professional service, college courses and workshops the principal has participated in as measured by principal response to items # 1-6 on Section II of the Principal Survey.

Implementation of Special Education Service: providing opportunities for education of students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment which includes supplemental aids and related services (Bateman & Bateman, 2001).

Inclusion: “a philosophy or set of beliefs based on the idea that students with disabilities have the right to be members of classroom communities with nondisabled peers, whether or not they can meet the traditional expectations of those classroom” (Friend, 2008).

Knowledge of IDEA: is an understanding of the law and guidelines which govern special education and the nature specific of disabilities (Mayrowetz & Weinstein, 1999; Valesky & Hirth, 1992). It is the basic understanding of special education and the students it serves (Wakeman et al., 2006). It is determined by the personal acknowledgement of the level of understanding of the measurement instrument as measured by principal response to items A- Z, Section IV of the Principal Survey.

Principal: The instructional leader and executive authority in a school, licensed by the State Department of Education. The term also includes Assistant Principal as it relates to operating decisions of the school.

Student with Disabilities: “a child evaluated in accordance with IDEA § 300.304 through 300.311 as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech of language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as emotional disturbance), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services” (IDEA 2004, § 300.8).

Delimitation of the Study

Research is being limited to schools in the New Orleans area and the principals in the separate school districts within the area. This delimitation should not limit the generalizability of the results based on the diversity of the schools in the New Orleans area and because the university course requirements for principal leadership were devised by the Louisiana State Department of Education.

1. There are four school districts considered: Recovery School District, New Orleans Public School, Algiers Charter School Association, and Independent Charter Schools.
2. Each school district and charter is managed by a Superintendent, separate Board of Education, or Board of Directors.

Justification

Principals in the New Orleans area are not currently required by school districts or charter schools to have any particular background in special education. According to the Boston Consulting Group (2007) report, “Today, most public schools in New Orleans (charters and noncharters) enjoy significantly more school-level autonomy than they did

before Hurricane Katrina” (p. 29). Many schools are operated by the State Department of Education, while others remain as either District Schools or Charter Schools.

It is important that principals have a general understanding of IDEA to make decisions regarding the implementation of special educational services and to lead the school toward growth in the process for students with disabilities. Principals must work with staff members to meet the demands of special education (Doyle, 2001). Milner (2005) stated “given the increasing diversity of our nation and our schools, we must attend to all aspects of diversity and its’ impact on teaching and learning” (p.31). Principals in the New Orleans area schools are in the process of building school programs after Hurricane Katrina. Few schools have veteran principals. Many of the fifty one schools operated by the State have principals with zero to five years experience (Boston, 2007) and many principals are from other states. The Cowen Institute (2008) noted that principals lack funds and expertise to serve special education students. While there are many challenges associated with occupying the position of principal in the New Orleans School District, there is also a unique opportunity to assist in the process of implementing programs for students with disabilities by gathering data from principals currently working in this new system.

This study will provide information on the relationship of the principal’s knowledge of special education to provision of services for students with disabilities in school. Further, it will determine the need for principal professional development related to IDEA.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The school principal's knowledge of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the implementation of services for students with disabilities remain crucial to schools and is the focus of this study. Topics detailed in this chapter include the influence of knowledge, compliance monitoring, and creation of a culture for the implementation of IDEA. This chapter, therefore, discusses the principals' compliance to IDEA and their shaping the school culture for special education services. The literature describes how the school principal's knowledge of IDEA has been explored by researchers and correlated to implementation of services for students with disabilities. The terms and processes for which principals should have specific background information regarding IDEA such as: a) least restrictive environment, b) individualized education program, c) due process, and d) inclusion are included.

Influence of Knowledge

In their pursuit to define the sociology of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann (1966) process the construction of reality. Knowledge as a social discipline depends on economic conditions, education, and the social role of man. As pointed out by the authors, the stock of knowledge determines what we do with what we know. According to these researchers, within the foundations of knowledge, we find the reality of everyday life in schools which includes the education of students with disabilities. Decades later, in a study by Rochelle (1995), it was again indicated that educators should understand how their knowledge affects their ability to make the most of new experiences for others.

Principals are faced with the enormous task of ensuring all children, both disabled and nondisabled, are educated. They must understand that special education is not a place, but a system of instruction and that students with disabilities are guaranteed their right to education in IDEA, the law by which instructional programs for students with disabilities are governed (CEC, 2001). According to Bateman and Bateman (2001), the principal is the “chief advocate” for special education in the school. As a result, there are specific responsibilities of the school principal for the implementation of IDEA for students with disabilities. Further, studies on leadership in special education found that qualities documented in the behaviors of successful leaders included specifics such as monitoring, consulting, and delegating (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; Praisner, 2003; Spillane et al., 1999; Petersen & Swan, 1996). It was also noted by these researchers that a strong knowledge of special education and grade level programs are also contributing factors to successful school leadership with regard to students with disabilities.

To begin to understand the breadth of principals’ knowledge of special education and special education law, one turns first to examine the formal training provided through college course work. Bateman and Bateman (2001), noting that school principals need to be knowledgeable about the federal mandates to provide students with disabilities with a free and appropriate public education in their least restrictive environment, propose principals may not have had adequate training to understand the terms or legalities associated with implementing services. For example, as these researchers suggest, principals “are suddenly thrust into situations in which they must be the final arbiter on matters related to strange-sounding issues such as IEPs, 504 decisions, due process hearings , and IDEA compliance” (p.1). They should also have an understanding of the

nature of students' learning needs, as well as knowledge of the educational benefits and provisions of supplemental aids and services available to students with disabilities, in order to implement programs designed to accommodate the student with a disability in a regular classroom (Thomason, 1994). Principals should also be knowledgeable of the educational benefits and provisions of supplemental aids and services available to students with disabilities (Thomason, 1994).

The possible consequence of limited knowledge was explored by Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998), who studied the principal's knowledge and attitude toward inclusion. These authors had previously established that principals with special education qualifications had a more positive attitude toward including students with disabilities in general education. In later studies, they found no such relationship between attitudes, either positive or negative, toward inclusion and the number of years in administration or special education teaching experience.

Taylor (2005) studied practices of principals and their knowledge of IDEA in public and private schools. His research indicated that there needs to be a more systematic method of measuring the course work principals have taken and how much knowledge school principals have of special education. Taylor challenged the selection criteria used to enroll students when the principal's knowledge of IDEA is limited. He contended the possibility that the extent of services provided to the students with disabilities at the school may be limited by a lack of understanding of provisions in IDEA by school principals (Taylor, 2005).

Understanding IDEA– the Law

Instructional leaders are responsible for meeting the needs of individual students as their first obligation but they also have the responsibility to meet federal, state and district requirements (Goor, Schwenn, & Boyer 1997). A school cannot successfully address all these issues unless the principal is knowledgeable about both the law and effective instructional practice. Specifically because the issues are so complex, planning, communication and collaboration are also key leadership strategies (CEC & NAESP, 2001). Among the many expectations and guidelines for principals stated by CEC and NAESP, (2001), are that the principal must be knowledgeable about legal requirements and effective special education and related services practices and that the principal uses that knowledge to develop - in collaboration with regular educators, special educators, and related service providers – instructional schedules that minimize disruptions in instruction for individual children. Hughes (1994) stated, “Successful principals get goal consensus by working with the staff to establish a collective visions of what the school might become – more importantly, a vision of what each student might become”. (p. 19)

In order to adhere to the guidelines or fulfill expectations, the school principal has to connect instruction to requirements of IDEA. Understanding the elements and terms of IDEA provides the framework of accountability for delivery of service (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; Yell, 2006). This law was enacted in 1975 to secure the educational right of students with disabilities and yet, today, we are still defining roles, requirements, and the nature of who is

responsible (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). A chronology of the dates of revisions includes the following: (Friend, 2006):

- Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 – required states to provide a free and appropriate public education for students 5 to 18 years old. It defined the least restrictive environment and required an individualized education plan.
- Individuals With Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) - replaced the previous Act, refers to people with disabilities rather than handicapped, adds new categories of disabilities, extends due process requirements, and requires transition for students who reach the age of 16.
- Amendment to IDEA 1997 – extends services to students who are expelled, requires general education teacher to be on the IEP team, requires students with disabilities to take part in statewide assessment, and requires behavior management plans for students with behavior problems.
- Reauthorization of IDEA 2004 – response to intervention is used to determine learning discrepancies prior to evaluation, increases funds for early intervention, and eliminates short term objectives on the IEP.
- Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, IDEIA 2004 – reauthorization of IDEA 2004 to align with the federal law of No Child Left Behind, provides an educational option for children with disabilities ages 3 through kindergarten age, addresses compliance to procedural safeguards, and includes changes to the IEP team meetings regarding participation of teachers and parents when unavailable to attend a conference.

The trail of history and the revisions of the laws give the provider a sense of the ever changing need to continue to provide individual educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Long (1977) wrote:

The passage of a law alone can not make good mainstreaming happen. Children can be transferred into different situations, but the spirit in which a program is carried out determines what happens to the children as much as the technical know-how, resources, and planning. (p.15)

The elements of IDEA are designed to cover a broad range of rights, processes, and related services for students with disabilities to receive an appropriate education. Among these elements are the a) individualized education plan, b) the individualized education team, c) the least restrictive environment, d) due process, and e) compliance monitoring.

Thirty years after the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, the school administrator has a critical role, not only in understanding IDEA but also in ensuring compliance with the law (Crockett, 2002). The intent of the law, beginning with its inception, was to include students with disabilities in their least restrictive environment wherever possible (NAESP, 2001). The process has continued through Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1990 (IDEA), IDEA 1997, and the recent Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004. Education of All Handicapped Children Act guaranteed the right to free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment for disabled children and provided needed funding to focus on the intent of the law (Brookshire & Klotz, 2002).

