

A Case Study of the Patterns of Practice Used to Provide Access to the  
General Curriculum for Secondary Students with Disabilities

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(ABSTRACT)

The multi-case analysis utilized in this study describes how specially-designed instruction is being used to ensure that secondary students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are participating and progressing within it. Bronfenbrenner's (1976) systemic model that presents interacting sub-systems in a series of nested educational environments was used as a guide for exploration. Case study schools included two high schools that serve partially suburban and partially rural communities within one school district. Review of documents, observations, and interviews were used to triangulate the data. Evolving display matrices were used to analyze the data. The matrix displays evolved as authentic categories emerged from within each case and across the two cases, and from within each level and across the four levels of the educational environment. To note differences, the data from two case schools as well as from the four educational environments were compared and contrasted.

The consistent patterns of practice found at all levels of the educational environment included: (a) identifying and implementing accommodations and modifications needed for students with disabilities, (b) initiating special education and regular education collaboration activities, (c) monitoring student learning, (d) examining placement, and (e) providing professional development training.

The findings from this study also revealed that the origin of the patterns of practice began at the macro-system level, or at the state department of education. It was found that the state policy context addressing the federal mandate is built on the vision of enabling students with

disabilities to access the general curriculum. In addition, it was determined that the strategies to meet this vision are designed around the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. The conclusions suggest that the patterns of practice throughout the total high school environment of District A are initiated through state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures, and support the participation and progress within the general education curriculum of secondary students with disabilities. A pattern of concern related to cluster grouping of inclusion students in secondary classrooms and their opportunities for *genuine* access to the general curriculum was noted.

## DEDICATIONS

### For Jeff

I remember when you were little and when you tried to learn to read. I remember how hard it was for you to make sense of the letters printed on the page and all the many sounds you heard. I remember how you struggled day after day and how you felt like giving up. In the end, you did not go by what you felt, saw, or heard. Instead, you confronted the learning disability, dyslexia, and blindness in your eye and you persevered. You learned to read, but you learned differently. You ended up being taught in a way that offered compensation for the effects of your disabilities. Today, I love to hear you read and I am proud of your determination and aspiration. I only wish for others, who might have similar disabilities, the success that you have found.

### For Grandmother Alice

We saw your students at your funeral and the tears on each face. They sat on the front row and their sobs let us know how much you were missed. Our hearts grieved for our loss; but what we saw in the faces of the children made us realize your work will continue to live on.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

The 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) placed a new emphasis on ensuring that students with disabilities had access not only to public education but also to the general education curriculum. According to Congress, this new focus was intended to place attention on the accommodations and adjustments necessary for students with disabilities to access and participate in the general education curriculum (Senate Report, 1997). The critical issue in 1997 that directed this new emphasis, however, was accountability for improvement in the educational achievement of students with disabilities. In response to this issue, Congress mandated the inclusion of students with disabilities in state and district-wide assessments (Yell, 1998). As a result, schools throughout the nation face the challenge of ensuring that individually appropriate approaches are used to enable students with disabilities to access the general education curriculum and to demonstrate educational achievement as specified by each state. The State of Virginia has become a leading proponent of accountability as evidenced by its high stakes Standards of Learning (SOL) testing program.

The federal mandate requiring all special education students to have access to the general curriculum and to be included in state and district-wide assessments should help to ensure that many more disabled students will become independent, productive individuals who will be socially included in their communities (Senate Report, 1997). If patterns of practice that focus on individualization are not used, then students with disabilities may actually be in greater danger of not reaching their full academic potential and being able to develop the necessary skills to live in an independent, productive, and socially included manner (Crockett, 1999; Crockett & Kauffman, 1999). For example, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) committee may

believe that a student with a disability is receiving access to the general curriculum simply because the SOLs are being taught and tested. The IEP committee may not realize that appropriate individualization is not being provided to help the student successfully learn the general curriculum. One former special education student who was diagnosed as being legally blind in one eye and having dyslexia shared that he is successful today because of the individualization he received:

I am a successful paramedic today because of the strong special education program of which I was a part. In the late 1970s when I was in fifth grade, I could not read at all. I got on a bus and rode 60 minutes to a school in the next city. I was later placed in self-contained classes in my home school, and then in regular classes with the opportunity to receive help in a resource room. I learned how to read, how to organize, how to communicate effectively, and most importantly how to learn. Every child wants to be included. Socialization is part of it, but obtaining the life skills I needed could only come through intensive individualization. I needed one-on-one instruction. (J. B. Cutler, personal communication to C. C. Whitehurst, January 22, 2000)

Through his IEP, Cutler believed he obtained the skills he needed to be successful in the regular classroom and as an adult in the community. Cutler was given the individualized instruction and the services that allowed him the opportunity as a high school student to learn what students in his own school were learning. Cutler felt he was successfully provided access to the general education curriculum. This provision enabled him to become an independent, productive person who became socially included in his school and in his community. Cutler now worries, however, that students with disabilities may not be given appropriate access to the

general curriculum due to a lack of individualization (J. B. Cutler, personal communication to C. C. Whitehurst, January 22, 2000).

This concern for lack of individualization is also evident among educators. Crockett (1999) noted, “There are concerns among American teachers and administrators about confusing the ethics of ensuring educational access and accountability with providing effective programming that is reasonably calculated to provide individual students with educational benefit” (p. 12). Access to the general curriculum must be understood as being more than teaching and testing the SOLs to students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Access to the general curriculum must be understood as individually tailoring the special education student’s instruction to enable the student to learn the skills and concepts in the general curriculum. When patterns of practice that focus on individually specific instruction are used, the emphasis of the IDEA of 1997 requiring all students with disabilities to have access to the general curriculum can be considered as an additional protection ensuring a fuller educational benefit to those students.

#### Statement of the Problem

It is only natural for children to have the desire to become independent, productive individuals who are socially included in their communities. Children who are disabled possess those same natural desires. When high schools do not ensure access to the general curriculum to students who are disabled, those students are in danger of not being able to achieve their desires of living a life that is independent, productive, and socially included. If high schools do not implement the federal mandate of access to the general curriculum by using patterns of practice that focus on individualization, students with disabilities have a greater chance of living in handicapped situations. Laurence Liberman (in Crockett & Kauffman, 1999) stated:

Special education is for people with disabilities who are in danger of becoming handicapped if they do not receive special services. Why do specialists provide orientation and mobility training for blind children, sometimes in special settings?

Because they are trying to prevent the handicap of not being able to move in space from developing in a disabled person. Why do we pull students with learning disabilities out of class? We are trying to prevent the handicap of not being able to read from developing in a disabled child. That is why we do special education. We are trying to prevent handicaps from developing in students with disabilities. (pp. 163-164)

The federal mandate requiring all special education students to have access to the general curriculum should ensure that students with disabilities are given the instruction and services that are needed to allow them the opportunity to learn what their peers in regular education classes are learning. If high schools, however, are not implementing the federal mandate appropriately using patterns of practice that emphasize individualization, then students with disabilities may have a greater chance of becoming handicapped.

As stated earlier, the emphasis on access to the general curriculum was directed toward helping students with disabilities to improve in the area of educational achievement that could be measured in state and district-wide assessments. This emphasis on accountability was later strengthened through The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) Act of 2001. The first principle in the act stressed stronger accountability for results. The fourth principle in the act, stressed the importance of schools utilizing programs that were scientifically research based and proven. Based also on the first principle of the NCLB Act, high school personnel must ensure that students with disabilities are equipped to be successful in state and district-wide assessments. The implication can further be made, based on the fourth principle of the act, that equipping

students with disabilities to be successful in state and district-wide testing programs hinges on the utilization of practices that have been proven to be effective.

The task of ensuring that the general curriculum is taught with appropriate, or individualized, accommodations and modifications and that the level of student achievement is measured through state and district-wide assessments will help provide complete access to the general curriculum with accountability, for students with disabilities. Accordingly, patterns of practice used to help students with disabilities to access the general curriculum at the high school level were examined in this study.

### Legal Foundations

The purpose of the IDEA is to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and to prepare them for employment and independent living (34 C.F.R. § 330.1). Children with disabilities, however, have not always benefited from such a right and opportunity as specified by law today in the United States. People with physical and mental disabilities have been the object of oppression and discrimination throughout history (Tucker, 1998). Even with the creation of a public school system in the United States, millions of children with disabilities were not afforded the opportunity to enroll in public schools. “As recently as 1958 and 1969, the courts upheld legislation that excluded students whom school officials judged would not benefit from public education or who might be disruptive to other students” (Yell, 1998, p. 54).

It was not until the last half of the twentieth century that laws were established in the United States to protect the dignity and rights of people with disabilities. In the early 1970s, Congress conducted a study to examine the need for a national policy for the education of

children with disabilities. The findings of the Congressional study indicated that federal intervention was necessary (Tucker, 1998) and supported the need for the passing of P.L. 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), in 1975. It was due to the EAHCA that enrollment in public education became a guaranteed right for the disabled student (Harris & Mamlin, 1998).

#### *Defining Free Appropriate Public Education*

The EAHCA stipulated that all students with disabilities were to receive a free appropriate public education. The EAHCA also included a funding mechanism to help local school districts meet the needs of students with disabilities (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). In interpreting the law, it was clear that free and public meant that students with disabilities were to receive an education in a public school at no cost to the parent. It was not completely clear, however, what the meaning of appropriate was (Bateman & Linden, 1998). As a result, the U.S. Supreme Court interpreted the law as follows:

Insofar as a State is required to provide a handicapped child with a “free appropriate public education,” we hold that it satisfies this requirement by providing personalized instruction with sufficient support services to permit the child to benefit educationally from that instruction. Such instruction and services must be provided at public expense, must meet the State’s educational standards, must approximate the grade levels used in the State’s regular education, and must comport with the child’s IEP. In addition, the IEP, and therefore the personalized instruction, should be formulated in accordance with the requirements of the Act and if the child is being educated in the regular classrooms of the public education system, should be reasonably calculated to enable the child to achieve

passing marks and advance from grade to grade. (*Board of Education v. Rowley*, 458 U.S. 176, 203 (1982))

The U.S. Supreme Court clarified “appropriate” to mean personalized instruction with sufficient support services to permit the child to benefit educationally from that instruction. The U.S. Supreme Court further explained that the IEP must be developed to enable the student with a disability to progress academically. It is through the IEP that a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is assured.

#### *Defining the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*

In 1974, an amendment was introduced by Senator Robert Stafford of Vermont that called for school districts to ensure that a student’s placement be in the least restrictive appropriate educational setting. The purpose of the amendment was to prevent the segregation of students with disabilities within schools. Senator Stafford’s amendment was later established in the EAHCA and subsequent IDEA as the LRE mandate. As with the FAPE mandate, however, there has been considerable debate over the LRE mandate (Yell, 1998). The debate has hinged on the question of what is an appropriate educational setting for students with disabilities (Bateman & Linden, 1998). Some feel that the LRE for all students is the regular classroom. Others disagree, stressing it is not appropriate for all students to be in the regular classroom because it “deprives many children of services they need to meet their unique educational needs” (Bateman & Linden, 1998, p.13).

The law states in 34 C.F.R. § 300.550(b):

(b) Each public agency shall ensure –

- (1) That *to the maximum extent appropriate*, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are non-disabled; and
- (i) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [Emphasis added]

Bateman & Linden (1998) pointed out that the key phrase in the law is “to the maximum extent appropriate.” They related that the U.S. Supreme Court has held that “a program is appropriate if it was developed according to the procedures required by the law and if it is ‘reasonably calculated’ to allow the child to benefit educationally” (p.14). LRE is therefore not a location. LRE is a procedural process for placement guidelines, and LRE is given less weight than the appropriateness standard of FAPE. What is therefore possible (the regular classroom) may not be the most appropriate (according to the student’s IEP) (J. B. Crockett, personal communication to C. C. Whitehurst, December 11, 2002).

### *Defining Special Education*

The term *special education* is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations (34 C.F.R. § 300.26) as specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, intended to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Education is made special when there is a combination of instruction being specially-designed and meeting the unique needs of a child (Tucker, 1998). Education is not made special when educational programs are designed and implemented without regard to the individual circumstances of a student (Gorn, 1999). Education is therefore special

for students with disabilities when the education is appropriate or when it is specially-designed to allow students with disabilities to freely participate and progress in public school education.

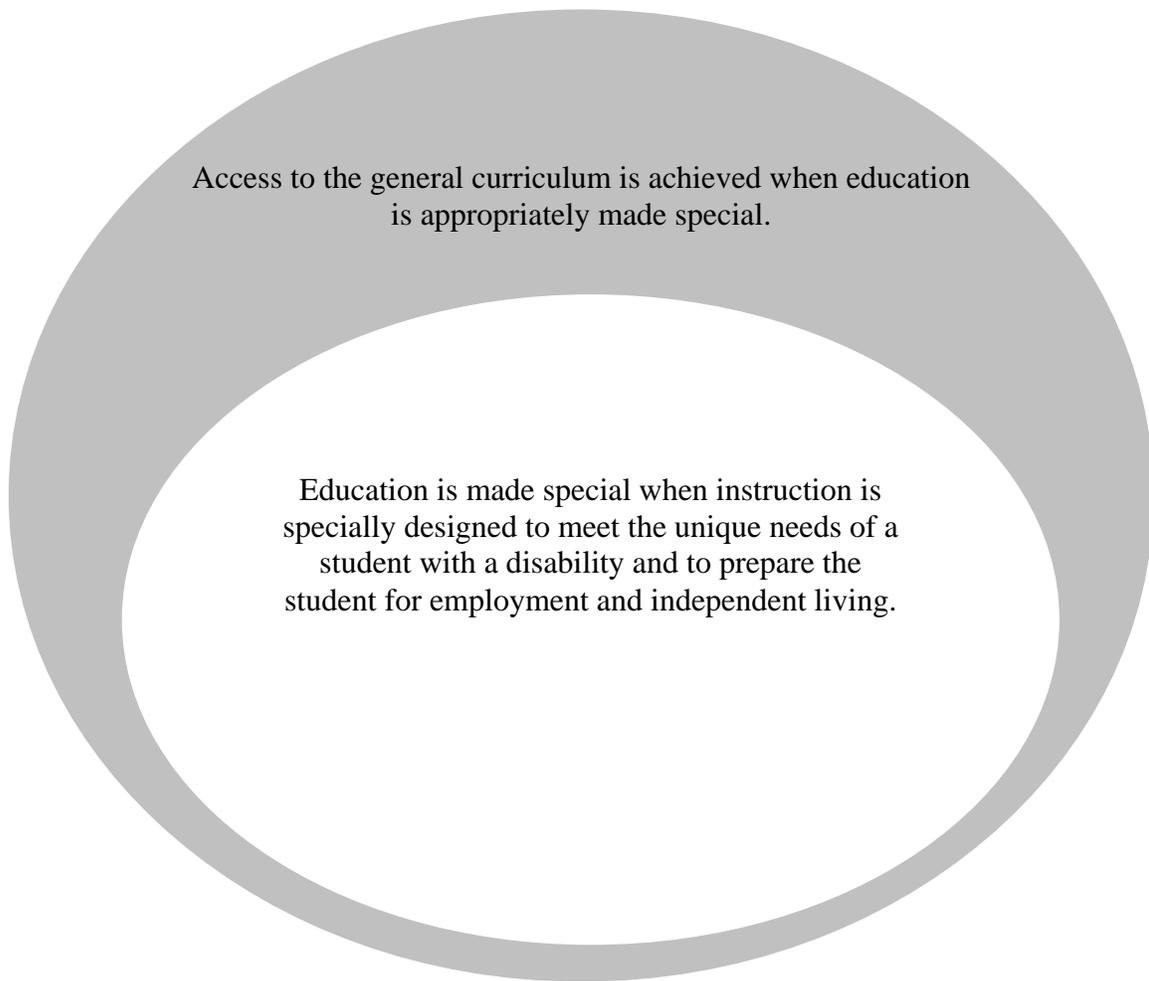
*Defining Access to the General Curriculum*

In the final regulations of the 1999 IDEA, the definition of specially designed instruction was provided for the first time. It is stated in 34 C.F.R. § 300.26(b)(3) that:

Specially-designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction–

- (i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child’s disability; and
- (ii) To ensure *access of the child to the general curriculum*, so that he or she can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children. [emphasis added]

The objectives of specially designed instruction are to address the unique needs of the child with a disability and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum. It is in the second objective of specially designed instruction that the term “access to the general curriculum” is presented. Without a specially-designed instructional plan or individualization, “access to the general curriculum” cannot be achieved. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between specialized instruction and access to the general education curriculum.