Zigmond (2003) recognized that in the 1979 Congressional report, The U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare stated that “many handicapped children are already receiving their education in a regular classroom setting and appropriate placements are in most cases available to accommodate children with special needs” (p.193). Yet services for the disabled were minimal at best. Hughes (1994) describes evolution of the law for students with disabilities as “zero reject”. The entitlements granted under the Education of Handicapped Children Act in 1975 continued through IDEA 2004. The basic premises remain that students with disabilities are to be individually placed in their most appropriate educational setting and that this education is free. At the school level, direction for the process of implementing these educational services for students with disabilities comes from the school principal. Thus the major concepts such as a) referral, b) evaluation, c) placement in the least restrictive environment, and d) due process may be familiar to administrators. Further, however, it is the principal’s knowledge of research based practices that assist in the development of partnerships between regular education and special education teachers to provide effective instructional services to students with disabilities (Hughes, 1993).

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

The identification of what is being taught, how, and when it is being taught is described by an Individualized Education Program (IEP). It is the means by which services for students with disabilities are provided. In fact, Gartin and Murdick (2001) find the cornerstone of IDEA is the IEP document, the legal artifact for placement. It is

the document that captures all of the decisions made through special education, eligibility, and programming procedures (Friend, 2006). A team of individuals required by IDEA, which includes a special education teacher, regular education teacher, parent, a representative of the local public agency, and a representative of the school system, collaborate to create an IEP for successfully implementing special education services in a public school setting. In finding significant differences from state to state regarding the differences in the extent of services for students with disabilities, McLeskey, Hoppey, Williamson, & Rentz (2004) suggested that placement decisions from the IEP team be examined systematically to determine practices and build capacity to improve services. Recognizing that knowledge of the IEP process as defined in IDEA is a significant aspect of implementing services, as an IEP team member, the principal is the representative of the public agency who is qualified to provide or supervise the instruction specifically designed for students with disabilities.

Least Restrictive Environment

Provisions under IDEA 2004 deem education for disabled students are provided in a setting determined to be the least restrictive environment (LRE). As a result of the constant scrutiny of the LRE, there have been many court cases. The decisions of the courts regarding LRE have varied according to the individual cases from state to state (National Council on Disability, 2000). Court cases dating back as far as 1819 with *McCullach vs. Maryland*, and the well known 1954 case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* influenced appropriate setting for students with disabilities in future legislative actions (Zigmond, 2003).

The more restrictive setting has potential drawbacks of isolation from the student's peers both socially and academically. Bateman and Bateman (2001) noted that although historically students with disabilities were placed in disability specific classrooms, this placement was made regardless of whether or not it was the appropriate placement for the student. They judge it imperative for the principal to have a full understanding of the process of placement for students with disabilities since the definition of the appropriate placement is a "process definition" (p.19). LRE and general education setting are not synonymous when applied to students with disabilities.

The educational determination should be based solely on the individual needs of the student. LRE placements influence more than just academic performance as numerous researchers have shown. The study conducted by McLeskey, Hoppey, Williamson & Rentz (2004) examined the controversy of the academic and social effectiveness of educating students with disabilities in general education classes in various states over a ten year period. When placed according to functioning level, either academically or socially, students with disabilities performed positively in regular education classes. The LRE for students with disabilities ranged from "pullout" program of one class period in regular education to more than to sixty percent of the day spent in general education classes (Friend, 2006). Moore, Gilbreath, and Maiuri (1998) found students with disabilities who were placed in general education classes made greater gains than those in "pull out" programs. Students, classified in the severe category as opposed to milder classifications were found by NAESP (2001) to not only show increases academically, but improve socially and behaviorally when receiving instruction in the regular education class. Research (Barnett& Monda-Amaya, 1998; Gunter, Denny,

& Venn, 2000; Jolivette, Stichter, Nelson, Scott & Liaupsin, 2000; Moore, Gilbreath & Maiuri, 1998) indicated inclusive practices had a positive impact on achievement, classroom behavior, peer relationships, and attitudes of students with disabilities. These authors also noted the IEP's of the students in inclusion classes were written with more academic objectives, an increase in social interaction, and a decrease in the amount of time students with disabilities spent alone.

Although IDEA and amendments to IDEA (IDEA 1997, 2004) assures the education in the least restrictive environment, there is little data from states regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes (Hirth & Valesky, 1998). State data from across the country shows vast differences in the number of students with disabilities placed in general education classes and suggests the placement policies of both state and local districts should be examined (Douvani & Hulsey 2002).

The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA changed the implication of LRE (Gallagher, 2006; CEC & NAESP, 2001; Aefsky, 1995). The earlier versions of law implied students should be in the general education environment whenever possible. Now IDEA 2004 makes the presumption that students with disabilities are only in the general education environment to the extent they can be successful (Friend, 2008). The educational environment for students with a disability can either be placement in general education all day, a percentage of the day in general education and in special education, in a separate special education class, or in a special school setting, depending on the severity of the student's disability (Friend, 2006; Nielson, 1997). General education is considered the least restrictive of the environments and educators justify and document this placement on the student's IEP. Placement in an environment that removes the disabled

student from his/her general education peers occurs only when the nature of the severity is such that education in general education classes can not be achieved satisfactorily (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005). In other words, IDEA's explanation of the LRE changed the principle of the free and appropriate education to an emphasis on appropriate. The determination is made as to whether the school has included the child in school programs with non disabled peers to the maximum extent possible (Gartin & Murdick, 2001; Thomason, 1994). According to Brookshire & Klotz(2002):

The regular education classroom is not necessarily the least restrictive environment. If the presence of a student with a disability compromises the quality of education in the classroom, the placement is inappropriate. When selecting the least restrictive environment for a student, the individual education planning team considers any negative effects the placement may have on the student and others in the quality of services the student and others need. (p.21)

Whereas research and literature support the placement of students with disabilities in instructional LRE with their regular class peers, there are, however, other instructional considerations in order for the student to experience success. According to Cullinan (2002), adjustments which are made in the regular class for inclusion of students with disabilities contribute to the well being of the student with the disability.

Accommodations for students with disabilities placed in regular education classes as a part of the inclusion process should be accepted rather than feared (Keller, 1994).

Cullinan (2002) noted that classroom-based support in a regular education class setting

that positively and successfully includes students with disabilities validates the least restrictive environment.

The process of placement to the least restrictive environment begins with the consideration of the student's developmental levels. Activities are selected based on the student's interests and, to a great extent, his or her ability to participate (Tomlinson, Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Moon, & Brimijoin, 2003). Providing services in an educational setting which considers the unique needs of students with disabilities follows a process of including needs expressed by the student when the needs can be expressed. Students are encouraged to use their imagination and to investigate as well as reason to provide connection to instruction.

Inclusion

It is noted that the public schools, since the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, have tried to consistently deliver educational opportunities that are tailored to the individual special needs child. IDEA promotes a system of change for children with disabilities; however, the ultimate responsibility falls on the school to respond to specific individual education needs (National Council on Disability, 2000). Inclusion, a process within that system of instruction, was generated to provide instructional resources for special needs students in regular education classes (Friend, 2006; Taylor, 2005; Petersen & Swan, 1996). In their research of middle school principals' attempts to facilitate inclusion, Petersen & Swan (1996) described inclusion as "a commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and class he or she would otherwise attend if he or she did not have a disability" (p.66). They further described inclusion as bringing the support services to the child rather than

moving the child to the support services, which as a result, will benefit the child by allowing by participation in the general education class.

Within the last ten years, inclusion has become a term in the continuum of least restrictive environments. Although not a term taken from IDEA, according to Friend (2008), inclusion has been mistaken as placement of where students with disabilities sit in a school. Because the student is included in a regular classroom does not necessarily mean the student is following the most appropriate least restrictive placement. Friend (2008) suggests principals and the team work together to determine the most appropriate classroom setting to create an inclusive educational environment for maximum learning. This researcher also indicates that, as a least restrictive environment, inclusion is defined as providing specially designed instruction and supports for students with disabilities within the context of the general education setting. There are many benefits to including students with disabilities, even severe disabilities, in the general education classes (Downing & Eichinger, 2003; Petersen & Swan, 1996), from academic to social and emotional growth. As with all decisions about LRE, decisions regarding inclusion must be based on the individual's need. The Council of Exceptional Children describes the process of inclusion as:

Inclusive practices include interdisciplinary teams for planning, assessment, and instruction; looping of students in the same team for two years; co-teaching by special and general education teachers; and welcome center for immigrant and migrant students. Instruction reaches all students in heterogeneous classrooms because teachers use individualized approaches based on brain research and multiple intelligences. (p.14)

According to Spillane, et al. (1999) together, the principal and teachers create a “culture” for inclusion with a shared vision and with guidance from a strong leader. Again, although “inclusion” does not specifically appear in any of the regulations governing special education, even as early as the 1975 version of the law, the purpose of IDEA was to educationally “include” the special education students in the least restrictive environment wherever possible (Crockett, 2002; NAESP, 2001). The culture of inclusion provides the atmosphere for change in the educational process as well as acceptance of disabled students. As stated by Doyle (2001), principals need to know how to work with staff to establish ownership of issues involved in inclusion. This will bring about the deep changes necessary to create an inclusive environment for students with disabilities. Praisner (2003) pointed out when the attitude of the school administration is positive and committed to inclusion, opportunities for segregation of students with disabilities from their peers while receiving services from special educators decreases and the increased amount of time in regular education has positive consequences.

Special education and regular education teachers recognize the growing need to strengthen the process of inclusion and first consider the instructional adjustments which will have the greatest impact on students (Spillane et al., 1999). To provide for success, accommodations, and curriculum adaptations for students who are identified as having a disability must be considered prior to placing them in a general education class to provide provisions for their success. Together, the teachers then select methods for individuals with disabilities to learn. They cultivate a teacher/student relationship which drives classroom instruction and fosters the spirit of inclusion in the school (Baglieri & Knof, 2004).