*Figure 1.* Relationship of special education to the general curriculum.

### Relationship of Past Research to the Topic of Study

The law expresses a preference that children with disabilities be educated in the regular classroom (Bateman & Linden, 1998). Seeking to obtain only the preferred expression of the law, there have been several special education programs designed using the inclusion philosophy of placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom with peers without disabilities (Yell, 1998). Studying the effects of the implementation of the inclusion philosophy can offer invaluable information related to teaching the general education curriculum to students with disabilities in the regular classroom.

After completing a synthesis of research studies related to teaching students with disabilities in the regular classroom, I determined that certain inclusive program practices could strengthen or hinder *genuine* access to the general curriculum in certain instances. For example, collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers, heterogeneous/multi-age grouping, computer-assisted instruction, and curricular modifications were perceived by some researchers to be the most extensively used and effective practices to implement inclusion successfully (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).

Inclusive instruction has been hindered when there is a lack of teacher preparedness and community preparedness (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998), and when educators have inconsistent definitions of inclusion (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Smith, 1997) and hold different perspectives about inclusion practices (Smith, 1997). I also found that certain obstacles at the secondary level hindered inclusion. I learned that specific factors such as department structure, subject-matter focus, lack of professional development, lack of common planning time, credit and graduation requirements, and course scheduling could limit the extent to which students with disabilities could access and benefit from a standards-based curriculum (Dailey,

Zantal-Wiener, & Roach, 2000). Some researchers also documented a lack of interaction between districts and schools regarding the special education programs and policies (Dailey et al., 2000).

I also learned that certain practices in inclusive settings could limit individualization (Espin, Deno, & Albayrak-Kaymak, 1998; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997), achievement gains (Daniel & King, 1997; Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elbaum, 1998), and student emotional well-being (Daniel & King, 1997; Howard & Tryon, 2002); could stimulate negative student behaviors (Daniel & King, 1997); and could create more parent and teacher concerns (Daniel & King, 1997), as well as student concerns (Vaughn, Schumm, Klingner, & Saurnell, 1995). Genuine access to the general curriculum was also blocked when teachers (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997) and communities were not prepared to support inclusive practices (Barnett & Monda-Amay, 1998). Specifically, inclusive practices can strengthen or hinder *genuine* access to the general curriculum in certain instances and those practices that hinder inclusive instruction can lead to limitations.

The field of Special Education has long addressed the complex learning needs of students with disabilities, and the research literature on inclusive instruction demonstrates that there cannot be one educational solution to giving students what they need. Administrators should therefore consider information based on inclusion studies as they design special education programs to ensure that students with disabilities are provided access to the general curriculum. Educational leaders need to be especially aware of the distinction between the noble philosophy of inclusion and limitations of its practice. They need to keep in mind that inclusive practices can sometimes limit individualization, student achievement, student emotional well-being, positive student behavior, and can create increased parent, teacher, and student concerns. In addition,

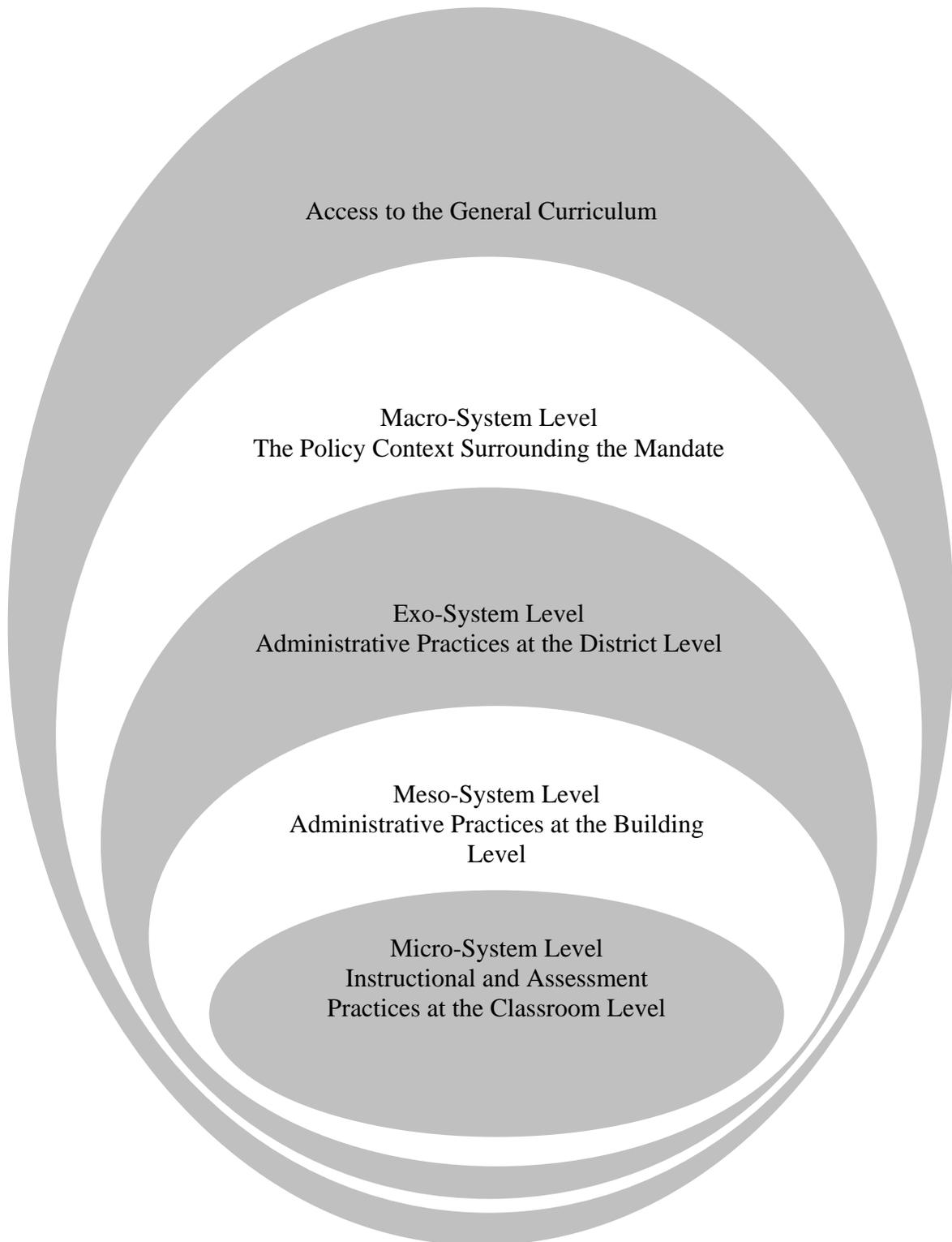
school administrators must also be aware that particular practices can strengthen or hinder successful inclusion.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe how specially-designed instruction is being used to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are participating and progressing within it. Specifically, this study used an embedded case study method to describe the patterns of practice being used across the educational environment to ensure that students with disabilities receiving instruction in the regular classroom are being provided with appropriate and *genuine* access to the general curriculum. I examined the practices throughout the structural layers of the educational system through Bronfenbrenner's (1976) theoretical model of the Experimental Ecology of Education. This model distinguishes the ecological structure of the educational environment topologically as "a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next" (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, pp. 162-163). The ecological system framework provided a useful direction for the examination of the systemic patterns of practice used to provide access to the general curriculum to high school students with disabilities. Figure 2 illustrates the ecological framework that directed the study that has been adapted from Bronfenbrenner's model.

### Research Questions

The overall guiding question for the study was as follows: What organizational and instructional patterns of practice are being used to ensure that high school students with disabilities are receiving specially-designed instruction and are participating and progressing in the general education curriculum? Subordinate questions included the following: (1) What is the state policy context addressing the federal mandate? (2) How have the practices of district level



*Figure 2.* Ecological framework that directed the study adapted from Bronfenbrenner's model.

administrators been affected by these policies? (3) How have the practices of building level administrators been affected by these polices? (4) How have instructional and assessment practices used by general and special educators been affected by these policies?

### Methodology

This study was a qualitative study of what individualized patterns of practice are being used in the total high school educational environment to ensure that students with disabilities are participating and progressing in the general education curriculum. Data was collected according to Bronfenbrenner's (1976) ecological systems framework. At the macro-system level, Virginia Department of Education (VADOE) documents were reviewed to determine the policy context surrounding the access to the general education mandate for students with disabilities. At the exo-system level, interviews with district level administrators were conducted and documents were reviewed to determine how administrative practices at the district level have been affected by the mandate. At the meso-system level, interviews with high school administrators and observations of their schools were conducted to determine how administrative practices at the building level have been affected by the mandate. Additionally, at the micro-system level, interviews with regular education and special education teachers as well as classroom observations were conducted to determine how students with disabilities are participating and progressing in the general education curriculum.

### Significance of the Study

The 1997 Amendments to the IDEA emphasized accountability for the improved educational achievement of students with disabilities (Yell, 1998). Complimenting these amendments, the NCLB Act of 2001 promoted closing the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2003).

Based on the principles of stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on proven teaching methods, The NCLB Act will help to ensure that students with disabilities receive a high-quality education (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2003).

The access to the general curriculum mandate from the 1997 reauthorization of the IDEA lays the foundation for the implementation of the NCLB Act. If students with disabilities are provided access to the general curriculum through practices that focus on individualization, then their participation and progress in that curriculum can help students with disabilities be more successful.

To emphasize student achievement, the NCLB Act requires that students with disabilities be included in state and district-wide testing. In the State of Virginia, all students in the Class of 2004 must pass a minimum of six Standards of Learning (SOL) End of Course (EOC) tests in addition to passing the required courses to receive a Standard Diploma. Students with disabilities who have an IEP must also meet this requirement to receive a Standard Diploma. Students with disabilities who have an IEP who are not able to pass six SOL EOC tests may receive a Modified Standard Diploma if they are able to pass the Eighth Grade English (Reading, Literature, and Research) and Math SOL Tests in addition to passing the required courses. Students with disabilities who are not able to pass any of the SOL tests can graduate with an IEP Diploma. These students, however, are still to be assessed through an alternative assessment option.

Students who have average ability should be able to pass the state assessment requirements and be eligible to receive either a Standard or a Modified Standard Diploma. However, students with disabilities can be successful in the state assessment program only if they have *genuine* access to the general curriculum. High schools in Virginia must ensure that

students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are equipped to be successful in the state's testing program as would be appropriate for the students' ability levels. Students with disabilities can become equipped to pass the SOL tests only if they are taught the general curriculum with appropriate accommodations and modifications. Educational leaders must ensure that students with disabilities have been adequately prepared by using patterns of practice that focus on appropriately individualized and specialized instruction.

### Definitions

For purposes of this study, the following terms and definitions will be used:

1. Access to the General Curriculum is providing the opportunity for a student with a disability to learn the important content reflected in rigorous content standards (or the same curriculum that is used for a student without a disability) (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000).
2. Accommodations are a service or support that helps a student with a disability learn the same curriculum that a student without a disability learns (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000).
3. Cognitive Access to the General Curriculum is providing intellectual availability to a student with a disability to learn the same curriculum that is used for a student without a disability.
4. Collaboration is interaction between regular education teachers and special education teachers that focus primarily on the knowledge contained in the curriculum as well as on specific accommodations and modifications that will support students who have learning problems (Nolet, 1999; Nolet & Tindal, 1996).
5. A Continuum of Alternative Placements (CAP) makes available a variety of placement options for the student with a disability that begins with the least restrictive environment and ends with the most restrictive environment (34 C.F.R. § 300.551).

6. A Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) occurs when special education and related services that are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge, meet standards of the State educational agency, include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education in the state involved, and are provided in conformity with the individualized education program (34 C.F.R. § 300.550(b)).

7. Full Inclusion involves placing a student with a disability in the regular education classroom with age- and grade-appropriate non-disabled peers (Gorn, 1999).

8. The General Curriculum is the curriculum used for students without disabilities. The term is related to the content of the curriculum and not to the setting in which the curriculum is taught (Borreca, Goldman, Horton, Mehfoud, Rodick, Weatherly, et al., 1999).

9. Handicap refers to a problem that a student with a disability confronts in an environment (Owen, Froman, & Moscow, 1981).

10. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) refers to A written statement that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a team meeting in accordance with federal regulations that specifies the individual educational needs of a student with a disability and what special education and related services are necessary to meet the student's needs (Yell, 1998).

11. The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) refers to the assurance that a student with a disability is educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who are not disabled and that the removal of a student with a disability from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (34 C.F.R. § 300.550(b)).

12. Modifications refer to teaching a student with a disability the same curriculum that a student without a disability learns but in a different manner (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000).

13. Physical Access to the General Curriculum refers to providing bodily availability to and within public facilities of learning so a student with a disability can have the opportunity to learn in the same physical environment as a student without a disability.

14. Special Education is specially designed instruction provided at no cost to the parent(s) that meets the unique needs of a child with a disability (34 C.F.R. § 300.26).

15. Specially Designed Instruction means adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability and to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum so that the child can meet the educational standards that apply to all children (34 C.F.R. § 300.26(b)(3)).

#### Limitations/Assumptions

The findings and conclusions determined in this embedded multi-case study were based on the examination of how specially-designed instruction is being used in the total high school educational environment to ensure that students with disabilities are participating and progressing in the general education curriculum. Descriptive data that describes the context of the total high school environment was included to help readers determine the extent to which the cases are most like their own environments. The applications of the findings and conclusions are transferable to schools in districts with similar demographics, enrollments, and average test scores.

#### Overview of the Dissertation

The presentation of the study is continued in six additional chapters. Chapter Two contains a review of literature on the following: (a) the context of access to the general

curriculum; (b) the legislative and legal foundation that established the federal mandate; (c) the theoretical bases supporting the possible misapplication of the federal mandate; and (d) a review and synthesis of commentary and research studies related to the interpretation of the federal mandate. Chapter Three contains the methodology and procedures that were used for the study. Chapters Four through Six describe the findings by using Bronfenbrenner's (1976) theoretical model of the Experimental Ecology of Education. The model helped to determine how specially-designed instruction is being used across the total high school educational environment to ensure access to the general curriculum to secondary students with disabilities. Information from each school was used to support the embedded multi-case study analysis. The study concludes with a discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications for practice, a recommendation for further research, and reflections.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter examines existing literature in the field of special education specifically related to providing access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. The guiding question for this review was: What patterns of practice that enhance individualization are being used in the total high school educational environment to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities? To provide a background and to answer this question, the following topics are first considered: (a) the context of access to the general curriculum; (b) the legislative and legal foundation that established the federal mandate; and (c) the theoretical bases supporting the possible misapplication of the federal mandate. An analysis and synthesis of commentary and research studies are provided related to the patterns of practice focusing on individualization that are being used in the regular classroom. The potential need for future research in this area is also described.