Considerations regarding inclusion that the school principal encounters include the availability of supplemental aids or service personnel the student will receive while placed in general education classes. Another possible consideration is the negative effect of the cognitive level of the student with the disability could have on the instructional process in the regular education classroom (Thomason, 1994). To manage these considerations, the principals' knowledge of IDEA gives them the flexibility to advocate for students with disabilities by acquiring essential service providers and ensuring teachers are informed about aids and accommodation to support students with disabilities (CEC, 2001).

Principals' Compliance to IDEA

Monitoring

Monitoring requires periodic review of the special education procedures as well as reviewing individual student records regarding the student's acquisition of services and placement in their least restrictive environment. The documentation of the implementation of a free and appropriate education is always under scrutiny and is subject to proof of evidence until schools meet compliance standards of the provisions set forth in IDEA.

Procedural safeguards in the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act 2004 (IDEIA), the reauthorization of IDEA not only emphasize the process of positive compliance monitoring, but place a distinct emphasis on positive results. Although the procedural safeguards are clearly defined in the law, compliance monitoring is also described to determine adherence to IDEA (Yell, 2006). The National Council on Disability (NCD) (2000) describes the IDEA compliance enforcement scheme as "created to address both systematic and individual compliance problems" (p.20).

According to the NCD report, it becomes the responsibility of the local school principal to implement compliance procedures.

In research by Thomason (1994) three factors were considered as positive contributions to compliance to IDEA: 1) whether the school district has made reasonable efforts to accommodate the child in a regular classroom; 2) the educational benefits available to the child in a regular class, with appropriate supplementary aids and services, as compared to the benefits provided in a special education class; and 3) the possible negative effects of the inclusion of the child on the education of other students in the class.

Timely access to appropriate and accessible instructional materials is inherent in a public agency's obligation under IDEA to ensure that educational services are available to all children with disabilities to enable them to participate in the general curriculum consistent with their IEPs. Yet, during a six state sample monitoring of compliance procedures in schools by the National Council on Disability (2000), it was found that all six states either failed to ensure compliance or simply ignored the procedures defined in the law. The school principal's knowledge of IDEA is reflected in the compliance audit of the implementation of inclusion for students in special education.

Due Process

In order to maintain a protocol for policy and to ensure the rights of the students covered by IDEA, procedural safeguards are designed to implement a system of procedures guaranteed by the law. IDEA provides the procedural safeguards for special education compliance to due process which includes:

- Timely and accurate teacher referrals for students suspected as having learning difficulty
- Parent participation at meetings including IEP notifications
- Prior notice for referrals, evaluations, or conferences
- Rights to Due Process (notification)
- Complaint Management system
- Least Restrictive Environment provided as individualized choice
- Independent educational evaluations
- Right to safeguards in discipline matters (IDEIA 2004)
- Explanation of the IEP Process (for those who need not attend) – (IDEIA 2004)
- Due Process Hearing
- Student record inspection
- Method to prevent disproportionate ethnic special needs students
- Recover attorney's fees.

Due Process is defined as a “procedure in which an aggrieved party has the right to present facts that will be heard by an impartial hearing officer” (IDEA, 2004; Karnes, 1991). The right to due process ensures equal treatment for children with disabilities and is the principle vehicle for resolving conflicts between the school district and the student (Comstock-Galagan & O’Connell, 2002). In this formal due process, arguments and evidence are presented from all parties. Due process procedures are technical in nature and time consuming (Gartin & Murdick, 2005) and once a due process request is made, only a hearing officer can refuse to proceed. The inherent problems of due process can be

costly and antagonistic (Bateman & Bateman, 2001). It is the responsibility of the principal to propose the details of actions for due process with appropriate notification to the parties involved. The process begins at the school level with principals' knowledge of the full continuum of procedural safeguards to due process.

Creating Practices for Special Education Services

Schools cultures are shaped by the individuals in the school. Bauer and Brown (2006) contend "principals bring about a cohesive, shared consensus to bond people together in a common cause and to define them as a community, in a way sufficiently loose to allow for individual expression" (p1). The culture provides the atmosphere for change in the educational practices as well as acceptance of students with disabilities. (Spillane et al.,1999; Foriska, 1998). The school principal functions as the supportive leader in the development of teaching practices and their implementation for students with disabilities. It is not always as easy as it sounds. Bauer and Brown (2006) found "this requires that the principal build a vision of an inclusive school culture in which leadership, information, and knowledge are shared" (p.2)

As leaders, principals have a very active role communicating the educational services for students with disabilities to the general community outside of the school (Gallagher, 2006 ;CEC & NAESP, 2001). Advocating for students to parent groups, which can be the strongest voice in expressing the needs for students with disabilities in public schools, is a valuable step in providing services for students with disabilities. Indeed, the principals' concerns when expressed to school district, state, and federal leaders, may help gather valuable recourses for their children. The school leader takes the most active role as advocate for the disabled population and the inclusive process (Bailey

& du Plessis, 1997) which requires principals to go beyond their traditional role and to voice support for a process that is not as visible perhaps as a specific program. It requires a passion and understanding for the needs of diverse group of students (Wicoxen, Cabello & Spagna, 2004) to speak for a community of learners developed within the framework of each individual school environment. Spillane et al. (1999) describes the principals' role as a practice constituted in the dynamic interaction of multiple leaders (and followers) that revolve around particular tasks. Principals utilize activities including newsletters, media releases, and forums to get information to the community regarding specific educational opportunities in the school. An outstanding leader then empowers all in the process as the school moves toward creating a culture for special education service (Van Dover, 1995).

Creating a Team

While it seems an instructional leader is often credited for promoting success in a school, the actual results come from the individuals chosen to surround him/her (Bateman & Bateman, 2002). The school leader establishes a team of individuals to implement all levels of the process providing services defined in IDEA. Together they design goals and objectives of the instructional environment, create schedules of the students, and ensure levels of adaptations for individuals which include support mechanisms (DiPaola, Moran & Thomas (2004). As a part of the planning strategies, the team examines the individual needs of the student with disabilities, identifies specific accommodations, and advocates for the students (Murray, 2004; Nielson, 1997).

Teaching Models

Teaching models vary for teaching students with disabilities. The models include having students scheduled to:

- a regular class with the support of a special education teacher
- special education classes only with a special education teacher
- a regular class with special education teacher and regular education teacher collaborate and work together to design what student will learn
- a regular education class with special education teacher and regular education teacher co-teach, both teachers teaching all students in the class (Friend, 2008, Taylor 2005).

Friend (2008) notes that in order for teachers to be successful, both principals and teachers must be responsible for the co-teaching process. In addition, each of these educators must share the joy and the grief as well as share resources.

Principal knowledge of the options provided through the law is essential to implementing the appropriate teaching models (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Keller, 1994). As explored in research by Keller (1994), schedules are rearranged so that students are in inclusive general education classes and the students are taught by both regular and special educators. Once students are scheduled to general education classes, other adaptations need to be made to meet their need for instructional accommodations (Duvall, 2006; Patton, Jolivette & Ramsey, 2006).

Together, teachers and staff create an environment for inclusion with a shared vision and with guidance from a strong leader. Co-teaching provides the atmosphere for change in the educational process as well as acceptance of disabled students in areas

where they previously have not ventured (Spillane et al. (1999). In the inclusive co-teaching setting, the teachers examine the practices which will suit their students (Scruggs et. al. 2007) and it is their shared responsibility for students with disabilities that drives decisions.

Creating Support Networks

Salisbury and McGregor (2002) recognized that principals are critical to school improvement and that it is the preparation of the school principal that create the conditions for success. Stakeholder support for a setting that includes students with disabilities in a positive way validates the process of implementing special education services. Student support is a process that begins with considering the student's developmental levels and is evaluated based on the student's abilities to process the information taught.

Classroom support is defined as providing the extra assistance needed to plan and administer accommodations (Smith & Leonard, 2005; Keller, 1994). It is important to the implementation of IDEA to determine whether the school has included the child in school programs with non disabled peers to the maximum extent possible (Gartin & Murdick, 2001; Thomason, 1994). According to Cullinan (2002), supportive adjustments made in the LRE and related services contribute to the well being of the student.

Finally, the building and maintaining of support systems is one of many responsibilities of school principals in addressing not only the needs of students with disabilities but also the laws related to the rights of these same students. Principals need an awareness of and opportunities for professional development activities for teachers as well as knowledge of accommodations such as varying degrees of time in regular

education or use of co-teaching which can be incorporated in the structure of implementing an educational program for students with disabilities. Issues the school principal also must consider include the availability of supplemental aids or services the student will receive while in general education classes (Bauer & Brown, 2006; Bateman & Bateman, 2001; Doyle, 2001; Thomason, 1994). The school principal has to be knowledgeable of IDEA, flexible in designing services and encouraging to teachers, parents, and the students involved in order to implement special education services for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

A description of the methods and procedures to be used in the study are presented in this chapter. It includes the research design, participants, the measurement instruments used, the data collection procedures, and analysis of the data.

The purpose of this correlational study is to determine the relationship between the principals' knowledge of IDEA and their implementation of special education services. Specifically, this study seeks to determine if there is a relationship between principals' knowledge of IDEA and their beliefs and practices for the implementation of special education services as well as determine if this knowledge is related to experience, training, and certain demographic characteristics.

This correlational research study will address the following research questions:

1. What is the level of knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of principals in the New Orleans school districts and does this knowledge level vary among districts?
2. Is there is a significant relationship between the principal's knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and their reported beliefs and practices for opportunities to implement special education services for students with disabilities?
3. Is there a relationship between principal's knowledge of Individual's With Disabilities Education Improvement Act and

- a. principal's demographics, including age, gender, percentage of school's enrollment of students with disabilities?
- b. self-reported experience and training?

Research Design

This correlation design study will evaluate relationships between the variable of principal knowledge and beliefs and practice variables. Further, demographic variables as well as reported experience and training variables will be used as factors (independent variables) to determine differences in knowledge of IDEA (dependent variable). This will be accomplished utilizing three survey instruments.