#### Context of Access to the General Curriculum

Prior to 1975, many students with disabilities were not permitted to enroll in public schools (Martin et al., 1996). With the 1975 EAHCA, children with disabilities received the right to be educated in public schools. Because of the EAHCA, students with disabilities were therefore provided physical access to a public school education. Even with this right to a free, appropriate, public education, there was concern that many students with disabilities were being placed in separate classes and were not receiving the opportunity to learn the same curriculum that was being taught to students without disabilities in the general classroom (Senate Report, 1997). Through the 1997 reauthorization to the IDEA, Congress initiated a new focus on the accommodations and adjustments that would be necessary for students with disabilities to

participate and progress in the general education curriculum (Yell, 1998). Through this reauthorization, students with disabilities could have the opportunity to learn and be tested on the same curriculum that students without disabilities were learning. Students with disabilities were not only to have *physical* access to a public school education but also to have *cognitive* access to a public school education.

Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) maintained that students with disabilities have achieved less than what they should have been able to accomplish. They specifically proposed that too many students with disabilities were failing courses, dropping out of school, not enrolling in post-secondary education, and were not being employed because they did not have appropriate interventions or supplementary aids and services as a part of their special education program. They further suggested that these challenges resulted in less than satisfactory special education outcomes and were responsible for creating the increased need for the recent federal mandate of the IDEA 1997 to ensure access to the general curriculum to all students with disabilities. Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) stated:

The 1997 reauthorization is intended to ensure that students with disabilities have access to challenging curriculum and that their educational programs are based on high expectations that acknowledge each student's potential and ultimate contribution to society. To do this, the new IDEA provisions have begun to shift the focus of education from physical access toward educational performance [cognitive access]. (p. 2)

Schools are now federally mandated to ensure that students receiving special education and related services receive instruction from the general curriculum content to the maximum extent appropriate to their learning needs (Warger, 2001).

The mandate “to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum” (34 C.F.R. § 300.26(b)(3)) was intended to help prevent persons with disabilities from being handicapped by the problems they confront through ensuring cognitive access to the general curriculum as well as physical access to public education. A review of the history of special education legislative law and case law may help to understand how the federal mandate to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities was established.

#### *Legislative and Legal Foundation that Established the Federal Mandate*

The history of legislation and case law that preceded the EAHCA facilitated the major change in the government’s view from excluding children with disabilities in public education to ensuring that children with disabilities are to have access to free and appropriate public education (Yell, 1998). The first sign of the turning point in the philosophy towards the education of disabled people can be seen in the Soldier’s Rehabilitation Act of 1918 and the Smith-Bankhead Act of 1920. These two pieces of legislation addressed the needs of disabled soldiers who had just returned home from World War I and who needed access to vocational rehabilitation services in the form of job training and counseling. The Soldier’s Rehabilitation Act of 1918 and the Smith-Bankhead Act of 1920 helped to focus national attention on the need for educational programs for the handicapped (Alexander, 1998). By 1944, both Acts were amended to include services for individuals with mental illness as well as mental retardation and to provide funding for research and training programs (Alexander, 1998).

*Influence of the Brown case.* Another indication in the philosophical change to ensuring education for all disabled children came with the Civil Rights Movement and the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). One of the key considerations in *Brown* was the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause that no state is to “deny any person within its jurisdiction

the equal protection of the laws.” The Supreme Court held that segregation (based on race in that case) violated equal protection in that it denied equal educational opportunity to minorities. “This decision opened a number of legal avenues for those seeking redress for students with disabilities” (Yell, 1998, p. 56). The precedent set in *Brown* established that educational access should be provided to all students, even disabled students (Alexander, 1998). The *Brown* case helped to provide for the equal protection of all students including those with disabilities (Yell, 1998).

*Influence of the PARC case.* A third event contributing to the philosophical change in special education took place in 1971 when the Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children sued the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in a federal district court for not providing free and appropriate public education to all the state’s mentally retarded citizens (Alexander, 1998). In the case of *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972), the group asserted that the mentally retarded students’ rights under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution were violated because these students were not receiving publicly supported education (Yell, 1998). The group maintained that the state was deliberately delaying or ignoring its constitutional obligations to provide a publicly supported education for these students (Yell, 1998). Specifically, the group contested a state law that allowed public schools to deny services to children who had not attained a mental age of five years by the time it was customary for students to enroll in the first grade (Martin et al., 1996).

Under a consent agreement, the state established the rights of children with mental retardation and agreed to provide a free and appropriate public education to these children (Martin et al., 1996). The *PARC* ruling specifically stipulated a standard of appropriateness. The

standard involved appropriateness, requiring that each student be offered an education appropriate to his or her learning capacity in a least restrictive placement (Martin et al., 1996). Also, as part of the agreement, periodic reevaluations and procedural due process were required for these students (Alexander, 1998). The *PARC* case was especially instrumental in extending a free appropriate public education to disabled students (Yell, 1998).

*Influence of the Mills case.* A fourth key turning point for handicapped children's rights took place in 1972, soon after the *PARC* decision. In *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972), the parents and guardians of seven children with a variety of disabilities, including mental retardation, epilepsy, behavior problems, hyperactivity, and physical impairments, filed a class-action suit in the Federal District Court against the District of Columbia (Yell, 1998). The suit was filed on behalf of all out-of-school students with disabilities against the District of Columbia's Board of Education. The seven children with disabilities represented more than 18,000 students who had been denied or excluded from public education in Washington, D.C. (Yell). The school district admitted that due to budget constraints, an estimated 12,340 children with disabilities would not be served for the 1971-72 school year (Martin et al., 1996).

The trial court granted summary judgment for the plaintiffs and ruled that school districts were constitutionally mandated to provide services (Martin et al., 1996). The court said the school district could not decide to prohibit services based on insufficient funding because the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment would not permit the burden of funding to fall more heavily on children with disabilities than on other children. As a result of the case, rights to equal educational opportunities were extended to all handicapped children in the District of Columbia Public Schools based on the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In addition, the court ordered the school district to implement a comprehensive

plan that included: “(a) a free appropriate education, (b) individualized educational plan, and (c) due process procedures” (Alexander, 1998, p. 398). The *Mills* case continued to emphasize the need for extending a free appropriate public education to disabled students but also helped to ensure procedural safeguards for disabled students (Yell, 1998). All of the protections in the *Mills* case were later included by Congress in the EAHCA (Martin et al., 1996).

*Legislative effects of the PARC and the Mills cases.* Soon after the decisions in the *PARC* and *Mills* cases, federal legislation was introduced in Congress with the purpose of eliminating discrimination against people with disabilities (Alexander, 1998). Congress targeted the discrimination problem through the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Alexander, 1998) which was the first federal civil rights law to protect persons with disabilities (Yell, 1998).

Section 504 of the Act states:

No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States . . . shall solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (Section 504, 29 U.S.C. § 794(a))

The Act, however, was virtually ignored by local and state educational agencies for 20 years because it had no funding or monitoring mechanism (Martin et al., 1996).

An additional effect of the *PARC* and *Mills* cases was the federal legislation in 1975 of P.L. 94-142, the EAHCA (Martin et al., 1996). Following the Congressional hearings that led to the passage of this Act, the results of Congress’s study showed that one million of the nation’s disabled children were excluded from public schools and more than half of American children with disabilities were not receiving appropriate educational services (Tucker, 1998). The EAHCA stipulated that all disabled students were to receive a free, appropriate public education

and included a funding mechanism to help local school districts meet the needs of students with disabilities. To receive funds for the implementation of this Act, states and local school districts had to provide a plan meeting the federal requirements (Yell, 1998).

*Parents and advocacy groups largely responsible for progress.* Children with disabilities across the United States now had the right to receive a free and appropriate public education, to be entitled to procedural due process protections, to be educated in the LRE, to receive nondiscriminatory evaluations, and to be prescribed an IEP (Yell, 1998). Many parents of children with disabilities and other concerned citizens who formed advocacy groups were largely responsible for the progress made in educating children with disabilities (Yell, 1998). Many of these groups worked to form a network of support and then challenged federal and state governments in the courts to “establish federal legislation that mandated a free and appropriate education for all children with disabilities” (Yell, 1998, p. 59). The advocacy groups included the National Association for Retarded Citizens, the Council for Exceptional Children, the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, the United Cerebral Palsy Association, the National Society for Autistic Children, the National Association for Down Syndrome, and the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (Yell, 1998). The long, hard work of parents and advocates of special education children, speaking out through legislation and litigation, helped to ensure that no disabled child would be excluded from public education or be underserved in the public education system.

*Strengthening the EAHCA through the IDEA.* Since 1975 the EAHCA has been amended several times, but only to strengthen the original intent of the Act (Alexander, 1998). In 1990, to emphasize the person by the word listed first, the name of the Act was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the term *handicapped student* was changed to

*child/student/individual with a disability* (Yell, 1998). The 1990 amendments to P.L. 94-142 also made it possible for students with autism and traumatic brain injury to be identified as a distinct class and required that transition plans targeting post secondary goals be required for all secondary students with disabilities (Yell, 1998).

In 1997, additional amendments to the IDEA were passed to reauthorize and to make improvements to the law (Yell, 1998). IDEA was consolidated from eight parts to four and the following significant requirements were added:

- (a) strengthening the role of parents, ensuring access to the general education curriculum and emphasizing student progress toward meaningful educational goals through changes in the IEP process; (b) encouraging parents and educators to resolve differences by using nonadversarial mediation and allowing school officials greater leeway in disciplining students with disabilities by altering aspects of the IDEA’s procedural safeguards; and (c) funding formulas. (Yell, 1998, p. 64)

*Ensuring access to the general curriculum.* It is in the 1997 IDEA that the phrase “access to the general curriculum” is emphasized. The emphasis is first noted in the objectives of the *specially-designed instruction* category: “To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children” (34 C.F.R. § 300.26 (b)(3)(ii)). The emphasis is again seen in 34 C.F.R. § 300.347(a), the description of what the IEP content should include:

- (1) A statement of the child’s present levels of educational performance, including—
  - (i) How the child’s disability affects the child’s involvement and progress in the general curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children); or .
  - ..

- (2) A statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, related to –
- (i) Meeting the child’s needs that result from the child’s disability to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children).

Although the term *general curriculum* is not defined, a revision of the regulation was developed to clarify that the general curriculum refers to the same curriculum as for nondisabled children and not the placement of a student in the LRE (Borreca et al., 1999).

To ensure access to the general curriculum for students with a disability, IDEA 1997 requires each district to make sure that all IEPs address each student’s ability to participate in the general curriculum (Borreca et al., 1999). As a part of the child’s present levels of educational performance, the IEP committee must address how the child’s disability affects the child’s involvement and progress in the general curriculum. “The ‘general curriculum’ statement becomes the starting point by which the IEP team then determines what accommodations and modifications the student requires for such participation” ((Borreca et al., 1999, p. 22).

The next statement required by IDEA 1997 is a statement that describes the annual goals and benchmarks or short-term objectives for special education students. It is clear from 34 C.F.R. § 300.347 (a)(2)(i) that the goals are to be written “to reflect what a student needs in order to become involved in and to make progress in the general education curriculum and in other educational areas related to the disability” (Yell, 1998, p. 182). Bateman and Linden (1998) point out that when addressing the student needs and what services are necessary to help the student access the general curriculum, the IEP team must not incorporate the general curriculum itself into the IEP, but must incorporate ways to help the student access the general curriculum.

It has taken more than three decades of litigation and legislation to ensure that students with disabilities are given access to public school education. In the United States, individuals with disabilities have gone from being excluded and served inappropriately to being given full access to public education. The push for a free, appropriate individualized education in a LRE gained momentum with the Civil Rights Movement. The *Brown* case ensured equal protection to all students. That equal protection was extended to children with disabilities through the *PARC* case. The *Mills* case next expanded the *PARC* ruling to ensure procedures that would safeguard the rights of disabled students. The *PARC* and *Mills* decisions were then used to establish the EAHCA that provided a free, appropriate public educational program to children with disabilities. The IDEA of 1990 and subsequent amendments further strengthened the original EAHCA.

*Focusing on the intent of the legislation.* In interpreting IDEA 1997, it is important to focus on the intent of the legislation. The intent of IDEA 1997 is to design an educational program that is in the best interest of the student. Not denying a student with a disability access to the general curriculum is in the best interest of the student. Not denying access to the general curriculum, however, does not mean that the student is to be automatically placed in a general education class to learn the general curriculum. Some people who embrace the full inclusion philosophy may not respond appropriately to the new federal mandate of access to the general curriculum. These people may push for access to the general curriculum to be ensured by treating students with disabilities, for purposes of placement, as a single entity. This application would wrongly interpret the intent of IDEA 1997.

### *Theoretical Bases Supporting the Possible Misapplication of the Federal Mandate*

The amended IDEA 1997 emphasized not only that public schools are to ensure that the educational needs of students with a disability are met in a free, appropriate manner in a LRE, but also that the general education curriculum is made accessible to students with a disability. Crockett (1999) stated, “*Genuine* access to the general curriculum hinges on giving individual consideration to the unique educational characteristics of the learner so that specialized instruction can actually make the curriculum accessible” (p.4) [emphasis added]. If a school were to respond to the mandate simply by placing more students with disabilities in the general classroom, then the disabled students’ *genuine* access to the curriculum could be limited.

### *Questioning Genuine Individualization in Inclusive Programs*

In the January 2002 magazine, *NEA Today*, the cover story entitled “Inclusion by Design” shows how “at East Hartford Middle School, IDEA is working.” A regular education teacher from the school is quoted as saying, “All the children benefit from inclusion” (p. 8). In the eighth grade classroom depicted, there are students who read at a fourth grade level and one student who cannot write complete sentences. The class is divided into groups to learn a social studies lesson on the Cherokee Indians. Each group includes a student covered by the federal IDEA. The special education teacher assigned to co-teach, or to participate in “inclusion for teachers” with the social studies teacher, helps the regular education teacher to develop the lesson modifications that help not only special education students but also regular education students. The special education teacher also works with all the students during the classroom activity so that a “spotlight” is not put on the special education students (Jehlen, 2002). One of the outcomes of the inclusion program is that “Some students who posed serious discipline problems when they were in separate classes now get their cues from regular education students

and are doing much better” (Jehlen, 2002, p. 9). The article concludes by saying that the teachers at East Hartford work through their union, and that the East Hartford Education Association has called for state authorities in Connecticut “to press for more inclusion and more teacher involvement in planning” (Jehlen, 2002, p. 9).

With the special education teacher providing services to the special education students and to the regular education students, and with each student with a disability being placed in a different group, the question does arise as to how much *genuine* individualization and specialized instruction the students with disabilities are receiving. If schools respond to the mandate by placing all students, or even a large majority of students with disabilities, in the general classroom to implement more inclusion, then the disabled students’ access to the curriculum could actually be limited instead of ensured.

#### *What Response Will There Be to the New Mandate?*

Could an inclusion trend cause high schools to respond to the new federal mandate by simply creating more inclusion programs, thus misapplying the mandate? Is there a past misapplication of part of the special education law that led to more inclusion programs in the past? If so, could that past misapplication possibly bring about another misapplication of the new mandate? Are there indications that can support this theory?

#### *LRE and Inclusion Mistakenly Used Synonymously*

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the terms *LRE* and *inclusion* began to be heard by many educators, parents, and students. These terms were sometimes mistakenly used synonymously. Crockett and Kauffman (1999) pointed out:

A wide range of topics in professional literature is subsumed under the headings of . . . inclusion, and LRE. . . . The same citations are found under various headings, suggesting

that the terms are synonymous and interchangeable. There is no evidence of an historical or conceptual organization of terms. (p. 5)

Some thought that both LRE and inclusion simply meant that all students with and without disabilities were to be taught together in the general classroom. Crockett and Kauffman (1999) explained how LRE is viewed in the full inclusion philosophy: “Full inclusion . . . defines the LRE in all cases by geography, that is, the general education classroom in the neighborhood school” (p. 3).