Participants

The sample consisted of 100 principals in public schools throughout the city of New Orleans. Many schools have more than one principal depending on the enrollment and design of the school (Louisiana Department of Education, 2008). The public schools in New Orleans are representative of various types of public schools within one city since Hurricane Katrina, 2005. As cited from the Boston Consulting Group (2007) study:

Twenty months after Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans system of schools bears little resemblance to the pre-storm school system. The new model has a fundamentally different governance structure. The once centralized, district-run school system is now fragmented: 58 public schools are governed by two districts. The RSD operates 22 schools. The OPSB operates five schools. There are 31 charter schools in New Orleans. Eighteen charter schools are linked through six local and national charter networks, and 13 charter schools operate independently.²⁵ Fifty-three

percent of the public schools — educating 57 percent of public school students — are now charters, making New Orleans the urban district with the highest proportion of charter schools in the nation. (p.11)

Approval to collect was granted by the Superintendent from the Louisiana Department of Education. The letter from the State Superintendent, a copy of the letter to the school principal and a copy of the instrument were mailed to the individual School District Superintendents and Charter School Board Presidents to verify informed consent. A cover letter, the instrument and a self-addressed stamped return envelope were mailed to seventy-six schools.

Generalizability of the results should be possible because there is such great diversity of the schools in the New Orleans area. Specifically, there are four school districts considered: Recovery School District, New Orleans Public School, Algiers Charter School Association, and Independent Charter Schools. Each school district and charter is managed by a Superintendent, separate Board of Education, or Board of Directors. Principals were recruited from across the United States after Hurricane Katrina (Boston, 2007). The certification requirements for principal leadership were devised by Louisiana State Department of Education for all schools in the study. The specific characteristics related to generalizability such as type governing body, type of principal education and training, and location of training and prior experience will be assessed to confirm the diversity represented by this sample.

Measurement Instrument

The portion of the Principal Survey (Wakeman, 2005) consists of sections: demographics, training, and beliefs and practices. The sections are:

- Section one contains 8 fill in the blank and closed-ended questions regarding demographics. Categorical responses are given for each of the items.
- Section two has 6 questions related to training and experience, with closed ended questions.
- Section three has 14 questions about beliefs and practices, indicated by :
1=agree, 2=disagree, or 3=no opinion.

Wakeman (2005) limited measurement error with an item by item analysis of the survey items by experts who were not participants in the study. According to Wakeman (2005), the items in the survey were analyzed for content validity by an expert in special education and an expert in educational leadership. It was first piloted to ensure reliability that all questions were interpreted the same way each time administered, answered in the same manner and interpreted the same way each time administered. Each question was rephrased and asked twice. Questions were found to be explicit and clear. The instrument was analyzed for relevance of questions, accuracy, and clarity, as well as word selection. Validity was directly a content validity measure and no other type of validity measure was used. It was built on the conceptual framework and research of the literature for the original study in 2005 by Wakeman. Categories were collapsed based on the principal's beliefs about special education and their knowledge about special education. Factorial

analysis was used to determine the individual as well as simultaneous effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The instrument reflected the variance in the principal's autonomy as it related to their belief of the implementation requirements of IDEA for special education services of students with disabilities.

A Knowledge Survey of Special Education, revised by Copenhagen (2005) from a successful use of the instrument in a study by Hirth 1988 was used to "determine areas of deficiency of principals' knowledge of special education law". Three experts assisted in updating the survey to its current version to reflect special education law, IDEA. All three experts agreed on the revisions to the instrument. The instrument consisted of 30 true/false items. Principals were given 1 point for correct answers only. An incorrect answer yielded a score of 0. It was possible, therefore to score a maximum of 30 points. A "not sure" option was included to determine if a number of principals were uncertain about specific topics in special education law, thus potentially affecting their implementation of services for students with disabilities. There were 15 items pertaining to procedural safeguards in the law (items # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 26, 28, 30). The remaining 15 items pertained to educational services (items # 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29).

A section of five items was developed and included to gather more specific demographic and experience information than provided by the Wakeman instrument. Additional items provided an overview of specific practices related to special education culture (collaboration, for example) within the New Orleans schools.

Permission to use the survey instruments was granted by Wakeman (2005), Copenhagen (2005) and Hirth (1988).

Data Analysis

Descriptive analyses and ANOVA were used to address Research Question 1 regarding the level of knowledge of IDEA of principals in the New Orleans school districts and their level of knowledge and whether this knowledge level varies among districts. For Research Question 2, Pearson correlations determined if there was a significant relationship between the principal's knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and their reported beliefs and practices implementing special education services. Multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate Research Questions 3a and 3b as to whether knowledge of IDEA could be predicted by certain personal and school demographics or by self-reported experience and training.

Procedures

The knowledge section of the instrument was comprised primarily of closed-ended questions and true /false items and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. Instruments was distributed and collected at a monthly meeting of New Orleans principals. Confidentiality of all persons associated with this study was maintained. The responses were anonymous. Approval was granted by the Human Subject Committee at the University of Southern Mississippi and participant's rights protected in accordance with the Human Subjects Committee. No names or other identifying statements were asked on the questionnaire. By completing the instrument and returning it in the mail, it is implied those respondents gave this researcher permission to use the information provided for this study. All data was maintained in a secure location, only accessible to the researcher and dissertation committee members.

Dissemination

Results of the study will be shared with school superintendents, if requested, to determine the need for future professional development for school principals on IDEA 2004 which impacts services to students with disabilities. While fulfilling the responsibility to meet federal, state and district requirements, principals must ensure that teachers are provided with information necessary for students to receive appropriate educational services, as well as have teachers collaborate with each other on the educational objectives designed for individual students.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the school principal's knowledge of IDEA and the reported implementation of IDEA services for students with disabilities. Specifically, it sought to determine if there is a relationship between school principals' knowledge of IDEA and their beliefs and practices for the implementation of special education services, as well as determine if this knowledge is related to experience, training, and certain demographic characteristics. A survey instrument was used to collect the data. It consisted of items related to: demographics, training, and beliefs and practices, built on the conceptual framework and research of the literature and taken from the original study by Wakeman (2005). Also used was a Knowledge Survey of Special Education, revised by Copenhaver (2005) from the research by Hirth (1988) on special education law. An additional section was added to the survey to indicate demographics specific to the New Orleans area schools.

Description of Respondents

Research was limited to schools in the New Orleans area and the principals in the separate school districts within the area. There were four school districts considered: Recovery School District, New Orleans Public School, Algiers Charter School Association, and Independent Charter Schools. For the purpose of data analysis, all Charter schools were grouped together. The 100 survey instruments were mailed to the sample recipients and a follow-up presentation was made at the monthly principals' meeting for each school district or charter school general meeting to request return of the survey instruments. Of those 100, 75 were returned, yielding a 75% return rate. The

principals indicated a range of experience from 1 year to 29 years as a principal, with the largest number of individuals having 1 (21.3%) or 2 years (17.3%) experience (see Table 1). Many (52%) were not principals of schools prior to Hurricane Katrina (see Table 2). More than half of the principals who responded are female (60%) and 40% are male. The percentage of respondents was distributed relatively evenly across the age categories: 51-60 years (28%), 41-50 (25.3%) and 31-40 (32%).

Table 1

Years as Principal in New Orleans Area Schools

Years	<i>f</i>	%
1-5	50	66.6
6-10	10	13.2
11-15	6	8.0
16-25	9	11.8

Table 2

Principals in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina

Principals in New Orleans Prior to Hurricane Katrina	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	36	48.0
No	39	52.0
Total	75	100.0

Principals indicated they had experience at multiple levels during their career. The majority of the experience reported by the principals was elementary (73.3%), middle

(57.3%) and senior high (42.7%). Only 13% of the 75 principals had special education certification, however, 29.3% reported having had higher education courses in special education. The large majority of the principals (88%) had formal special education workshops in the last two years.

The type of school in which principals in the New Orleans area were assigned were divided into three groups, Charter (30.7%), City/District (24%), State Operated (45.3%) As shown in Table 3, there was a great deal of variability (8% minimum, 12.45% maximum) in the percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in the different types of school. More than two-thirds (69%) of the principals reported having had personal experience with a person with disabilities (see Table 4).

Table 3

Mean percent of Students with Disabilities

Type of School	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Charter	8.0455	22	5.85115
City/District	9.8750	16	9.82429
State	12.4516	31	10.88375
Total	10.4493	69	9.37540

Table 4

Personal Experience with Individual with Disability

Experience w/disability	<i>f</i>	%
Valid Yes	52	69.3
No	23	30.7
Total	75	100.0

Research Questions

This correlational study sought to answer three research questions regarding the principals' knowledge of IDEA and the relationship this knowledge has to implementing services for students with disabilities. The questions were:

1. What is the level of knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of principals in the New Orleans school districts and does this knowledge level vary among districts?
2. Is there is a significant relationship between the principal's knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and their reported beliefs and practices for opportunities to implement special education services for students with disabilities?
3. Is there a relationship between principal's knowledge of Individual's With Disabilities Education Improvement Act and
 - a. principal's demographics, including age, percentage of school's enrollment of students with disabilities?
 - b. self-reported experience and training?

Research Question 1.

What is the level of knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of principals in the New Orleans school districts and does this knowledge level vary among districts?

The survey consisted of 30 true /false statements regarding IDEA. Answer choices were true, false, and unsure. None of the principals answered all thirty questions correctly. Table 5 indicates that the responses ranged from 2.6% of the principals who answered between 6-10 items correctly, 66.6% who answered 11-20 items correctly, and 30.7% who correctly answered 21-24 items. The overall percentage of IDEA knowledge items correct was 60% for the total principal respondents.