LRE, however, is not a particular educational setting. LRE means that students with disabilities are to be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who do not have disabling conditions.

To determine the LRE for a student with a disability, the IEP committee must decide what is the maximum extent appropriate for the disabled student to be educated in the regular classroom, or what is the LRE for a particular student (34 C.F.R. § 300.552(a)(1)). The committee must then base the student’s placement on the student’s IEP (34 C.F.R. § 300.552(b)(2)) and the location of the student’s home (34 C.F.R. § 300.552(b)(3)). The committee must also consider the potential harmful effects on the student or on the quality of the prescribed services that a particular placement could create (34 C.F.R. § 300.552(b)(3)(d)). The committee must lastly ensure that a student is not removed from the regular classroom solely because the student needs modifications in the general curriculum (34 C.F.R. § 300.552(b)(3)(e)).

In responsible inclusion programs, special education students also have prescribed individualized modifications to their education program in order to assist in their academic success (Yell, 1998). A full inclusion program, however, offers only the placement setting of the

regular classroom with needed educational modifications to the disabled student. During the middle to late nineties, the term *inclusion* also began to be heard with a note of caution.

Kauffman and Hallahan (1995a) wrote:

Our concern is that the inclusion movement is leading to designation of the general education classroom in the neighborhood school as the ‘promised land’ or a ‘holy place’ for students with disabilities. The implication is that special education is in danger of being radicalized into a group who will justify whatever tactics are necessary to claim that promised land for students with disabilities. The claim that all students should be promised placement in general education classes is based on the assumption that the general education classroom is least restrictive for all, which is a serious misunderstanding of LRE. (p. 326)

#### *Implications for Schools and School Districts*

Over the past two decades, the courts have provided schools and school districts with a set of guidelines to assist in the implementation process of LRE. These guidelines make it clear that it is the local educational agency’s responsibility to develop the student’s educational program and choose the methods most suitable to meet the student’s learning needs. When a school or school district cannot demonstrate that the student’s educational program is of benefit to the student with disabilities and his or her classmates, then the school or school district has violated LRE. When a school or school district implements a full inclusion program and does not provide a cascade of placement options, how can the best environment or the LRE be fully considered? It is impossible for a single environment to contain the many different options on the placement continuum. Kauffman and Hallahan (1995a) stated:

The doctrine of full inclusion defines diversity of placement as morally suspect, if not the Great Satan of special education. It seeks the elimination of placement options under the assumption that only one environment can be least restrictive, that the general education classroom is the promised land of all children. (p. 339)

Schools and school districts that solely provide full inclusion programs are in possible violation of LRE. Even though the IDEA encourages integration, the IDEA also recognizes that for some students a more restrictive setting may be the most appropriate (Yell, 1998).

#### *Summarizing the Difference between Inclusion and LRE*

Inclusion and LRE are not the same. “Inclusion in a regular classroom concerns the setting where a student with a disability is educated” (Gorn, 1999, 5:11). The LRE is the legal requirement that directs school districts to educate children with disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate with children who are not disabled (34 C.F.R. § 300.550(b)(1)). LRE acknowledges, through the “maximum extent appropriate” phrase, that the general classroom is not always the most appropriate placement. The full inclusion philosophy provides only one appropriate place to educate children with disabilities, the general classroom.

#### *The Purpose of the Access to the General Curriculum Mandate*

“Participation in the general curriculum refers to what a student learns” (Gorn, 1999, p. 5:11). In the 1997 Senate Report, it was explained that the purpose of the new emphasis on participation in the general curriculum was to draw more attention to the accommodations and adjustments that are needed for disabled students to participate successfully in the general curriculum (Yell, 1998). To learn the general curriculum, appropriate accommodations and modifications must be implemented. Access to the general curriculum is not a placement, but helps to ensure that disabled students are receiving a free and appropriate public education

(Gorn, 1999). When students can address the limitations posed by their disability, and when they have the opportunity to learn what students in regular education classes are learning, then disabled students have a lesser chance of becoming handicapped in making life choices.

#### *Misapplication of the New Mandate Can Limit Genuine Access*

If proponents of full inclusion, who use the LRE mandate to support their philosophy, push for access to the general curriculum to be ensured by treating students with disabilities, for purposes of placement, as a single entity, then those teaching strategies that can be administered only in a resource room will be limited. If certain students with disabilities are not permitted to learn the same lesson objectives as their peers in an individualized setting where they can have access to a more repetitive pacing of instruction, along with more opportunities for guided practice and questioning, then some of these students may become handicapped. If students do not have *genuine* access to the general curriculum, then the intent of the new mandate may be misapplied.

#### *Learning from the Promotion of Inclusion in Secondary Classrooms*

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) stressed that even though inclusion on the secondary level can potentially ensure access to the general curriculum, the major challenge is that research in this area is relatively scarce. Mastropieri and Scruggs did stress, however, that the studies that have investigated the effectiveness of interventions in inclusive secondary classes could provide some important implications for practice.

#### *Characteristics that Could Facilitate Successful Inclusion*

In reviewing previous studies from mainly the 1980s and early 1990s, Mastropieri and Scruggs found several overall characteristics that could facilitate successful inclusion. These characteristics included administrative support, special education personnel support, a positive

attitude toward individual differences in the regular classroom, a curriculum for a variety of learning needs, peer assistance, effective teaching skills, and disability-specific teaching skills.

### *Current Challenges to Inclusion at the Secondary Level*

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) also described some of the current challenges to inclusion at the secondary level. They cited Bulgren and Lenz as well as Sabornie and DeBettencourt regarding the difficulty imposed on students with disabilities by their having to experience a heavy emphasis on content knowledge. They also cited Deshler, Schumaker, and Lenz regarding the obstacles that students with disabilities often must confront when they are expected to study independently. They cited Frase-Blunt in relation to the challenge presented to students with disabilities, as they are required to keep up with the pace of instruction that is often dictated by the need to prepare for a particular test. They also cited Dev and Scruggs as well as Scruggs and Mastropieri in describing the negative secondary-level teacher attitudes that often prevail towards inclusion and that those students with disabilities often have to encounter in the regular classroom. Lastly, they cited Frase-Blunt regarding how academic learning and graduation for students with disabilities can also be tied to high-stakes state testing. Mastropieri and Scruggs pointed out concern over the possible risk of how high-stakes testing can facilitate the abandonment of specialized teaching techniques in the general education classroom.

### *Inclusion Strategies Used in Secondary Classrooms*

In addition, various inclusion strategies were described such as peer tutoring, co-teaching, and strategy instruction that were employed in social studies, science, mathematics, and English secondary inclusion classes. Mastropieri and Scruggs explained how the practice of peer tutoring was found to have results that were mixed. For example, tutoring was found to yield positive

results in a high school world history class and in a middle school English class but not in a middle school algebra class or in a high school English class.

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) related how some studies have concluded that co-teaching is workable and effective in some secondary general education classrooms while other studies have concluded that the effects of co-teaching are inconsistent and are not documented sufficiently. Unfortunately, co-teaching is a practice that is frequently mentioned when discussing inclusion but is not frequently systematically studied.

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) explained that certain studies have found strategy instruction to be effective in special education settings. They also stated, however, that strategy instruction has been found to be less reliable in inclusive secondary settings. Reasons for unreliable results with strategy instruction in secondary settings might include “the complexity of the academic content in secondary general education classes, the class size, or the challenges to providing sufficient duration and intensity of training” (p. 273).

#### *Questioning Genuine Access to the General Curriculum*

The information presented by Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) seemed to point to mixed results. There were certain characteristics that when put into practice appeared to help make inclusion more successful. There were, however, many challenges to successful inclusion that were created by a variety of variables inclusive to secondary education. For example, the heavy content, the need for independent study skills, the need for a specific pace of instruction, the presence of negative attitudes toward inclusion, and the graduation demands related to high-stakes testing programs all presented challenges to successful inclusion. Lastly, certain inclusive practices such as peer tutoring, co-teaching, and strategy instruction have had some positive and

some negative results. It has therefore been hard to determine the overall effects of the practices, thus more research is needed.

The attempt to individualize in the general classroom appeared to have been made in most of the incidents cited. Whether *genuine* access to the general curriculum was achieved through the specific practices is hard to infer due to the mixed results. It is clear, however, that for inclusion practices to have the greatest chance to be successful, certain characteristics must be present.

#### Research Studies Included for Review

The literature used to support the rationale of the case study examines the question of what patterns of practice that enhance individualization are being used in the total high school educational environment to ensure access to the curriculum to students with disabilities. Within this collection, I found the themes of individualization, student achievement, student emotional well-being, student behavior, parent concerns, teacher concerns, student concerns, teacher preparedness, community preparedness, consistency in defining inclusion, department structure, subject matter focus, professional development, teacher planning time, credit and graduation requirements, course scheduling, interaction between districts and schools, collaboration, heterogeneous/multi-age grouping, computer-assisted instruction, and curriculum modifications present in the literature. Only one of the studies that related to inclusion mentioned the LRE mandate as part of the background information to the studies.

Published journal articles were found through research using the ERIC and Wilson Web databases. Sample descriptors that were successful included inclusive schools, mainstreaming education of the handicapped, special education high schools, learning disabled education, individualized education programs, parent attitudes, individualized instruction, outcomes of

education, student attitudes, teacher attitudes, and attitude change. Several additional articles were found by doing hard searches of educational journals and other articles that were obtained from professors who used these sources to enhance their curriculum.

This review of research studies is related to inclusion, LRE, and access to the general curriculum. Ten studies were selected that made meaningful connections to what patterns of practice that enhance individualization are being used in the total high school educational environment to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities. School leaders might find helpful the analysis that suggests ways that inclusion practices assist with individualization or limit individualization as they seek to implement the access to the general curriculum mandate.

#### *Establishing the Need to Offer a Continuum-of-Services*

Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) presented a review of previous research, including their own as well as others, addressing the importance of the continuum-of-services required by the IDEA's LRE mandate. Mastropieri and Scruggs explained that the most common interpretations of the IDEA specification of requiring students with disabilities to be placed in the LRE include a description of a continuum-of-services to students with disabilities. Mastropieri and Scruggs stated that the continuum-of-services begins with a total placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with the special education teachers providing consultative services to those students with disabilities. They suggested that at the most restrictive end of the continuum are placements for students with disabilities in special schools and facilities outside the public school system.

*Considering inclusion practices.* Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) further described that the concepts of LRE and continuum-of-services have created a debate related to modifications

and placement: “These two fundamental concepts, least-restrictive environment and continuum of services, have sometimes resulted in conflicting arguments regarding how and where students with disabilities should be taught” (p. 206). Citing Lipsky and Gartner and Stainback and Stainback, Mastropieri and Scruggs pointed out that some feel that teaching students with disabilities in the regular education classroom through full inclusion is society’s moral obligation. Citing Fuchs and Fuchs and Kauffman and Hallahan, Mastropieri and Scruggs also pointed out that others argue that the continuum-of-services must be maintained. Their generalization was that when considering inclusion practices, there are two fundamental issues: preserving the *special* nature of special education, and considering the attitudes regular education teachers have expressed over the years regarding teaching students with disabilities in their classes.

*Evaluating the effectiveness of inclusion programs.* Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) evaluated the effectiveness of inclusion programs through a variable known as PASS. The variable PASS is an acronym that describes effective special education practices that are crucial in any setting. The “P” stands for *prioritize* objectives. The “A” represents the need to *adapt* curriculum, methods, materials, and environments to students’ special needs. The first “S” symbolizes the use of other variables collectively known as *SCREAM*. The collective variables of *SCREAM* summarize the critical teacher-presentation variables obtained from teacher-effectiveness research. The “S” stands for the *structure* that is needed so students with disabilities will be aware of the purpose, sequence, and components of the lesson. The “C” represents the *clarity* that must be exhibited in the lesson presentation to facilitate student understanding. The “R” denotes elements of *redundancy*. The “E” depicts *enthusiasm* that must be present in the lesson presentation to convey to students the importance and enjoyment of

acquiring new knowledge. The “A” stands for the *appropriate* rate at which the lesson must be paced. The “M” symbolizes the fact that teachers must *maximize* student engagement with all the instructional activities. The last “S” in the acronym PASS stands for *systematically* evaluating student progress toward specified goals and objectives. Figure 3 summarizes the components of the PASS variable.

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Corresponding Terms</b>	
<b>P</b>	<i>Prioritize</i> objectives	
<b>A</b>	<i>Adapt</i> curriculum	
<b>S</b>	<i>Symbolize</i> use of other variables collectively known as <b>SCREAM</b>	
	<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Corresponding Terms</b>
	<b>S</b>	<i>Structure</i>
	<b>C</b>	<i>Clarity</i>
	<b>R</b>	<i>Redundancy</i>
	<b>E</b>	<i>Enthusiasm</i>
	<b>A</b>	<i>Appropriate</i> rate
	<b>M</b>	<i>Maximize</i> engagement
<b>S</b>	<i>Systematically</i> evaluate student progress	

Figure 3. Summary of PASS Variables.

Scruggs and Mastropieri (1997) referred to a special issue of *the Journal of Special Education*, Summer of 1995, which presented the results of an important study of inclusive instruction conducted by Naomi Zigmond and Jan Baker. In this issue, Scruggs and Mastropieri evaluated these full-time inclusion program reports from the states of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Kansas, and Washington. They observed that in every case the PASS variables were not being implemented. As one example of how seldom objectives were prioritized for students with disabilities, Mastropieri and Scruggs cited Baker who conveyed that a teacher in Virginia admitted to not making any accommodations for a student with learning disabilities in her classroom. The teacher reported that the student does the same as everybody else (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997).

As another example that adaptations for special learning needs were found to be inadequate or absent, Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) cited Zigmond who reported that in a Pennsylvania site, the predominant form of instruction was whole-class regardless of the subject matter the students were studying. To illustrate that the SCREAM variables were not being implemented, Mastropieri and Scruggs again cited Zigmond who remarked that in the Pennsylvania site there was an obvious lack of redundancy and appropriate pacing. A teacher was observed telling students each word to be remembered and not *how* to remember each word. Mastropieri and Scruggs suggested that the student with disabilities in the full-inclusion classroom appeared to doodle and not pay full attention. The student had apparently reached a saturation point for remembering new sight words.

To demonstrate that students with disabilities were not receiving systematic evaluation of their progress, Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) noted that formative evaluation of learner progress was rarely conducted and teachers appeared more interested in moving through the curriculum instead of ensuring that students were mastering the information presented. They cited a 1993 study by Fuchs, Fuchs, and Fernstrom, who maintained that when students with disabilities who are in inclusion settings have been administered formative progress evaluations, the evaluation results pointed out that these students are not making satisfactory progress.

Scruggs and Mastropieri (1997) also drew on an earlier analysis they conducted in 1996 in which they summarized the results of 28 previous surveys, conducted from 1958 to 1995, of 10,000 regular education teachers who were asked how they felt about teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms. They concluded that there has been little change in the opinions of regular education teachers regarding the teaching of students with disabilities in the regular classroom since the administration of the 1958 survey. Scruggs and Mastropieri reported that

two-thirds of the teachers they surveyed accepted the general idea of teaching students with disabilities in their classrooms, that a little over half expressed a willingness to do so, and that only half of the teachers surveyed agreed that inclusion practices benefited students. When teachers were questioned further about full-time inclusion and including students with more severe intellectual or behavioral disabilities or making substantial changes in their classroom routines to accommodate students with disabilities, the proportions declined. Only one-fourth of the teachers surveyed agreed that they had sufficient time, training, or assistance to undertake such inclusive practices.

*Individualization not preserved in inclusion programs.* Based on the findings of their evaluation of inclusion programs with the PASS variables, Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) concluded that the *special* nature of special education was not preserved. Their data also suggested that the teacher support of such practices was not high enough to facilitate sound teacher commitment. Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) completed their study findings by stating:

For increased inclusion to work in practice, substantial commitments of resources, personnel, and training are very necessary. This important point is true from the vantage of expressed teacher attitudes as well as from direct observation of instruction of students with disabilities in inclusive settings. (p. 210)

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum and the implementation of the LRE.* Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) made it clear that the students in the selected inclusion programs were not provided with *genuine* access to the general curriculum. The evaluation tool of the PASS variables made it obvious that appropriate individualization was not provided to the students with LD in these programs. It was also evident that students with disabilities were not permitted to learn the same lesson objectives as their peers in a more individualized manner. In

review of this study's findings, it is clear that a better implementation of the LRE concept might have been to provide a continuum-of-services instead of only providing an inclusive setting.

*Comparing Individualization in the Least Restrictive Setting to Individualization in a More Restrictive Setting*

Based on a 1995 study by Fuchs and Fuchs and the original EAHCA of 1975, Espin et al. (1998) stated that it is the individual focus that makes special education special and it is the IEP that is key to tailoring individual programs. Espin et al., however, questioned the extent to which individual programming remains central to special education. Specifically, they questioned to what degree individual tailoring occurs in inclusive and non-inclusive settings.

Citing the classic elementary study published by J.M. Baker and Zigmond in 1995, and a 1996 secondary study by Deno, Foegen, Robinson, and Espin, Espin et al. (1998) summarized that students with disabilities who are educated in inclusive settings could experience a reduction in the degree to which instruction is individually tailored. They then questioned whether it was the result of teachers' failing to deliver individually planned instruction or whether it was the students' programs not being individually planned that reduced the degree to which instruction was not individually tailored.

Three studies were cited by Espin et al. (1998) that compared IEPs for students in different service delivery models. Hunt and Farron-Davis in 1992 compared 22 IEPs of students who had severe disabilities with those in special classes to those in general education classes. Hunt and Farron-Davis found that students with severe disabilities in inclusive settings had more short-term objectives in their IEPs. These objectives, however, were related to the interactions between students with and without disabilities. It was shown that settings could influence the development of IEPs.

Espin et al. (1998) then cited studies conducted by Smith and Simpson in 1989 and Smith in 1990 that examined the extent to which IEPs were individualized for students in different settings. In the studies of 22 IEPs, the congruence between current level of performance information and annual goals was found to be greater in IEPs from self-contained settings than in IEPs from resource settings. The initial implication made by Espin et al. (1998) from the review of the two studies was that the less restrictive the setting; the less individualized the IEP programming can become.

*Purpose of the study.* Espin et al. (1998) therefore determined to study the extent to which settings influenced the individualization of the IEPs for students with mild disabilities. The specific purpose of their study was to determine whether the IEPs for students with mild disabilities in inclusive programs differed in their degree of individualization from IEPs for students in more traditional special education resource programs.

*Participants in the study.* Participants in the study included 108 students with IEPs who received special education services for reading in 12 different schools. Fifty students, with resource program IEPs, came from 10 different teachers while 58 students, with inclusive program IEPs, came from 18 different teachers. A total of 8 first grade students, 6 second grade students, 12 third grade students, 10 fourth grade students, 11 fifth grade students, and 3 sixth grade students participated in the study. Participants of the study that were from a resource setting program included 42 students categorized as learning disabled (LD) and 8 students categorized as having mild mental retardation (MMR). Participants of the study who were from an inclusive setting program included 7 students not given a label, 36 students categorized as LD, 10 students categorized as MMR, 1 student categorized as having emotional or behavior disorders (EBD), and 4 students categorized as other. Participants of the study who were from a

resource setting program had a mean score on the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT) total score of 78.53 with a standard deviation of 11.97. Participants of the study who were from an inclusive setting program had a mean score on the OLSAT total score of 79.72 with a standard deviation of 11.24.

*Dependent variables and measures.* The students' IEPs were studied to determine the number of minutes per week of special education services, the number of long-range goals and short-term objectives, and the sources of information used to formulate each of four areas of the IEP (current level of performance, rationale for placement, long-range goals, and short-term objectives). The OLSAT is a norm-referenced test that is administered by group in about 45 minutes. Scores were examined to determine the degree to which IEPs were customized according to differences in student ability. Differences in IEPs for students who were labeled LD or MMR were the focus of the study due to the possibility that IEP development might have differed as a function of the type of disability. A Reading Program Description Questionnaire (RPDQ) of 23 items that addressed planning, structure, implementation, and evaluation of reading instruction was used to describe the reading program designed by each student's primary reading teacher and to study the extent to which the actual reading programs were consistent with the students' IEPs. Lastly, trained graduate students coded and computed 36 IEPs, 3 IEPs from each participating school.

*Procedure and analysis.* All teachers participating in the study completed the RPDQ. Each participating student's IEP was studied and then compared with the OLSAT and the RPDQ results. The following four questions were used to help organize and analyze the data:

1. Do consistent differences exist between the written IEPs for students in resource and in inclusive programs?

2. Do components of the IEP vary in relation to student ability level, and does this relation differ for students in resource and inclusive programs?
3. Do components of the IEP vary in relation to student disability category, and does this relation differ for students in resource and inclusive programs?
4. Do components of the IEP vary in relation to the type of reading program delivered to students, and does this relation differ for students in resource and inclusive programs?

(p.168)

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and a follow-up one-way analysis of variance (ANOVAs) were used to examine program differences on the four IEP components. To examine the concordance between student ability level and the information included in the IEP (IEP service minutes within each program), Pearson product moment correlations were conducted. To determine a relation between components of the IEP and disability category, MANOVAs and ANOVAs were conducted on the variables. A MANOVA and an ANOVA were conducted on the variables to investigate whether there was a relation between students' IEPs and their actual reading programs, and whether this relation differed for students in resource and inclusive programs.

*More individualization found in more restrictive settings.* Espin et al. (1998) found that differences did exist between the IEPs written for students in the two types of service delivery models, as well as in the relations between IEP components and other variables. The pattern that was identified suggested that there was more individualization in the programming for students in resource models than in the programming for students in inclusive models. In other words, they found that there was more individualization in more restrictive settings.

Regarding more individualization in resource settings, Espin et al. (1998) concluded that IEPs for students in resource programs had more service minutes, more long-range goals, and used more sources of information than IEPs for students in inclusive programs. They determined that short-term objectives on IEPs written by teachers in resource programs were based on more sources of information and different types of information. They also concluded there was a better concordance between IEP components and the ability level of students in resource programs, and differences in IEPs by disability category were more pronounced in resource programs than in inclusive programs.

Espin et al. (1998) found only one area in which there was greater individualization of programming in inclusive settings. They found that the relation between the IEP level of service intensity and the number of minutes allocated to reading each day was greater for students in inclusive programs than for students in resource programs. Although data suggested that students had more time to read, nothing was said about what this gain from more minutes dedicated to reading demonstrated.

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* In review of this study's findings, it is evident that students received more individualization in the more restrictive (resource) settings than in the less restrictive (inclusion) setting. This conclusion implies that students in the inclusion programs were not provided *genuine* access to the general curriculum. Students in inclusion settings were not permitted to learn the same lesson objectives as their peers in a more individualized manner.

#### *Achievement Outcomes for Students in Inclusive Classrooms*

Klingner et al. (1998) explained that in much of the literature there is an implicit assumption that when students with disabilities are instructed in the general education classroom

alongside their same-age peers, then those students with disabilities benefit to a greater extent. Klingner et al. stated that what is missing from the research “is empirical evidence that documents the effects of inclusion, particularly for students with learning disabilities” (p. 153). They further emphasized that more research is warranted regarding “the characteristics of students who make gains in full-time general education placements and the conditions under which their special education needs are met” (p. 153). Klingner et al. also stressed that there is little research regarding the learning outcomes of students without disabilities who are placed in full-time general education placements with students with disabilities. As a result, they further recommended that an examination of academic outcomes for students in inclusive classrooms should consider effects across achievement levels.

*Purpose of the study.* Klingner et al. (1998) therefore determined to study the academic progress of students, with and without learning disabilities, who were placed in full-time general education classes and who had teachers that had been a part of a professional development program. Klingner et al. (1998) noted they were also particularly interested in the study’s results that described the academic reading progress of students with LD when compared to their classmates.

*Participants in the study.* Participants in the study included 114 students in grades 3 through 6 that were placed in inclusion classrooms from a single metropolitan elementary school. Out of the 114 students, 25 were identified LD and 89 were identified as non-disabled. All of the general education students’ teachers and all of the special education students’ teachers participated in the study. There were four general education teachers and two special education teachers.

*Dependent variables and measures.* Reading and math tests were administered in a group setting to all the students in the study. The reading test that was administered was the Basic Academic Skills Samples-Reading test, also known as the BASS. The math test that was administered was the Mathematics Concepts and Applications Test, also known as the MCA.

Students who were identified as LD were administered portions of two other tests. Only the reading decoding and the reading comprehension sub-test of the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, also known as the KTEA, were administered to students identified as LD. Only the word identification sub-test of the Qualitative Reading Inventory, also known as the QRI, was administered to students identified as LD. These assessments were used with students identified as LD to add in the further understanding of the students' progress.

*Intervention and analysis.* All of the teachers participating in the study were the recipients of a professional development program that focused on improving student outcomes in literacy. The professional development program involved meeting in workshop sessions that lasted for a total of four days. The topics of the workshops included the Writing Process Approach, Collaborative Strategic Reading, Class-wide Peer Tutoring, and Making Words. The academic achievement of those students who were assigned to the teachers who participated in the professional development program was measured.

The data were analyzed in two sections, beginning with the academic outcomes for achievement groups to the more specific findings for the students with LD. Due to the teacher intervention focusing more on improving literacy skills, the reading tests were examined more extensively than the math tests. The academic gains for each achievement group were analyzed separately.

*Low student achievement outcome found for poor readers identified as LD.* The group of students found in the low- to average-achieving and high-achieving groups improved at statistically significant levels on all reading and math tests. The students identified as LD improved at statistically significant levels in reading, but not in math. Students who were tested at the beginning of the year at a first-grade reading level on the QRI stayed at a low level. The poorest readers identified by the KTEA tests kept the overall mean difference score low. It was found that students with LD who were poor readers made no progress and that full-time placement in the general education classrooms with in-class support from special education teachers was not sufficient.

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* Even with in-class support from special education teachers, students identified as LD who were poor readers made no progress in the full-time placement in the general education classroom. This conclusion implies that those students did not receive *genuine* access to the general curriculum. Those students with a disability and identified as LD needed combined services that included in-class support and daily intensive, one-on-one instruction from highly trained personnel in order to succeed. The fact that those students did not receive that type of service implies that their access to being able to learn the content in the general curriculum was limited.

#### *Impact of Inclusion on Achievement, Behavior and Self-esteem, and Parental Attitudes*

Daniel and King (1997) explained that the foundation for inclusive education is actually in the original P.L. 94-142 with the subsequent reauthorization in 1990, known as IDEA, which requires that students with a disability be educated in an environment that constitutes a LRE. Daniel and King pointed out that even with this foundation the delivery of special education services has evolved to separate categorical programs that have been traditionally delivered

through pullout programs where special education students are educated separately from their age-appropriate peers. These boundaries, however, that once separated general education and special education, according to Daniel and King, are becoming increasingly blurred as the educational reform known as inclusion is emerging in schools throughout the nation. Daniel and King believed that the accumulation of additional information that can provide a foundation for informed, knowledgeable choices hinges on the future debate surrounding inclusion.

*Purpose of the study.* Daniel and King (1997) determined to study primarily the impact of students' placement versus non-placement in an inclusion classroom in relation to academic achievement, student behavior and student self-esteem, and parental attitudes. Secondly, Daniel and King determined to study whether student placement in three different types of inclusion programs could affect differences in the variables.

*Participants in the study.* Students with and without disabilities were from one of three types of classrooms as defined in relation to inclusion. The three types of elementary classrooms defined were random inclusion classrooms (students with disabilities remained in the regular classroom throughout the day), clustered inclusion classrooms (students with disabilities remained in the regular class throughout the day), and non-inclusion classrooms (students with disabilities remained in the regular class for a portion of the day and in a self-contained class for a portion of the day). Students with special learning needs who had been identified as LD, language impaired, and gifted were randomly assigned across all the classrooms in the school, which were known as random inclusion classrooms. Six of the random inclusion classrooms were studied.

Two other classrooms were studied that were assigned an additional clustering of students with special needs. These two classrooms, defined as cluster inclusion classrooms,

consisted of a higher percentage of children with special needs than the percentage of children with special needs in the random inclusion classrooms. Specific details about the range of disabilities, and the exact percentage of children with special needs were not mentioned.

Four other classrooms that were studied, defined as non-inclusion classrooms, also consisted of students with special learning needs who had been identified as LD, language impaired, and gifted. In those four non-inclusion classrooms, however, the students with special learning needs were mainstreamed into the classrooms for only a portion of the school day because they also received special education services through a pullout resource program.

The total number of students who participated in the study was 207 third through fifth graders from 12 classrooms in one elementary school. The total number of students was divided into three groups. The first group was made up of four non-inclusion classrooms, with 68 students who received part time instruction in the general education classroom with resource room support. The second group consisted of two clustered inclusion classrooms, with 34 students. The third group was comprised of six random inclusion classrooms, with 105 students. Students in groups two and three received full-time instruction in these inclusive classrooms.

*Dependent variables and measures.* Three standardized instruments and one non-standardized instrument were used to measure areas of interest to the study. The standardized instruments used were a child behavior checklist, a self-esteem index, and a Stanford Achievement Test. The non-standardized instrument used was a parent concern questionnaire. The four instruments were used with the regular education and special education students who participated in the study.

The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) measured teacher and parent perceptions of various behaviors. The Brown and Alexander Self-Esteem Index (SEI) was used for students to

report their familial acceptance, academic competence, peer popularity, and personal security. The Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) was used to report students' academic achievement in the areas of reading, mathematics, language, and spelling. The SAT is a group-administered achievement test battery. The SAT is, however, normed on a typical population and does not provide the refined, diagnostic information that a supplementary assessment like the KTEA could provide. The students' test gains were calculated by the subtracting of their national percentile scores for the previous year from their national percentile scores for the present year on each of the sub-tests. The parent concern questionnaire was developed as a part of the study and reported parent concerns about their children's school program.

*Procedure and analysis.* Information about the participants was collected through the following instruments: the SAT, the SEI, the CBCL, and the parent concern questionnaire. Descriptive statistics for each discriminating variable was used across the entire sample and was broken down by grade level and the three groups.

*More behavior problems, lower self-esteem, and more parent concerns found for students in inclusive settings.* It was concluded that when comparing the effects of the inclusion programs (random inclusion classrooms and cluster inclusion classrooms) to the non-inclusion program (non-inclusion classroom), there was a higher instance of behavior problems, lower student self-esteem, and more parent concerns in the inclusion programs. The researchers also concluded that there appeared to be no consistent pattern in achievement differences related to the effects of the inclusion programs. For example, there were higher gains in reading scores in third-grade inclusion programs, but students in fourth-grade inclusion programs experienced smaller gains in mathematics. The results do not support consistent academic gains in inclusive settings.

In comparing the two inclusion programs, it was found that students in the clustered inclusion classrooms were less likely to experience gains in reading achievement scores and were more likely to express lower self-esteem. Teachers and parents of the students in the clustered classes were also more likely to report instances of behavioral problems, and parents were more likely to report a higher degree of concern with the school's programs. The comparison between the two types of inclusion classrooms suggested that educators pay careful attention to the number of students placed in inclusion classrooms. The higher percentage of students with disabilities placed in the cluster inclusion classrooms may have facilitated fewer gains in reading achievement, lower self-esteem, more behavioral problems, and more parent concerns.