Table 5

Number of Knowledge Correct (n=75)

Number Correct	<i>f</i>	%
6-10	2	2.6
11-20	50	66.6
21-24	23	30.7
25-30	0	0

The ANOVA results of the number of knowledge responses correct indicates a significant difference in number of knowledge items correct between the type district ($F(2, 72)=3.24, p=.045$). Whereas there was little difference in the Charter and City and the District school mean scores of number correct (17.3, 17.2, respectively), the State

Operated schools had a greater number correct with a mean of 19.4 and a narrower range in minimum and maximum correct than the other groups. The overall mean for knowledge items for all principals, regardless of district, was 18.2 items.

For more generally addressing this research question, the knowledge items were separated into two subscales of procedural safeguards and implementing education services, as proposed by Copenhaver, 2005. Of the 30 items, there are 15 items pertaining to procedural safeguards in IDEA (items # 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 26, 28, 30). The remaining 15 items pertain to implementing educational services (items # 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29) and are related to practices of the principal in providing services to students with disabilities.

The analysis of the responses also provided the number of unsure responses for either procedural type items or service implementation items, but these responses were not scored as incorrect. Table 8 indicates the responses for category of procedural safeguards. Correct responses for procedural safeguards ranged from 96% correct responses for parental permission for special education consideration, to only 13% of the responses that were correct regarding parental permission to change the student's special education placement. The items which were specific to parental participation in IDEA yielded a range of correct scores of 13% to 53%.

Table 6

Responses to Knowledge Items – Procedural Safeguards (n=75)

Knowledge Item	Correct		Incorrect		Not Sure	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1. Comprehensive evaluation must be conducted	66	88.0	8	10.7	1	1.3
2. Parents must give consent	72	96.0	2	2.7	1	1.3
3. Non-discriminatory evaluation	69	92.0	5	6.7	1	1.3
4. Written parent permission required to re-evaluate	26	34.7	48	64.0	1	1.3
5. Written parent permission required for placement	10	13.3	63	84.0	2	2.7
6. Due process hearing is an administrative hearing	29	38.7	38	50.7	8	10.7
7. Law allows award of attorney fee to parents	32	20.0	28	37.3	15	20.0
12. Parents bear the burden of proof in placements	40	53.3	25	33.3	10	13.3
13. In Louisiana , students suspended up to10 days	62	82.7	12	16.0	1	1.3
15. IEP meeting held without parent attempts.	59	78.7	13	17.3	3	4.0
17. IEP meeting required to place at another School	36	48.0	37	49.3	2	2.7
18. La. students suspended long term for behavior	40	53.3	31	41.3	4	5.3
26. Removal of student 10 days have a BIP and FBA	63	84.0	6	8.0	6	8.0
28. IEP within 30 days of eval. and 90 days of referral.	49	65.3	13	17.3	13	17.3
30. Student 18 has procedural safeguard rights	47	62.7	13	17.3	15	20.0

The principals' correct responses to the items regarding implementation of educational services in Table 9 ranged from 20% to 93%. Items specifically related to the IEP had 53% to 63% correct responses. Only 28% of the principals responded correctly to whether "inclusion"

is required by the law, although 93% answered correctly regarding the LRE clause for students with disabilities to be educated with their peers in regular education.

Table 7

Responses to Knowledge Items – Service Implementation (n=75)

Knowledge Item	Correct		Incorrect		Not Sure	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
8. Students educated in regular education.	70	93.3	4	5.3	1	1.3
9. Student educated where attended if not disabled.	66	88.0	8	10.7	1	1.3
10. "Inclusion" required by IDEA.	21	28.0	49	65.3	5	6.7
11. IEP change the amount of services LRE	47	62.7	23	30.7	5	6.7
14. Goals and objectives of regular teacher in the IEP.	63	84.0	8	10.7	4	5.3
16. Law presumes curriculum is standard course of study	53	70.7	16	21.3	6	8.0
19. Students may not be excluded from school athletics.	58	77.3	15	20.0	2	2.7
20. US Supreme Court ruled guarantees instruction.	15	20.0	56	74.7	4	5.3
21. Students must be provided special education.	15	20.0	58	77.3	2	2.7
22. School system is liable for diagnostic medical.	33	44.0	36	48.0	6	8.0
23. District provides Clean Intermittent Catheterization.	36	48.0	22	29.3	17	22.7
24. Transportation part of free appropriate education.	56	74.7	12	16.0	7	9.3
25. Court cases held students not entitled to summer program	50	66.7	17	22.7	8	10.7
27. The BIP is part of the IEP	43	57.3	25	33.3	7	9.3
29. At age 14, transition service included in IEP	40	53.3	18	24.0	17	22.7

Research Question 2

Is there a significant relationship between the principal's knowledge of IDEA and their beliefs and practices about opportunities to implement special education services for students with disabilities?

Beliefs and Practices survey items were divided based on work by Wakeman (2005) into 8 items on beliefs and 7 items on principal practices (Table 8, Table 9). Each item of belief and practice were scored as either "agree"=2, "disagree"=1 or "no opinion"=0. The higher the belief or practice score, the more positive are the beliefs or practices of the respondent. The frequency of agreement in those categories had a range of 86-94% for practices of including students with disabilities in general instruction, and the beliefs of principal responsibilities. Most principals (94%) agreed that teachers are responsible for all students and classroom diversity is welcomed. However, 54.7% of the principals disagree with counting state standardized assessment of students with disabilities in school accountability scores. Only 1%-6% of the principals had "no opinion" on items indicating their belief related to students with disabilities in school.

Agreement with practices items on the survey ranged from 81%-97%. The frequency for principal practices indicated 97% agree that they reflect on actions and decisions. Yet, only 81%, the principals felt they were risk takers. Those responding with "no opinion" regarding practices ranged from 2.7%-6.7%, with the latter percentage indicating no opinion about themselves as risk takers.

Table 8

Principal Beliefs

Principal Beliefs	Agree		Disagree		No Opinion	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Students have access to general curriculum	65	86.7	4	5.3	5	6.7
Students have access to general education	64	85.3	8	10.7	3	4.0
Students are held to high expectations	68	90.7	6	8.0	1	1.3
Teaching students responsibility of all	71	94.7	2	2.7	2	2.7
Principal responsible for student's education	70	93.3	3	4.0	2	2.7
Diversity of students welcomed	71	94.7	2	2.7	2	2.7
All assessment scores should be counted	30	40.0	41	54.7	4	5.3
Principal reflects actions and decisions	70	93.3	4	5.3	1	1.3

Table 9

Principal Practices

Principal Practices	Agree		Disagree		No Opinion	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Principal meets with program teachers.	70	93.3	3	4.0	2.0	2.7
Reflect actions and decisions once a week	73	97.3	0	0.0	2.7	2.7
Consistently promote a culture of inclusion	68	90.7	4	5.3	2.0	2.7
Participate regularly in student IEP meetings	65	86.7	6	8.0	3.0	4.0
Principal practices program decisions.	63	84.0	9	12.0	2.0	2.7
Provides effective inclusive practices	65	86.7	7	9.3	3.0	4.0
Consider myself a risk taker	61	81.3	9	12.0	5.0	6.7

The sum of the scores for beliefs and practices were analyzed with the number of knowledge items correct to determine if there is a relationship between knowledge of IDEA and the beliefs and practices about opportunities to implement services for students with disabilities. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between principals' beliefs of services for students with disabilities and knowledge of IDEA correct. A weak correlation that was not significant was found ($r(74) = .211, p=.077$). However, a second Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between principals' practices of services for students with disabilities and knowledge of IDEA correct. This correlation was significant ($r(74) = .293, p=.012$). The correlation between belief and practice was also significant ($r(74) = .592, p<.001$).

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between principal's knowledge of Individual's With Disabilities Education Improvement Act and

- a. principal's demographics, including age, gender, percentage of school's enrollment of students with disabilities
- b. Self-reported Experience and Training

Table 11 indicates the frequency and percentage of principals with experience at elementary only (32.7%), middle school only (23.7%), senior high school (34.3%) and multiple levels (60%). The number of knowledge items correct was greater for those who reported working at the elementary school level.

Table 10

Principal Experience School Level

N=75	<i>f</i>	%	% Knowledge Correct
Elementary (only)	18	32.7	73.3
Middle (only)	1	2.3	57.3
Senior (only)	11	34.3	42.7

For Question 3a, multiple linear regressions were used to determine whether knowledge could be predicted from the demographic variables of age, gender, and percentage of students with disabilities in the school. This model was not significant ($F(3, 68) = .377, p = .770$) for the predictors considered together. Further, none of the variables separately were significant predictors of knowledge.

Table 11

Coefficients for Model Demographic Variables

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	17.824	1.958		9.101	.000
	Gender	-.213	.862	-.031	-.247	.806
	Age Category	.241	.386	.077	.624	.535
	Percentage of Students with Disabilities	.040	.046	.109	.876	.384

a Dependent Variable: Number of Knowledge Correct

For question 3b, a second, standard multiple regression was conducted to determine the significance of training, including special education teaching certification, and professional development resources as predictors of knowledge. Regression results indicate that this overall model was also not significant ($F(10, 74)=1.47, p=.169$) nor were any of the individual predictors.

Table 12

Coefficients for Model Training Variables

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	25.342	4.018		6.307	.000
Formal Workshops in 2 Years	.061	.114	.067	.536	.594
Training School	.197	.413	.069	.478	.634
Training State	-.518	.917	-.069	-.565	.574
Training District	-1.782	1.010	-.211	1.765	.082
University	-.307	.981	-.037	-.313	.755
Training Published Resource Internet	-.296	1.000	-.039	-.296	.768
Professional Organization	-1.265	.957	-.164	1.322	.191
Other	-1.747	1.011	-.218	1.729	.089
Special Education Certification	.730	1.587	.063	.460	.647
	-.010	.234	-.006	-.043	.966

Summary

The respondents of this study were 75 principals in the New Orleans area schools. Of the groups, 52% were not principals in schools in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina and the majority of the group currently has 1 to 5 years experience. The principals of public schools are divided into groups by districts: charter schools (30.7%), city /district schools (24%) and state operated schools (45.3%). The descriptive results indicated that 69% of the group had personal experience with individuals with disabilities at some level.