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* From reviewing the results of the Daniel and King (1997) study, it appears that special and regular education students in the random inclusion classrooms and in the cluster inclusion classrooms did not benefit from inclusive program practices due to an increase in student behavior problems, low self-esteem, and parental concerns. The inclusion teacher may have had to devote more time to disciplining students and less time to providing instruction, and the students with low self-esteem in the inclusion classrooms may have lacked the motivation to focus on the instruction that was provided. These two deficiencies created by the inclusion programs imply that *genuine* access to the general curriculum was limited not only for the special education students but also for the regular education students. The optimal instructional environment was intruded upon by distracting incidents related to poor discipline and low self-esteem. With the combination of poor student behavior and low self-esteem experienced by the students in the inclusive programs, it is

no surprise that parents of the students in the inclusive programs reported a higher degree of concerns.

### *Students' Views of Teacher Adaptations in the General Classroom*

Vaughn et al. (1995) expressed concern regarding the movement toward more inclusive schools in relation to whether the learning needs of students with disabilities were adequately being addressed in the general education classroom. Vaughn et al. (1995) articulated that a study of the students' perceptions of instructional practices for students with special needs is a very important piece of research that is needed. They explained that students' perceptions can directly or indirectly influence teachers' behavior and that students' reactions to teachers' adaptations can contribute to their likely success in the classroom.

*Purpose of the study.* Vaughn et al. (1995) therefore determined to conduct individualized interviews with middle and high school students to understand their perceptions of teachers' adaptations to meet the special learning needs of students in the general education classroom. It was also the goal of these authors to identify what middle and high school students said they needed in order to learn the content taught in the general classroom.

*Participants in the study.* Participants from the study were attendees from a middle school and a high school in a large city in the southeastern United States. Forty-seven middle school students participated in the study. There were 14 seventh grade students and 33 eighth grade students. Out of the 47 middle school students, 89% of the students were Hispanic, 8% of the students were Black, and 3% of the students were white non-Hispanic. Forty-eight high school students participated in the study. There were 28 eleventh grade students and 20 twelfth grade students. Out of the 48 high school students, 82% of the students were Hispanic, 1% of the students was Black, 16% of the students were White non-Hispanic, and 1% of the students was

Asian-American or East Indian. On the most recent administration of the reading comprehension sub-test for the Stanford Achievement Test, the median percentile score for the middle school was 34 and the median percentile score for the high school was 45.

Participants in the study included low-achieving students (LA), average-achieving students (AA), high-achieving students (HA), students with LD, and students who spoke English as a second language (ESL). Students identified as LA achieved stanine levels of 1, 2, and 3 in reading comprehension on the most recent school district administration of the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT). Students identified as AA achieved stanine levels of 4, 5, and 6 in reading comprehension on the most recent school district administration of the SAT. Students identified as HA achieved stanine levels of 7, 8, and 9 in reading comprehension on the most recent school district administration of the SAT.

Students who were identified as LD met the school district's criteria for that classification. Identifying a significant discrepancy between IQ and achievement test scores, identifying evidence of a processing deficit, and ensuring the learning disability was not due to a condition such as learning a second language or having a physical disability were all part of the school district's criteria.

*Dependent variables and measures.* The Students' Perceptions of Textbook Adaptations Interview (SPTAI) was the instrument used in the study. The SPTAI was made up of 11 questions. The SPTAI included structured and open-ended questions. Sample question topics included soliciting students' opinions on whether they prefer to be taught with textbooks or experiments/projects. Other topics included asking students their opinions on pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities. Additional questions included gathering information

on how students felt about the extent to which they think adaptations should be made for LA students and what adaptations the students liked or disliked.

*Procedure and analysis.* A field test using the SPTAI was first administered to 10 middle school and 10 high school students. After secondary teachers and an outside expert reviewed the field test results, the instrument was administered individually by trained interviewers. The interviews were recorded and all tapes were audio-checked to ensure accuracy.

Two independent researchers then developed a coding system of the data by randomly reading 10 middle school and 10 high school interview results. Common themes were identified and an initial list of categories was developed. The 20 interview results were then reviewed again and coded using the category list. The two researchers then coded the transcribed responses using the coding scheme. Intercoder agreement was defined as when the reviewers coded the students' responses as in the same category. The intercoder agreement was found to be .90. The differences were resolved through discussion by the reviewers.

*Students' perceptions of how they could benefit from teacher adaptations in the general classroom.* It was concluded in the study that all students believed they needed extra teacher's assistance to learn from a textbook and that they could benefit best from the teacher using strategy instruction designed to assist them in learning on their own. Most of the students said they wanted more teacher-directed assistance regarding pre-reading and during-reading activities. Most of the students said they would like to participate in peer tutoring opportunities. Most students said that in order for learning to occur, they realized they needed to participate in activities such as writing summaries and that they needed teacher adaptations. Students reported that they felt their teachers were not making the adaptations they needed to help them learn.

*Additional conclusions and questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* One implication from the study for students identified as LD in inclusion programs is that students with LD must be taught learning strategies that will provide them with the tools they need to actively participate and learn from teacher presentations and textbooks. If students are not taught strategies on how to learn in the general classroom, then their access to learning the content in the general curriculum could be limited.

A second implication for students identified as LD in inclusion programs is that teachers need to group students in their classes according to learning styles. Student pairing and teacher-selected grouping could be used to accomplish this grouping task. If students who are LD are not allowed to learn according to their learning style, then their access to learning the content in the general curriculum could be limited.

A third implication is that students identified as LD said they prefer homogeneous whole class grouping as opposed to heterogeneous whole class grouping. Students who are LD may feel reluctant to participate in classroom activities if they feel their difficulties would be more obvious to other students. Students who feel self-conscious may not be able to learn the content in the general curriculum as well as they could.

A final implication from the study suggests that students perceive teacher adaptations positively but do worry about the pace being slowed down to the point of some students being prevented from learning. Students who are LD may worry about slowing the rest of the class down and decline much needed repetition and extra drill, thus limiting their ability to learn the content in the general curriculum and *genuine* access to the general curriculum.

### *Principals' Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward Inclusion*

Barnett and Monda-Amay (1998) explained that more schools are including students with disabilities in the regular classroom. As a result, principals' beliefs in the inclusion philosophy and their willingness and ability to lead staff in successful implementation of inclusive practices are important and should be further investigated.

*Purpose of the study.* Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) therefore proposed to examine the attitudes and knowledge of principals toward inclusion. It was thought that the information gained from such an inquiry could provide a foundation for understanding how inclusive practices could better be implemented and how principals could better prepare for including students with disabilities in the regular classroom.

*Participants of the study.* Participants from the study were principals from 115 randomly selected schools in the State of Illinois. There were 29 high school principals, 27 junior high school principals, and 59 elementary school principals who were sent surveys to complete.

*Dependent variables and measures.* The instrument used in the study was a survey that was divided into four sections. The first section of the survey elicited basic background information from the principal. Specifically, questions were asked to find out what types of special education programs were in the principals' schools and what types of professional preparations the principals had experienced.

The second section of the survey addressed the topic of leadership style. The principals were provided with four statements that summarized common models of leadership. The principals were then requested to identify the statement that best reflected their style of school leadership.

The third section of the survey elicited the principals' definition of inclusion. Principals were given a list of terms and asked to select the five terms that they considered most essential to their definition of inclusion. The principals were then asked to select from a list of eight categories of special needs populations the students to whom they felt their definition of inclusion would apply. The eight categories included the following: learning disabilities, at-risk for school failure, behavior disorders, educable mentally handicapped, trainable mentally handicapped, severely or profoundly handicapped, physically/health impaired, and culturally diverse. Principals were finally given a set of questions further addressing the definition of the inclusion that required the principals to respond on a 4-point Likert scale with 0 equaling not at all and with 3 equaling completely. The set of questions were related to the following areas: (a) Their attitudes toward inclusion; (b) The extent to which inclusion is present in their school; (c) The degree to which their school was working to become inclusive; (d) The current preparation of their teachers to teach in inclusive settings; (e) Their beliefs about the potential success of inclusion in their schools; and (f) Their opinion on how supportive their communities would be toward inclusion.

The final section addressed how principals rated the extent to which a list of 21 practices that were determined to be effective inclusion practices were being used their schools and how successful those practices were. The list of practices was gleaned from the literature as useful approaches for students with disabilities in the regular classroom. The list of practices included the following: collaboration, co-teaching, in-service on inclusion, interaction analysis, parent education support groups, parent/volunteer participation, peer coaching, teacher assistance teams, teacher mentoring, behavior management, computer-assisted instruction, cooperative learning, curricular modification, curriculum-based assessment, direct instruction, heterogeneous

and/or multi-age groupings, learning strategies instruction, modification of peer attitudes, multicultural education, peer and cross-age tutoring, and social skills instruction. In one column on the survey, the principals indicated the extent to which the practice was being used in their schools. Principals responded using a Likert scale with 0 equaling not at all and with 3 equaling routinely. In another column, the principals indicated the extent to which they perceived the practices to be effective for inclusion. Principals again responded using a Likert scale with 0 equaling not at all and with 3 equaling extremely.

*Procedures and analysis.* The surveys were coded, to protect the respondents' identities, and were mailed to the participants. To analyze the first three sections of the survey, demographic information, leadership styles, and inclusion definitions and practices, descriptive statistics were used. ANOVAs were used to determine if different responses occurred because of the grade level to which the principal was assigned or because of the personal characteristics of the principal. T tests were used to determine the overall difference between ratings of the perceived effectiveness of the 21 educational practices and the extent to which the practices were perceived as being used. Correlations were used to evaluate whether leadership styles influenced how inclusion was defined, how student populations were chosen, how attitudes were determined, and how educational practices were determined.

Of the 115 surveys that were mailed, 57% were returned. Specifically, surveys were returned by 56% of the elementary principals, 59% of the junior high principals, and 55% of the high school principals. The principals reported that 31% of their schools were rural, 19% of their schools were urban, and that 50% of their schools were suburban.

The service delivery models most often used in the principals' schools were resource and consultative programs for students with learning disabilities and students with behavior

disorders. Principals of high schools reported the highest percentage of consultation programs for students with learning disabilities and behavior disorders as well as the highest percentage of resource programs for students labeled as educable mentally handicapped and trainable mentally handicapped.

Of the 65 surveys returned from principals, there were only 3 administrators who reported they had special education teaching experience. The majority of administrators who returned the surveys, 89%, were principals with the remaining 11% being principal/superintendents, principal/assistant superintendents, assistant superintendent for instruction, or assistant principals. Thirty percent of the surveys returned were from female administrators while 70% of the surveys returned were from male administrators.

In identifying the principals' leadership styles, the greatest percentage of participants, 57%, responded that they try to make sure that all employees are highly motivated and satisfied with their work. The next to highest percentage of participants, 30%, responded that they try to develop a school culture that shapes the behavior of employees in desirable ways.

In identifying the principals' definitions of inclusion, the greatest percentage of participants selected the following three items as the most essential to their definition of inclusion: supportive environment with a 56% response, shared responsibility with a 48% response, and cooperative with a 41% response. The highest ratings specifically given by high school administrators were the terms, shared responsibility with 47% response, and mainstreaming with 40% response.

The three educational practices that received the overall highest rating by the principals for being the most used and effective practices in their schools to facilitate successful inclusion were the grouping of students heterogeneously or with other students of different ages, using

collaboration, and using cooperative learning. When tabulating the highest percentages for the most used and effective practices to facilitate successful inclusion perceived by high school principals, collaboration was ranked first, grouping students heterogeneously was ranked second, and computer-assisted instruction and curricular modifications were tied for being ranked third.

*Conclusions from the study.* It was determined that greater consistency is needed in defining an inclusive philosophy and inclusive practices. It was also determined that principals believed their schools were somewhat inclusive, were becoming more inclusive, that all children should not be included in regular classrooms, that teachers were not prepared to support inclusive practices, and that communities were not prepared to support inclusive practices. Lastly, the researchers found that collaboration, heterogeneous/multi-age groupings, computer-assisted instruction, and curricular modifications were perceived to be the most extensively used and the most effective practices by the principals at the high school level.

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* It is disconcerting to note that principals believed that their schools were becoming more inclusive but that their teachers were not prepared to support inclusive practices. The question arises as to how individualization can take place in the general classroom with students who have disabilities when the teachers of those classes are unprepared to provide specially designed instruction. Teacher preparedness to teach students in the regular classroom and practices that emphasize individualization are critical to providing *genuine* access to the general curriculum.

#### *Depressive Symptoms In and Type of Classroom Placement*

Howard and Tryon (2002) explained that the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA has called for more inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom. They therefore maintained that research in the area of including students in the general classroom is warranted.

*Purpose of the study.* Howard and Tryon (2002) investigated the relationship of depressive symptomatology to type of classroom placement in a sample of adolescents with LD who attended an urban public high school. It was thought that high school students who were LD and had a self-contained placement would rate themselves as more depressed than other high school students who were LD and had a general education classroom placement. It was also thought that guidance counselors would rate high school students who were LD and had a self-contained placement as more depressed than other high school students who were LD and had a general education classroom placement.

*Participants in the study.* The participants in the study were 52 students with LD from a New York City public high school with a total enrollment of 2,280 students. All of the students that participated in the study were African Americans. Half of the participant group had an IEP placement in self-contained classrooms. The other half of the participant group had an IEP placement in general education classrooms. One female high school counselor and one male high school counselor also participated in the study.

*Dependent variables and measures.* The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition (WISC-III) was used to measure student participants' full IQ score. The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) was used to measure the student participants' actual achievement.

One of the measures of student depression was the Beck Depression Inventory-Second Edition (BDI-II), a 21-item self-report that assesses and measures the severity of depressive symptoms. Another instrument used to measure student depression was the Devereux Behavior Rating Scale-School Form (DBRS-S), an objective measure of emotional functioning that is to

be completed by school personnel who are in a position to observe and rate a student's performance.

*Procedure and analysis.* Each student participant was administered the WISC-III, the WIAT, and the BDI-II at their routine evaluation time. Any student who had difficulty reading the words on the BDI-II was given assistance by the testing examiner. The school counselors completed ratings of students on the DBRS-S.

Overall scores from the BDI-II instrument were compared to the WISC-III and the WIAT. There was no correlation found between the BDI-II scores and either the WISC-III scores or the WIAT scores. The BDI-II revealed a mean score of 15.15 for students in self-contained classes and a mean score of 14.62 for students in general education classes. Only a few more students in self-contained classes reported having more symptoms of depression than students in general education classes. The DBRS-S revealed a mean score of 11.35 for students in self-contained classes and a mean score of 13.15 for students in general education classes. More school counselors, however, reported students in general education classes to have more symptoms of depression than students in self-contained classes.

Approximately 45% of the students with LD rated themselves as having a mild or greater level of depression. Approximately 32% of the students with LD rated themselves as having moderate to severe symptoms of depression. School counselors rated 43% of the students with LD as being within the clinically significant range for depression.

*Conclusions from the study.* The results showed that a large percentage of special education students, as listed above, were rated by either their guidance counselors or themselves as having significant symptoms consistent of depression. Students who rated themselves showed no differences in scores concerning type of classroom placement. Guidance counselors, however,

rated students with LD in general education classes as having more symptoms of depression than students in self-contained classes. Howard and Tyron (1998) did note, however, that previous research does show that self-ratings and other ratings of depressive symptoms in students with LD are not always in agreement.

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* It should concern educators to know that students with LD in general classrooms can experience higher levels of depression. As pointed out in the study, the depression could be triggered when students with LD compare themselves to other students in the general classroom and feel inferior.

From my experience as a teacher and as an administrator, I have noticed that students who experience depression are often prone to shut down and not focus on class work and homework. If students with LD shut down due to symptoms of depression that stem from low self-esteem, then their *genuine* access to the general curriculum could be limited.

Educators who teach students with LD in the general classroom must therefore be careful to watch for symptoms of depression. Educators in the general classroom must be prepared to respond with encouragement, support, and guidance counseling referrals as needed.

#### *Varied Meanings and Practice Perceived by Teachers*

Smith (1997) explained that students with disabilities who are currently in inclusion classrooms at the elementary level face the possibility of moving to a more segregated classroom environment at the high school level. If not placed in a segregated classroom environment, these students could experience inclusion but within a system grounded in ability grouping that reflects beliefs about student academic potential and competence. Citing Scruggs and Mastropieri in 1996 who found secondary teachers to be less positive about inclusion, Smith explained that

research is needed to understand high school teachers' thinking and teaching practices regarding their students who have general and special education labels.

*Purpose of study.* Smith (1997) examined the perspectives of teachers who taught ninth grade classes that included students with disabilities. Specifically she proposed to generate data from observations and interviews to develop meanings and interpretations of inclusion for the teachers of an inclusive instructional team in a high school.

*Participants in the study.* The study took place at an urban high school in the northeastern United States that had a total enrollment of 1000 students. The school was among one of the poorest in the area with 55% of the student body receiving free and reduced lunches. Further demographics revealed that 60% of the students were of European American descent with the rest of the student body being African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, or other. A team of teachers and students, known as the A Team, was involved in a pilot inclusive program. The A Team included 125 students. As a part of the 125 students, 25 of the students were students with a range of disabilities and 25 of the students were students that had been labeled at risk of dropping out of school. The A Team also included a special education teacher, a paraprofessional, a teacher's aide for a student with Down Syndrome, and four teachers, one from each of the four disciplines (e.g. English, math, science, and social studies).

*Data Collection.* The study was a qualitative study that was based in symbolic interaction. The symbolic interaction approach uses observations and interviews to lead to the discovery of themes about the meanings that participants give to situations, events, and people. The symbolic approach also fosters a deeper understanding of definitions and of the experiences and process that lead to the definitions. Observations and interviews were therefore used to collect the data. The interview guide contained a list of seven questions with subsequent

questions that facilitated the discovery of the participants' background, understanding of inclusion, current involvement in the implementation of the inclusion philosophy, and thoughts about their involvement in the implementation of the inclusion philosophy. The following questions were used as a part of the interview guide:

1. How did you come to be teaching at West? What do you do? Whom do you work with?
2. What are your experiences in inclusive settings? (or with children with disabilities); share key learning experiences that guide your work here.
3. Why are you involved? What does it mean to you?
4. What is inclusion? Has your definition or idea about it changed?
5. What are you doing with Gerard? How is it going? How do you think about him?
6. What do you want to tell other teachers thinking about "taking on" inclusion?
7. Is there anything else you wish to mention or discuss?

*Procedure and analysis.* Eight observations that lasted 1 hour in length were made in A Team classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with five of the A Team staff members. An English teacher, a social studies teacher, a special education teacher, a long-term substitute social studies teacher, and a one-to-one aide of a student with Down Syndrome from the A Team were all interviewed. Interviews and field notes were transcribed. Field notes and transcriptions were analyzed for themes, key issues, and recurring activities. Memos were then used to note emerging themes, thoughts, and comments about the data. The coding process occurred in three stages. The first stage involved choosing a focus. Themes that emerged from stage one included academic, social, and attitude. The second stage involved examining teacher perspectives on inclusion and how those perspectives affected the students with disabilities.

Themes that emerged from stage two included dreams and goals, strategies, planning, teacher rewards, and teacher role. The third stage involved combining the codes into categories. The categories were based on meanings and how the meanings led to practices. The last stage brought about reexamination and reinterpretation of all the data because of the new categories that emerged.

*Conclusions from the study.* Smith (1997) found that the meaning of inclusion differed among the participants in the study. She also found that differences in perspectives and practices emerged from the data along with the various meanings of inclusion. The general themes that emerged from the data included interpretations of inclusion, strategies and structures, and outcomes of inclusion for teachers and students. Factors from the theme of interpretations of inclusion included diversity, belonging, and inclusive status. Factors from the theme of strategies and structures included curriculum, teaching strategies, and social support for teachers. Factors from the theme of outcomes of inclusion for teachers and students included impact on teaching practice, teachers merging social and academic goals for students, and student outcomes such as progress, achievement, and meanings of inclusion. The results depicted the complexity of inclusion and indicated suggestions for practice and research. Smith explained that the supportive practices like the practices observed in the A Team would facilitate a successful inclusion program. Smith also noted, however, that for inclusion practices to be successful, teachers must work to ensure consistent expectation for student participation in classroom activities and must work to overcome scheduling difficulties for special education students.

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* It was distressing that in this study there were not consistent expectations for certain students with disabilities. For example, Gerard, the student with Down Syndrome, was pulled from his morning class three times a week to

receive services for speech and adapted physical education. On other days, Gerard would come to class halfway into his second period class due to his community-based instruction, which involved his shopping and ordering in fast food restaurants. As a result, Gerard lost continuity of instruction and may not have experienced *genuine* access to the general curriculum because of his sporadic attendance in core curriculum classes. The question of what constitutes a beneficial curriculum for students of differing abilities is therefore raised.

### *Secondary Special Educators in Co-Taught and Special Education Settings*

Weiss and Lloyd (2002) explained there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities who have been receiving a majority of their education in the general education classroom. With additional pressure for students with disabilities to receive their education in the regular classroom, schools have had to look to different service-delivery options such as co-teaching. When a special educator and a regular educator work together to deliver instruction to a diverse group of students in a single space, then the practice is known as co-teaching. In 1995, 891 districts in 50 states confirmed their use of inclusive programs in their schools and these districts reported that they used co-teaching more often than other service models to implement their inclusive programs.

*Purpose of the study.* Weiss and Lloyd (2002) therefore conducted a study to determine the roles of special educators in co-taught classrooms at the secondary level and to find out how the instructional actions of special educators differed in co-taught and special education classrooms. It was the goal of the investigators to understand and interpret the meanings and actions of the special education teachers in co-taught and special education classrooms.

*Participants of the study.* The middle school and high school in which this study took place were located in a rural area in the mid-Atlantic region. The schools began implementing a

co-teaching model 3 years prior to the study. There were 3 special educators who co-taught at the high school level. All of the co-teachers from the high school participated in the study. There were 3 special educators who co-taught at the middle school level. All of the co-teachers from the middle school also participated in the study. Of the 6 teachers who participated in the study, 5 had master's degrees in special education. The teachers co-taught across the content but taught math, English, and study skills in special education resource rooms. In their co-taught classrooms, there was an average of 4 students with disabilities and 17 students without disabilities. In their special education classrooms, there was an average of 7 students with disabilities. All the participants had received some training in co-teaching. The participants were also given articles and other written materials from the administration about co-teaching. The middle school co-teachers had common planning periods; the high school co-teachers did not.

*Data collection.* The data was collected in this qualitative study through observations, interviews, and the reviewing of documents. Fifty-four observations, each lasting 30 minutes, were made in co-taught and special education classroom settings. Each teacher was observed approximately 9 times.

Special education co-teachers were also interviewed three different times. The first interview included questions that helped the researchers better understand their observations. The second interview included questions that helped the researchers learn about the background of each participant. The third interview included questions that helped the researchers verify their data from the previous two interviews. An administrator was also interviewed in order to help the researchers understand the context within which the teachers worked.

After each observation, the teacher completed a journal entry that was analyzed by the researchers. Additional documents related to special education policy on integration and job responsibilities were reviewed.

*Procedure and analysis.* The data were transcribed and then entered into a test-based manager computer program called Folio Views to be analyzed. Through the computer program, data were coded, grouped, and sorted by categories, concepts, and mediating circumstances. The constant-comparative data analysis method was then used, which is a systematic set of procedures that are used to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about an occurrence. Of the three progressive stages of coding, open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the method of open coding was selected. Open coding is the process of collecting data and forming the categories for that data as the collection proceeds.

*Findings.* Weiss and Lloyd placed the data collected into four categories: Roles in the co-taught classroom, roles in special education classrooms, influences on co-teaching roles, and differences in instructional actions. Four roles were identified for co-teachers in the co-taught classroom: providing support to the classroom teacher, teaching the same content in a separate classroom with a smaller group of students from the co-taught class, teaching a different part of the content in the same classroom, and team teaching with the classroom teacher. In the special education classrooms, the teachers' role was that of sole instructor, controlling instruction, assessment, and feedback.

Weiss and Lloyd identified four key influences on co-teaching roles: scheduling pressures, content understanding, acceptance by general educators, and skills of the special needs student. These factors affected the roles special educators assumed in both the co-taught and special education classrooms.

Finally, the four instructional actions most noted in observations were considered, and these actions were compared between the co-taught classrooms and the special education classrooms. The instructional actions described were explaining, questioning, giving help, and giving feedback during teacher-directed instruction. The actions of explaining and questioning were found to be very similar in both classroom settings. Giving help was also similar, but the co-teachers gave help in a greater variety of ways in special education classrooms. Giving feedback was the instructional action in which there was the greatest difference between the co-taught classroom and the special education classroom; much more feedback was given and in a greater variety of ways in the special education classrooms.

*Conclusions from the study.* Special educators in this study took on different roles in their special education classes than they did in their co-taught classes. Those differences were influenced by differing definitions of co-teaching and perceived pressures from the classroom, the administration, and the professional community. An important difference was that in the special education classes, the teacher used strategies with students that were more specially-designed to meet the students' individual learning needs.

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* The researchers also stressed that they saw little use of the special educators' expertise in the co-teaching situations. The researchers pointed out that the purpose of the co-teaching in this study was to get the students with disabilities into the general curriculum and little thought was given as to how it was done or as to how well it was done. The important implication for practice was that co-teaching should not necessarily be seen as the right service-delivery model for all schools.

### *The Effect of the Standards Movement on Secondary Students with Disabilities*

The Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform conducted a 5-year study on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform (Dailey et al., 2000). During the first three years of the study, the focus was on describing and analyzing the interactions among “federal, state, and local standards-based education reform policies and programs and their implications for students with disabilities” (p. 13). During the last two years of the study, the focus of the study shifted to the location of the reforms such as classrooms, schools, and districts. Dailey et al., (2000) cited that there is currently much research on how local districts achieve state or federal policy but that “program delivery at the district or school levels is a major unknown factor in understanding how general and special education reforms interact” (p. 5).

*Participants in the study.* Data were collected from districts and high schools in three states. Representing settings from urban and rural locations and from diverse populations, six districts were studied in the three states. Each school district chose schools that were representative of its total district populations and that had similar enrollments and racial demography. Ten high schools were selected as sites for data collection. Participants included district superintendents or their designees, district directors of special education, special education teachers, regular education teachers, parents, and students.

*Methodology.* In all six districts, relevant documentation was reviewed at the district and school levels (e.g. standards, mission statements, handbooks), face-to-face interviews were conducted at the district and school levels, and classroom observations were made at the school level. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for triangulation purposes. The

triangulation was used to provide the redundant measurement of the same phenomenon through the examination of multiple sources of evidence.

*Findings of the study.* It was found that there was a lack of interaction between special education programs and policies with district- and school-based reform efforts. For many states, there is no requirement that all students will be part of reform efforts. Few states and districts provide schools with guidelines about aligning standards with the IEP of a student with a disability.

On the high school level, it was determined that there are several factors that greatly inhibit “the capacity and collaboration among special and general education teachers to include students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum and related assessments” (p. 7). The following factors were found to place limitations on the extent students with disabilities could access and benefit from a standards-based curriculum: department structure, subject-matter focus, lack of professional development, lack of common planning time, credit and graduation requirements, and course scheduling.

*Questioning genuine access to the general curriculum.* Based on the findings of the study, seven recommendations were made to educators. It would seem that if these recommendations are followed, then students with disabilities will have a greater chance of obtaining *genuine* access to the general curriculum.

The first recommendation was that the IEP should be the tool for declaring the supports needed by students with disabilities to participate in a standards-based curriculum and assessment program.

The second recommendation was that districts should develop a decision matrix that can be used by IEP teams to assist in their declaring the supports needed by students with disabilities

to participate in a standards-based curriculum and assessment program. The decision matrix would include criteria to help the IEP team negotiate, reconcile, and determine the supports needed by students with disabilities.

The third recommendation was that collegiate training programs for general education teachers should teach about the philosophy of inclusion and the pedagogical knowledge and strategies for teaching students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum.

The fourth recommendation was that there should be school based and school faculty led professional development activities that support the capacity of general and special education teachers to integrate standards-based curriculum and develop activities that prepare students for assessments. Tied to the fourth recommendation was that special education and regular education teachers should receive training on how to develop accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities to participate in the standards-based curriculum. Providing teachers and administrators opportunities to reflect and evaluate school and classroom practices, engage in interdepartmental study groups, and design and maintain interdepartmental strategic planning teams were additional topics recommended for professional development activities.

The fifth recommendation was that districts should organize high schools as interdepartmental structures that unite general and special education teachers together.

The sixth recommendation was that collegiate training and state certification boards should consider certification for secondary special education teachers that includes content-specific course work and knowledge required for teaching a standards-based curriculum.

The seventh recommendation was that school and central office administrators should strive for credibility as instructional leaders who understand the academic challenges of including students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum. Tied to the seventh

recommendation was the idea that administrators should develop a vision that has high academic expectations for students with disabilities. It was recommended that this vision be communicated and promoted consistently through course offerings, grading, staffing, finances, award structures, moral support, and collaboration opportunities for general and special educators to reflect further on issues related to teaching a standards-based curriculum to students with disabilities.

### *Review of Research Studies Findings*

The findings from the review of the research studies point out there are many practices that can be used to enhance individualization to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities. The list of practices below has been synthesized from the research studies reviewed.

1. Recognize the continued need for the continuum of services (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997).
2. Recognize the continued need for assigning special education services on a case-by-case basis (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997).
3. Preserve the individualization of instruction when teaching a student with disabilities in the regular classroom (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997).
4. When writing IEPs for less restrictive settings, emphasize individualization (Espin et al., 1998).
5. Provide resource room opportunities to students with LD who are poor readers (Klingner et al., 1998).
6. Pay careful attention to the number of students placed in a regular classroom (Daniel & King, 1997).

7. Teach students with LD learning strategies to provide them with the tools they need to actively participate and learn from teacher presentations and textbooks (Vaughn et al., 1995).
8. Group students according to their learning styles (Vaughn et al., 1995).
9. Provide homogeneous whole class grouping for students with LD (Vaughn et al., 1995).
10. Assist students with LD in not worrying about their slowing down the pace of the class (Vaughn et al., 1995).
11. Provide greater consistency in definition of an inclusive philosophy and practices (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998) and (Smith, 1997).
12. Prepare teachers and communities for teaching students with disabilities in the regular classroom (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).
13. Recognize collaboration as an effective practice for teaching students with disabilities in the regular classroom (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).
14. Acknowledge that although principals believe that heterogeneous grouping is an effective practice for teaching students with disabilities in the regular classroom (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998), students with LD prefer being taught in a homogeneous grouping and administrators should be sensitive to that preference (Vaughn et al., 1995).
15. Encourage computer-assisted instruction, as it is an effective practice for teaching students with disabilities in the regular classroom (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).
16. Modify the curriculum in order to teach students with disabilities effectively in the regular classroom (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).