The overall score for all three districts in the study was 60% for number of IDEA knowledge items correct. The relationship of the principals' knowledge of IDEA to their implementation of services for students with disabilities varied for the districts. The ANOVA results indicated there was a significant difference in knowledge of IDEA between the type of school districts. The state operated schools had the greatest number of knowledge items correct. The beliefs and practices of the principals, when measured against their knowledge of the law, showed beliefs had no relationship to what they knew of IDEA. However, the results indicated their self-reported practices had a significant relationship to their knowledge of IDEA. The regression model showed no significant impact of training, personal, or school demographics as predictors of knowledge of IDEA.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The results of the research and discussion of the findings are presented in this chapter. The contributions from the literature, previous studies and recommendations for the future are also included. The purpose of the study was to determine a relationship between the principals' knowledge of IDEA and their implementation of special education services for students with disabilities. It is important for principals to know the law in order to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to move from one point to the next in the public education system.

Results

Three research questions on the principals' knowledge of the law were the focus of this study. The data analysis determined if there was a relationship between the principals' knowledge of IDEA to their demographics, beliefs or practices. Because the entire population of New Orleans principals is relatively small (approximately 100), a typical response rate of 30% would have substantively impacted the analyses used. Thus with the greater response rate, multiple regression was used as an alternative to univariate tests.

There was a 75% return rate by the principals from the New Orleans area schools on the survey instrument developed by Wakeman (2005) and Copenhagen (2005), with a small section developed by the researcher on specifics to the principals assigned to New Orleans area schools. It was noted that only 48% of the sample were principals in New Orleans within the last three years.

Although 69% of the principals indicated they had experience with an individual with disabilities and all reported having at least 8 % of their school's students as those with disabilities, examination of the mean survey score for knowledge of IDEA procedural safeguards and services was equivalent to 60%. correct. The Charter schools and City /District schools scored within close range of each other (57% overall score correct) and the State Operated schools were significantly higher, with 64% overall score correct. This is somewhat smaller than the overall 68% correct that was found by Copenhaver (2005) from North Carolina principals on the same items. However, a higher overall score of 72% was found twenty years earlier by Hirth (1988) on the original survey items. The New Orleans area school principals scored 12% lower on the same knowledge instrument than the scores of the Tennessee principals in the Hirth (1988) study and this raises a concern since the law has been updated over the years. However, the basic fundamentals of procedural safeguards and service implementation in IDEA remain the same. Knowledge of IDEA, then, has dropped over time using three apparently similar samples.

Of the 30 items on the knowledge survey, 15 items pertained to procedural safeguards and 15 items pertained to implementing services. The range of responses was wide with 13-96 % of the items correct. Yet, again as in Copenhaver (2005) and Hirth (2005), those items for which respondents were unsure (6.7% for procedural safeguards and 8.8% for implementing services for students with disabilities) raises concerns. Being uncertain about an item may reflect an uncertainty about what the law requires or allows and this, in turn, may influence practice and implementation of services.

In order to effectively administer a plan or idea you must first believe it can be done. Principals must have a belief that all concerns regarding guaranteeing an education to all students can be achieved. Furthermore, without first having a belief, a practice can not be effectively implemented. Therefore, implementing services for students with disabilities would first require understanding of what principals believed, as well as the ability to put their knowledge of IDEA to practice. Principals were asked to indicate their beliefs and practices for educating students with disabilities. Most principals agreed on the seven items of belief statements, with the exception of an item suggesting the counting of state standardized assessment of students with disabilities in the school accountability score, a finding similar to that of Wakeman (2005). Based on the results of this and other studies, it appears that principals hold students with disabilities to a different standard from students in regular classes by indicating their belief that assessment data of students with disabilities should not be included in the school test scores.

The responses to the practice items on the survey indicated most principals agree on the importance of promoting inclusion (90%) and reflecting on decisions (97%). The principals were unaware that inclusion was not written in the law, yet they answered correctly that students with disabilities were required to be educated with their peers in regular classrooms. The item reflecting the lowest level of agreement of all seven practice items on the survey was that the principal was a “risk taker”. Although (81%) of the group felt take risks in relationship to providing services to students with disabilities, this percentage would warrant further information on whether their ability to take risks was related to the principals’ knowledge of the law. The instrument may have implied the risk may be related to providing services for students with disabilities in regular education

(inclusion). In either case, a principals knowledge of IDEA would address their ability to take a chance on offering options necessary to educate students within the parameters of the law.

Principals' beliefs had no significant relationship to knowledge items, yet principal practice was found significantly related to knowledge items. It is perhaps expected but nonetheless noteworthy that a correlation of belief and practice was found. Principals believe that classrooms should be diverse and they practice inclusion. Although not directly addressed by the research questions in this study, the model of instruction practiced most often by principals in the New Orleans area is the inclusion model of placing students with disabilities in regular education classes with special education teacher support. The other options include regular education without special education teacher support, collaboration of regular and special education teacher in the same classroom or co-teaching (Friend, 2006). The collaboration mode was ranked second by the respondents in this study.

Age, gender, and percentage of students with disabilities together were not significant predictors of the number of knowledge items correct. It was also found that even analyzed separately; these variables were not statistically related to knowledge. Further, the variables of training, special education certification, and professional development showed no significant relationship to knowledge.

Discussion

In order to establish and maintain public educational institutions as the city rebuilds the infrastructure of the public school system in New Orleans, principals need to be knowledgeable on updated and pertinent aspects of the IDEA to offer services to

students with disabilities. Now more than ever, principals in New Orleans area schools have an opportunity to lead their communities by structuring the provision of services for students with disabilities, but it must be done based on a clear knowledge of the federal guidelines. IDEA maps the path to free and appropriate opportunities for students with disabilities in public school.

Knowledge of the IDEA 2004

The fundamental knowledge of special education is essential for principals to promote a positive least restrictive environment for students, collaborate with building staff and teachers, design relevant professional development activities, as well as maintain positive relationships with individuals who assist students with disabilities (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrin-Delzell, 2006). Whereas the findings in this study indicate there is no relationship between training from any source to the knowledge variable, it may be nonetheless important to the issue that the number of knowledge items correct is low for many participants. Many principals responded incorrectly to the items regarding parental permission for services in special education. The number of correct responses was also remarkably low for due process consideration. Because part of due process is parental permission, this low level of knowledge warrants concern since due process applies to all school age students regardless of their educational placement.

Types of schools in the New Orleans area, Charter, City/District, and State Operated showed a marked difference in the number of students with disabilities enrolled. Charter schools, which opened in larger numbers after Hurricane Katrina, had far fewer students with disabilities enrolled even though they are public schools (Boston, 2007). The state operated schools have the largest percentage of students with disabilities

enrolled in the schools .The enrollment criteria should be considered in future research, especially since 48% of the participants were not principals in New Orleans prior to the hurricane. It is also noted that many of the principals have 1-5 years experience. This lack of training and expertise suggest there may be exclusionary practices regarding students with disabilities in public schools.

Principal Compliance to IDEA

The knowledge of IDEA had a direct relationship to practices, but it is suggested in this study that the follow through of practices for students with disabilities may be hindered by the principals' beliefs. All three, knowledge, belief and practice tie together to provide the background for principals to be able to implement the services and educational opportunities for students with disabilities. The school principal needs to be responsive to diversity of students in special education programs as they provide direction for all students in the school. Thus, the principal has the responsibility of selecting a qualified team for instruction, having knowledge of IDEA, creating a culture for least restrictive environment, providing professional development on current issues in special education, and advocating for students with disabilities throughout the school community. Principals will be able to use their expertise in promoting research-based approaches that support children with disabilities if they are knowledgeable about IDEA and practices about special education and related services.

In the knowledge section of the survey, principals were asked to answer true/false items which are based on specific areas of IDEA. The survey items elicited responses from principals on specific guidelines which are related to the implementation of services, beginning with the IEP committee for special education services. Council for

Exceptional Children (1998), in Office of Special Education Programs special projects, noted that “To varying degrees, we know that many students succeed in schools in which strong leaders maintain high standards, rigorous curricula, a sound instructional program, a safe environment, family involvement, and an equitable accountability system”. (p 2)

It is likely, based on the results in this study, that if the strong leaders are well versed in the law and its procedures, he or she, would be more accurate at implementing services for students with disabilities. Provisions under IDEA 2004 deem education for disabled students be provided in a setting determined team, which includes the teacher, the parent, the student, principal and other individuals advocating for the best interest of the student as their least restrictive environment (LRE). As a result of the LRE constant scrutiny, the court decisions regarding it have varied according to the individual cases from state to state (NCD, 2000). Court cases dated back as far as 1819, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, and the well known 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education* influenced appropriate setting for students with disabilities in future legislative actions (Zigmond, 2003).

Providing Services through Classroom Instructional Models

The range of services for students with disabilities has moved from the format of “assembly line” of instruction to a program which caters to the individual (Friend, 2006). The Education of All Handicapped Children Act 1975 set precedents which have been “employed successfully in many instances by parents and other advocates for the students with disabilities in seeking through due process hearings or in the courts to gain access to appropriate educational opportunities for handicapped children” (Karnes & Marquardt, 1991, p.8). Later in 1990, IDEA set specific requirements for the implementation of a

free and appropriate education. “IDEA mandates that school systems respond to the needs of individual children with disabilities making education accessible to them regardless of the severity of the disability” (National Council on Disability , 2000, p.11). The models used in this study ranged from having all special education students receiving services in regular class without the support of a special education teacher to both regular education teacher and special education teacher in the same room sharing responsibilities by “co-teaching”. The majority of the principals indicated using a model of inclusion, where students with disabilities a where placed in regular education classes with the support of special education teacher sharing the instructional responsibilities while providing special education services.

Professional Development

Based on the results of this study, principals need to invest time in practical training to support special education at their school sites. Although the data suggest that principals have positive beliefs about students with disabilities, and report practices consistent with these beliefs, their knowledge of special education law is of some concern. Their knowledge of IDEA can be increased by spending time with their district special education department leaders and IEP committees. Information on various procedures and service implementation is very clearly outlined in IDEA and can be communicated through various sources of training. Districts, state departments of education and universities carry the responsibility of providing updates in the law, as well as current trends to provide services.

Principals must keep up with the time demands of academics. According to the Boston report (2007), “Today, most public schools in New Orleans (charters and

noncharters) enjoy significantly more school-level autonomy than they did before Hurricane Katrina” (p. 29). In order to foster consistency and connection among schools in New Orleans, nonprofit organizations and local universities have begun to provide opportunities for professional and leadership development (Boston, 2007, p.30).

Additionally, the Boston Group notes:

New Leaders for New Schools (NLNS), a national nonprofit organization, has promised to recruit and train 40 school principals over the next four years to lead the city’s public schools. NLNS provides aspiring principals with an intensive summer training program and year-long residency during which they complete a rigorous course of study and build skill sets in instructional and organizational leadership. Principals also receive additional coaching and mentoring for their first two years as a principal (p. 30).

Training through professional development is required to disseminate accurate information. For years we have recognized the growing need to strengthen the process and first train those who will have the greatest impact on students with disabilities. There are future steps to be taken to ensure that principals receive information on current aspects of IDEA and to allow them to move toward creating educational opportunities for students with disabilities within the school:

- Periodically survey the school principal to determine a relationship between prior knowledge and results of compliance audits.
- Prepare local and state reports from monitoring specific to the role of the principal prior to annual IEP updates.

- Ensure that both regular education and special education students are full participants in the school community.
- Take notice to ensure that regular educators and special educators are equal partners in providing instructional opportunities.
- Determine the feasibility of district provisions on training for knowledge of IDEA from college courses, licensure programs or structure professional development training.
- Create a plan of action which incorporates building a broad based regional coalition to include local organizations, school personnel, and community members to keep abreast of current trends and influences on the laws as well as provisions for students with disabilities.
- Include the resources principal can use to communicate aspects of IDEA with parents.

Limitations

All participants are administrators in the New Orleans area schools but many were not residents of the city prior to Hurricane Katrina. Their background information and responses may reflect the procedures from other states. They may be unfamiliar with procedures or specific terminology in Louisiana. IDEA is a federal law and the participants were asked only to respond based on IDEA requirements. The small sample may influence generalizability, however, the diversity in background experiences and training represented by the New Orleans principals may have actually contributed to the external validity of the findings. Mindful of the fact the entire city closed for several months after the hurricane, during the recovery efforts schools reopened in New Orleans

with different configurations based on the returning residential population. Elementary schools were opened as Kindergarten through 4, or kindergarten through 8, or a combination in between (Boston, 2007). Middle schools and high schools were redesigned to have various grades. The demographic information on the instrument only asked for the principals' experience at various levels and all levels that applied could be answered.

The self-reported beliefs and practices responses, as noted by Wakeman (2005), had the potential for bias. Many survey responses, being yes or no, do not fully illuminate the knowledge principals may have of IDEA. Although the participants responded correctly to 60% of the items, because the items were true/false, one might naturally expect 50% correct responses despite the actual knowledge of the principals. The only way of knowing what principals actually know would be to use free response or multiple choice items to contribute to internal validity. For future research a stronger instrument would yield stronger statements about what principals actually know. Also, with half of the principals having very limited experience (1-5 years, many in the first year) this may have influenced the results in terms of relationships of knowledge with age or knowledge with training. The relative novices were combined with the principals who had multiple levels and years of experience in calculating the level of knowledge.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, there is no quick fix to solving the problem of the principals' limited knowledge of IDEA and implementing special education services as reported in this study. The costs are time and patience invested in training, consultation, and the knowledge of the law to improve services for students with disabilities. State and federal

audits will continue to measure the principals leadership in providing services for students with disabilities. Principals' knowledge of IDEA in partnership with parents and teachers will expand the availability of services for students within the school and substantially improve the quality of education for students with disabilities. Principals must understand that special education is not a content area; it is not something that is taught. It is the provision of equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities in a public school environment with the least restrictions possible. Providing special education services involves knowledge of the law and an unwavering belief in the value of educational requirements for students with disabilities.

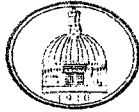
With a greater understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Act principals could advance their responsibility of educating parents and teachers on implementing services. A national study is needed to determine the need for college special education courses required to receive certification as a school administrator. State licensing programs working with colleges and universities would be able to design the course content to link current trends, needs of the local schools as determined by state audits and requirements of the federal government as outlined in IDEA. A school leader becomes an advocate in passing on valuable information to parents for this particular population of students. This requires principals to go beyond their traditional role and voice support for a process that is not to visible as a specific program. It requires knowledge of the law connected to beliefs and practices, along with passion and understanding for the needs of diverse group of students with disabilities so that emphasis can be placed on supporting these students. In order to provide and implement services for students with disabilities effectively in the any school setting, the information on IDEA must be made available to

principals. Principals have a major responsibility to offer and to support multiple service delivery options to students with disabilities to increase the student's learning opportunities in a free public educational system. Transforming knowledge to implementing services will take time.

Despite the fact principals are not as aware of IDEA as they should be; efforts are being made to offer instructional practices, such as inclusion, to give students with disabilities a chance to achieve with their peers. The challenge is to continue to find mechanisms to get information on changes to IDEA, comprehend current trends, and administer viable programs and services for students with disabilities.

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
 Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
 Tel: 601.266.6820
 Fax: 601.266.5509
 www.usm.edu/irb

**HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
 NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION**

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 28073104

PROJECT TITLE: Principals' Knowledge of Idea and Their Implementation of Special Education Services

PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 07/28/08 to 12/01/08

PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation or Thesis

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Karen Smith Collins

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology

DEPARTMENT: Curriculum, Instruction, & Special Education

FUNDING AGENCY: N/A

HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 07/31/08 to 07/30/09

Lawrence A. Hosman

 Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
 HSPRC Chair

7-31-08

 Date

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
(SUBMIT THIS FORM IN DUPLICATE)

Protocol # 28073104
(office use only)

Name Karen Smith Collins Phone (985) 643-3884

E-Mail Address kc917@bellsouth.net

Mailing Address 109 Norfolk Court, Slidell, Louisiana, 70462
(address to receive information regarding this application)

College/Division Curriculum, Instruction, Special Education Dept Special Education

Department Box # 5027 Phone (601)266-6967

Proposed Project Dates: From July 28, 2008 To December 1, 2008
(specific month, day and year of the beginning and ending dates of full project, not just data collection)

Title PRINCIPALS' KNOWLEDGE OF IDEA AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Funding Agencies or Research Sponsors N/A

Grant Number (when applicable) N/A

New Project

Dissertation or Thesis

Renewal or Continuation: Protocol # _____

Change in Previously Approved Project: Protocol # _____

Karen A. Collins 7/28/08
Principal Investigator Date

Francis A. Kanner 7/28/08
Advisor Date

[Signature] 7-28-08
Department Chair Date

RECOMMENDATION OF HSPRC MEMBER

Category I, Exempt under Subpart A, Section 46.101 () (), 45CFR46.

Category II, Expedited Review, Subpart A, Section 46.110 and Subparagraph (f).

Category III, Full Committee Review.

[Signature] 07/28/08
HSPRC College/Division Member DATE

Lawrence A. Hosman 7-31-08
HSPRC Chair DATE

APPENDIX B

STATE DEPARTMENT EDUCATION APPROVAL LETTER



STATE OF LOUISIANA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
POST OFFICE BOX 94064, BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804-9064
Toll Free #: 1-877-453-2721
<http://www.louisianaschools.net>

December 28, 2007

Karen S. Collins
109 Norfolk Court
Slidell, Louisiana 70461

Dear Ms Collins,

Consent is hereby given to you to request schools to participate in the research project entitled "The Effect of Principal Knowledge of IDEA 2004 on the Implementation of Special Education Services" as a requirement of your doctoral dissertation research. The procedure and purpose to be followed were explained with regard to using a survey instrument, developed by Dr. Shawnee Wakeman, UNC Charlotte (2005). It is understood the instrument will be completed by principals and assistant principals in New Orleans area schools while utilizing approximately 15 minutes to answer the items in the instrument.

Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and subjects may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential, and no names will be disclosed. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided, if that information may affect the willingness to continue participation in the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Pastorek", written over a rectangular box.

Paul G. Pastorek
State Superintendent of Education

"An Equal Opportunity Employer"

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY (WAKEMAN, 2005)

From: Shawnee Wakeman



[Print] [Close]

From: "Wakeman, Shawnee" <slwakema@uncc.edu>
 To: <kc917@bellsouth.net>
 Subject: RE: Research Instrument for KCollins Dissertation
 Date: Mon, 17 Dec 2007 01:44:08 +0000

Karen-
 I am sorry for the delay in responding. I am attaching a Word version of the survey as well as the final version (formatted in Survey Pro- a survey software program that your university may or may not have. If they have it, open that version- It is the two page document that was sent to the participants). If you choose to use or modify the survey, I only ask that you cite the original reference accordingly. Good luck with your study.
 Shawnee Wakeman

From: kc917@bellsouth.net [mailto:kc917@bellsouth.net]
 Sent: Thu 12/13/2007 10:42 PM
 To: Wakeman, Shawnee
 Subject: Research Instrument for KCollins Dissertation

Hello Ms. Wakeman:

My name is Karen Collins and I'm working on my dissertation at the University of Southern Mississippi (Hattiesburg, Ms.) and rebuilding the program at Sarah T. Reed Senior High School in New Orleans. It is a school in the Recovery School District (taken over by the La. Department of Ed.) and quite interesting. I began pursuing a doctorate in Special Education and Educational Leadership after Hurricane Katrina to keep focused.

I am looking for an instrument which measures a school principal's knowledge of special education policy. Principals in Louisiana are not required to have course work or training in special education. I am trying to determine a relationship between their prior knowledge of special education and the implementation of services in the school to which they are assigned.

Do you have the instrument used in your study published in June 2006? May I have permission to use it to replicate the study in our school districts? I would greatly appreciate anything you can do to move my research process forward.

Karen S. Collins

kc917@bellsouth.net

Attachment 1: Principal Survey.doc (application/msword)
Attachment 2: Principal surveypro survey.sp3 (application/octet-stream)

<http://webmail.att.net/wmc/v/wm/476748D4000AD9B60000280022230680329B0A02D2089B9A01...> 12/16/2007

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY (COPENHAVER, 2005)

M. Beth Copenhaver, Ph.D.
238 Springwood Drive
Aiken, South Carolina 29803
803 502-1153

May 2, 2008

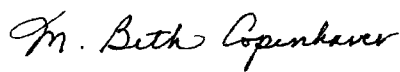
Ms. Karen Collins
109 Norfolk Court
Slidell, Louisiana 70461

Dear Karen:

As per your request, I am granting permission for you to replicate portions of my 2005 research and dissertation entitled *Survey of North Carolina Principals' Knowledge of Special Education Law*. In addition, I am granting permission for you to use my survey entitled *A Knowledge Survey of Special Education Law*. As you are aware, my survey was modified from Dr. Marilyn A. Hirth's 1988 survey and research entitled *Principals' Knowledge of Public Law 94-142 and Significant Court Litigation in the Area of Special Education at the University of Memphis*.

I wish you well in your research and doctoral work.

Sincerely,



M. Beth Copenhaver, Ph.D.

Section III Beliefs and Practices

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements. For the purposes of this survey, inclusion is defined as the commitment to educate each child to the maximum extent appropriate in the school or classroom he or she would otherwise attend if not disabled (Rogers, 1993). *

Given the current diversity of students in schools and accountability levels, is it reasonable to expect that:	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
1. All students have access to the general curriculum.			
2. All students have access to instruction in a general education classroom.			
3. All students are held to high expectations.			
4. Teaching all students is the responsibility of all teachers.			
5. The principal is responsible for the education of all students at their school.			
6. The diversity of students should be welcomed in every classroom.			
7. All students' assessment scores should count in school accountability scores.			
7. As a principal I reflect on my actions and decisions at least once a week.			
In regards to special education programs and students within my school, I:			
1. Regularly (once a month or more) meet with program teachers and staff.			
2. Reflect on my actions and decisions at least once a week.			
3. Consistently promote a culture of inclusion.			
4. Participate regularly in student IEP meetings.			
5. Participate regularly (once a month or more) in program decisions.			
6. Provide resources for effective instructional practices for inclusive teachers.			
7. Consider myself a risk taker.			

* Rogers, J. (1993) The inclusion revolution. Research Bulletin, 34, 1-6.
Instrument Author: Shawnee I. Wakeman, Ph.D
University of North Carolina at Charlotte (2005)

Specific Practices for Special Education Services New Orleans Area Schools

1. Please indicate the **type of public school:** Charter City/District State Operated
2. Are you required to monitor special education records for educational placements in the school?
 Yes No
3. Did you create procedures and processes in order for students with disabilities to receive services specified on the IEP?
 Yes No
4. Please indicate the model of instructional practices for students with disabilities utilized at the school:
select one
 Students are placed in all regular education class with the support of a special educator.
 Students are placed in all regular education class **without** the support of a special educator
 Collaboration (regular educator and special educators work together to design what students will be taught).
 Co-Teaching (regular educators and special educators teach together in the same classroom).
 Students are placed in special education classes only.
5. Were you a principal in the New Orleans area prior to Hurricane Katrina of 2005?
 Yes No

A Knowledge Survey of Special Education Law

This survey is designed to determine principals' understanding of special education laws and procedures. Please do NOT consult other sources before answering.

Please use a pencil or black pen to "bubble" answers to the following statements as **true, false or not sure**. In no way does this survey mean to imply that principals should interpret the law as stated in the question, since some are true and some are false.

ITEM	True	False	Not Sure
1. A comprehensive evaluation of a student's educational needs must be conducted before any action is taken to initially place the student in special education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Prior to an initial comprehensive evaluation, parents must give their consent, be notified of their procedural rights, and be provided with an explanation of what has and will take place, including a description of each proposed evaluation activity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Non-discriminatory evaluation is a requirement under due process safeguards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Written permission from the parent is required to re-evaluate a child receiving special education and related services.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Written permission of the parent is required to change the educational placement of a student receiving special education and related services.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. A "due process" hearing under special education law is an administrative hearing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Special education laws allow the award of attorney's fees to parents who prevail in special education lawsuits against school districts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. As part of the "least restrictive environment" clause, students with disabilities and non-disabled students must be educated together unless the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular classroom cannot be achieved satisfactorily.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Unless a student's Individualized Educational Program (IEP) stipulates otherwise, the student with disabilities is educated in the school he or she would attend if not disabled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. "Inclusion" is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Following the "least restrictive environment" concept, an Individual Education Program (IEP) team may change the amount of services a student receives (e.g., from resource to "separate" special education class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Parents bear the burden of proof when the local education agency (LEA) proposes an educational placement that would involve partial or full removal of their child from his age mates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. At the present time in Louisiana, a special education student may be suspended for up to 10 days (cumulative) without the suspension(s) being considered as a "change of placement", triggering special education procedural safeguards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Goals and objectives from the student's regular education teachers may be included in the IEP, even though this is not common practice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. An IEP team meeting may be held without the parents in attendance if the LEA is unable to convince the parents to attend and if the LEA has documented notification attempts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. The law presumes that the curriculum for students with disabilities is the standard course of study where the student attends school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

ITEM	True	False	Not Sure
17. An IEP team meeting is required before placing a student with disabilities who has moved in from another school system.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. At the present time in Louisiana, a special education student may be long-term suspended from attending school and receive no educational services during the long-term suspension, if the IEP team determines that both of the following conditions are met: a. The misbehavior was NOT caused by the student's disability. b. The educational placement of the student was appropriate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. Students with disabilities may not be excluded from any athletic activity conducted by a school receiving federal funding as long as the student is "otherwise qualified" to participate. "Otherwise qualified" means that the student is qualified to participate in spite of his or her disability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that school systems are required to guarantee that individualized instruction will maximize the potential of each student with a disability, commensurate with the opportunities provided students who are not disabled.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. Special education and related services must be provided to all students with disabilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. A school system is liable to pay for medical services provided by a licensed physician, if the medical services are diagnostic and needed to determine eligibility, which then results in the students' need for special education and related services.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. If a student requires the provisions of Clean Intermittent Catheterization (CIC) in order to be able to attend school, a school district is not required to pay for the provision of this service.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. The provision of special transportation services to students with disabilities has been viewed by the courts to be part of a free appropriate public education (FAPE).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. The majority of court cases have held that students with disabilities are not entitled to a summer program to prevent regression of progress made during the regular school year., since non-disabled students also regress during the summer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26. If a student is removed from the school for disciplinary reasons for more than 10 school days during a school year or a removal that constitutes a change in placement, the school must develop an individualized behavior intervention plan (BIP) based upon the findings of the students' functional behavioral assessment (FBA).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. The behavior intervention plan is part of the IEP; therefore, the IEP team must develop the BIP.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. For a child with a disability not yet receiving special education services, the IEP must be developed within 30 days of a determination that the child requires special education services. The IEP must be implemented as soon as possible following the IEP team meeting but not exceed 90 days after the referral date for special education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. Beginning at age 14, a statement of transition service needs of the student that focuses on the students' course of study must be included in the IEP. Any necessary interagency linkages do not have to be included in the IEP until the student is 16 years old.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. A student who is eighteen years or older has the same rights regarding procedural safeguards that his parents or guardians previously ha (prior to turning 18).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Instrument Author: Dr. M. Beth Copenhaver (2005) Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana

Thank you for taking the time to answer all the questions on this survey. I appreciate your assistance with this study.

Please return this survey to **Karen Collins** in the enclosed envelope.

Scoring Key: A Knowledge Survey of Special Education Law

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| 1. TRUE | 16. TRUE |
| 2. TRUE | 17. TRUE |
| 3. TRUE | 18. FALSE |
| 4. FALSE | 19. TRUE |
| 5. FALSE | 20. FALSE |
| 6. TRUE | 21. FALSE |
| 7. TRUE | 22. TRUE |
| 8. TRUE | 23. FALSE |
| 9. TRUE | 24. TRUE |
| 10. FALSE | 25. FALSE |
| 11. TRUE | 26. TRUE |
| 12. FALSE | 27. TRUE |
| 13. TRUE | 28. TRUE |
| 14. TRUE | 29. TRUE |
| 15. TRUE | 30. TRUE |

APPENDIX F
LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Karen S. Collins
Graduate Student
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, Special Education
University Of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39406-0001

August ____, 2008

Principal and Assistant Principal

_____ School
New Orleans, Louisiana

Dear Principal:

I am a graduate student pursuing an Ed.D. in Special Education at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am currently developing a research project studying the effect of school principal knowledge of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) on the implementation of special education services.

The purpose of this survey is to identify the school principal's understanding of special education issues using a survey instrument. It will take approximately 15 minutes to answer the items in the instrument. Permission to conduct the survey has been granted by Paul Pastorek, Louisiana Department of Education Superintendent of Education.

I also want to assure you that principal and assistant principal involvement is paramount and confidentiality will be totally assured. The data will only be used for this research.

Thank you for your assistance with this study. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at (504) 908-2267.

Sincerely,


Karen S. Collins

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