17. Watch for depression in students with disabilities who may be feeling added stress or pressure from being placed in the regular classroom. Be prepared to offer counseling (Howard & Tryon, 2002).
18. Ensure that special educators take on the same type of role when teaching in the regular education classroom as they do when teaching in the special education classroom (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002).
19. Encourage special education teachers to continue to use strategies with students that are specially-designed to meet the students' individual learning needs in the regular classroom as well as when in the special education classroom (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002).
20. Use the IEP as the tool for declaring the supports needed by students with disabilities to participate in a standards-based curriculum and assessment program (Dailey et al., 2000).
21. Develop a district-wide matrix that can be used by IEP teams to assist in their declaring the supports needed by students with disabilities to participate in a standards-based curriculum and assessment program (Dailey et al., 2000).
22. Offer collegiate training programs for general education teachers that teach about the philosophy of inclusion and the pedagogical knowledge and strategies for teaching students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum (Dailey et al., 2000).
23. Develop a school based and school faculty led professional development program that helps general and special education teachers integrate the standards-based curriculum and prepares students for assessments (Dailey et al., 2000).

24. Train special education and regular education teachers on how to develop accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities to participate in the standards-based curriculum (Dailey et al., 2000).
25. Provide teachers and administrators the opportunity to reflect and evaluate school and classroom practices, engage in interdepartmental study groups, and design and maintain interdepartmental strategic planning teams (Dailey et al., 2000).
26. Organize high schools as interdepartmental structures that unite general and special education teachers (Dailey et al., 2000).
27. Consider certifications for secondary special education teachers that include content-specific course work and knowledge required for teaching a standards-based curriculum (Dailey et al., 2000).
28. As an administrator, strive for credibility as an instructional leader who understands the academic challenges of including students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum (Dailey et al., 2000).
29. As an administrator, develop a vision that has high academic expectations for students with disabilities (Dailey et al., 2000).

From my review of literature, I found only comments made in the background information portions of a limited number of studies that address how people may be interpreting inclusion in relation to LRE. I did find there were patterns that strengthen inclusive instruction and patterns that hinder inclusive instruction. I also found there were limitations that can be created by inclusive instruction, which was a cause for concern.

*Interpreting inclusion in relation to LRE.* I found there was little research related to how inclusion is being interpreted in relation to LRE. In the study “What’s Special about Special

Education? A Cautious View toward Full Inclusion” (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997), the disagreement over interpreting LRE to mean that instruction should be provided through a continuum-of-services or of interpreting LRE to mean that instruction should be provided in inclusive settings was merely mentioned.

*Patterns that strengthen inclusive instruction.* I found that there are patterns that strengthen inclusive instruction. In the study “Principals’ Knowledge of Attitudes Toward Inclusion” (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998), I discovered that collaboration, heterogeneous/multi-age grouping, computer-assisted instruction, and curricular modifications were perceived to be the most extensively used and effective practices to successfully implement inclusion.

*Patterns that hinder inclusive instruction.* I also discovered that there were certain patterns that can hinder inclusive instruction. For example, in the study “Principals’ Knowledge of Attitudes Toward Inclusion” (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998), I found that principals did not believe their teachers and communities are prepared to support inclusive practices, which is indicative of the quality of individualization students with disabilities in the regular classroom could receive. In that same study, I found not only that inclusion had a different meaning and a different perspective to people but also that inclusive practices did differ. In the study, “Varied Meaning and Practice: Teachers’ Perspectives Regarding High School Inclusion” (Smith, 1997), I not only found that inclusion had a different meaning and a different perspective to people but also inclusive practices did differ. I took careful notice of the fact that these inconsistencies and differences could produce an environment for students that could be somewhat confusing and filled with frequent changes.

*Patterns that hinder standards-based teaching.* In the study, “Reforming High School Learning: The Effect of the Standards Movement on Secondary Students with Disabilities” (Daily et al., 2000), I learned that there are factors that limit access to a standard-based curriculum for students with disabilities. These factors included department structure, subject matter focus, lack of professional development, lack of common planning time, credit and graduation requirements, and course scheduling. I also learned there has been a lack of interaction between special education programs and policies with district- and school-based reform efforts, which is important to enable students with disabilities to receive access to the general curriculum.

*Limitations that can be created by inclusive instruction.* In reviewing the literature, I found it to be most disturbing to note that inclusive instruction could limit individualization, achievement gains, student emotional well-being, positive student behavior, and could create more parent, teacher, and student concerns. In the study “What’s Special about Special Education? A Cautious View toward Full Inclusion” (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997), it appeared that individualization was limited in instructional practices. It also appeared, in the study “Individualized Education Programs in Resource and Inclusive Settings: How ‘Individualized’ Are They?” (Espin et al., 1998), that individualization was limited by the development and writing of the IEPs.

In the study “Outcomes for Students With and Without Learning Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms” (Klingner et al., 1998), it was depicted that students who were LD and were poor readers had no achievement gains in reading. It was also depicted that students who were LD and were good readers had achievement gains in reading, but no gains were seen in math. In the study “Impact of Inclusion Education on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior

and Self-Esteem, and Parental Attitudes” (Daniel & King, 1997), there was apparently no consistent pattern in achievement differences.

In the study “Impact of Inclusion Education on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior and Self-Esteem, and Parental Attitudes” (Daniel & King, 1997), it was reported that students in inclusive settings experienced a lower self-esteem and more behavior problems. In the study “Depressive Symptoms In and Type of Classroom Placement for Adolescents with LD” (Howard & Tryon, 2002), it was reported by school counselors that students with LD in general education classes had more symptoms of depression than students in self-contained classes.

In the study “Impact of Inclusion Education on Academic Achievement, Student Behavior and Self-Esteem, and Parental Attitudes” (Daniel & King, 1997), it was reported that there were more concerns from parents who had children in inclusive settings. In the study “Students’ Views of Instructional Practices: Implications for Inclusion” (Vaughn et al., 1995), it was reported that there were students with LD who wanted individualization to a greater degree in inclusive settings. Specifically, these students wanted more teacher-directed assistance, more peer tutoring, more lesson adaptations, more grouping with students who learn with the same learning style, and more homogenous grouping. These students with LD also reported that they worried about slowing the rest of the class down. Figure 4 summarizes the influences of inclusive practices on *genuine* access to the general curriculum as synthesized from the research studies.

*Influences of practices on genuine access to the general curriculum in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System Framework theoretical model.* In comparing Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical ecological system framework to the results from the synthesis of

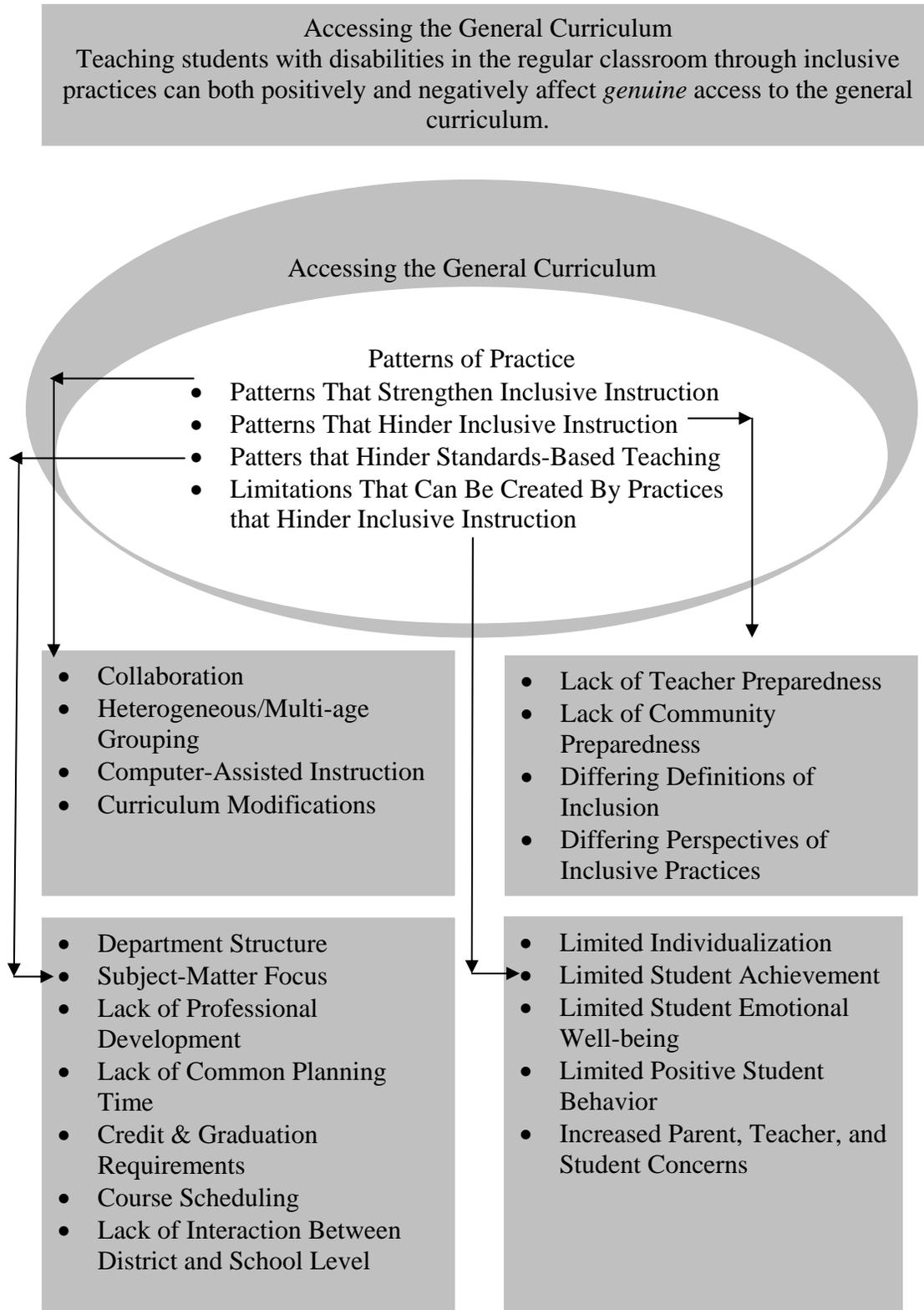
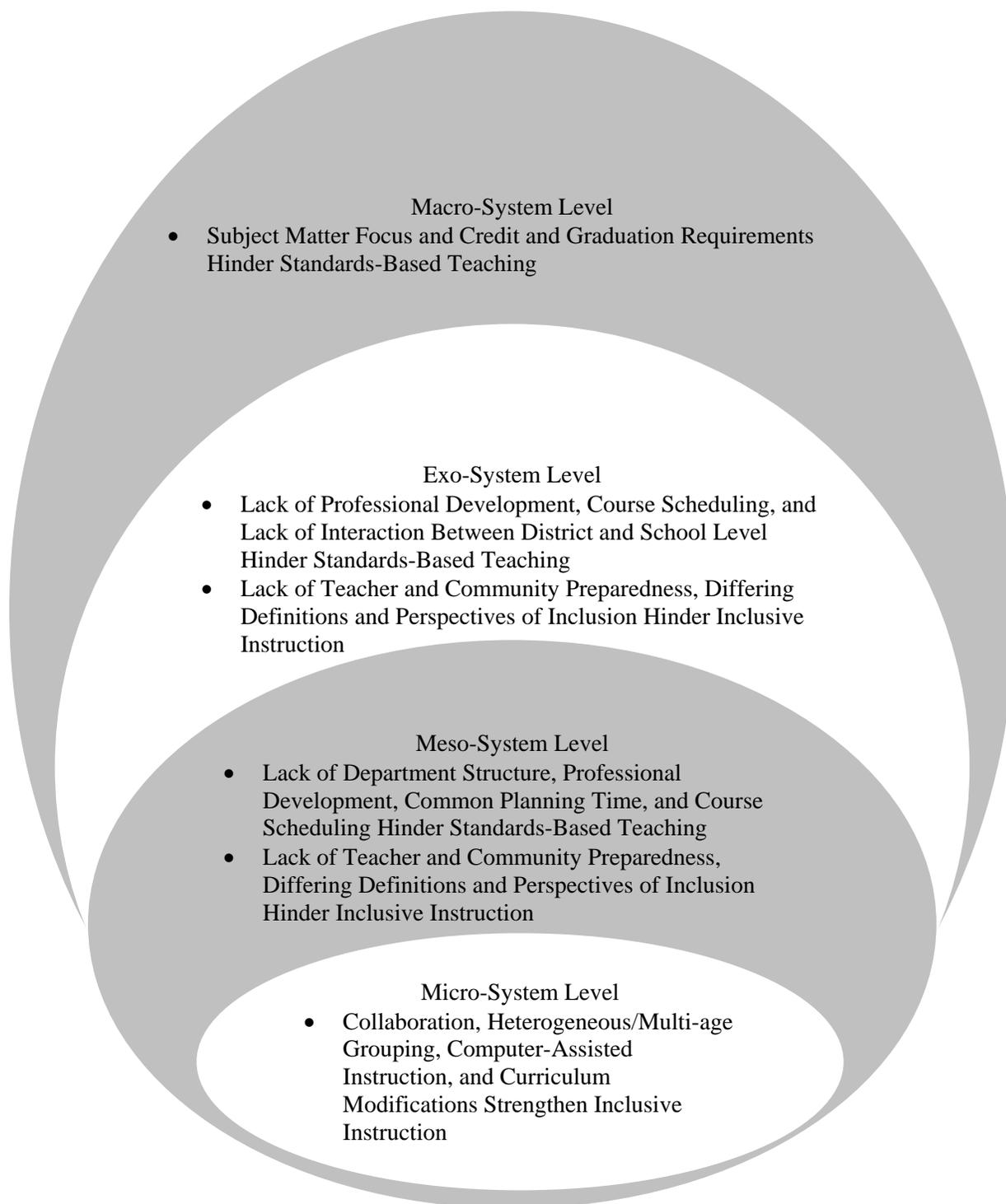


Figure 4. Influences of inclusive practices on *genuine* access to the general curriculum.

the research studies, there are specific practices that take place within each level of the framework that influence *genuine* access to the general curriculum. For example, at the macro-system level or the state level, subject matter focus and credit and graduation requirements are found to hinder standards-based teaching. At the exo-system level or district level, lack of professional development, course scheduling, and lack of interaction between districts and schools hinder standards-based teaching. Also at the exo-system level or district level, lack of teacher and community preparedness and differing definitions and perspectives of inclusion hinder inclusive instruction. Found at the meso-system level or at the building level, department structure, lack of professional development, lack of common planning time, and course scheduling hinder standards-based teaching. Also at the meso-system level or building level, lack of teacher and community preparedness and differing definitions and perspectives of inclusion hinder inclusive instruction. At the micro-system level or at the classroom level, collaboration, heterogeneous/ multi-age grouping, computer-assisted instruction, and curriculum modifications strengthen inclusive instruction. Figure 5 summarizes the influences of practices on *genuine* access to the general curriculum in relation to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Framework theoretical model.

Because inclusion practices could limit individualization, achievement gains, student emotional well-being, and acceptable behavior, and could create more parent, teacher, and student concerns, students in inclusion classrooms might not be able to fully learn the content of the general curriculum. Their *genuine* access to the general curriculum could therefore be limited. As a result, people should be cautious about pushing for access to the general curriculum to be ensured by treating students with disabilities, for purposes of placement, as a single entity in an inclusion program. If schools respond to the mandate simply by placing more students with



*Figure 5.* Summary of influences of practices on *genuine* access to the general curriculum in relation to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Framework.

disabilities in the general classroom, then the students' *genuine* access to the curriculum could be limited. On the other hand, inclusion practices that facilitate successful individualization should be considered when ensuring access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. Knowing exactly where the practices occur in the educational ecological system could benefit school leaders. A study is therefore warranted investigating the individualized patterns of practice that are used at various levels of the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Framework to implement the mandate of ensuring access to the general curriculum.

#### Future Research Potential

Access to the general curriculum is facilitated by individually tailoring the special education student's instruction to enable the student to learn the skills and concepts in the general curriculum. It is important that administrators be aware of past research that suggests that inclusive practices can limit individualization, student achievement, student emotional well-being and positive student behavior and can create more parent, teacher, and student concerns. It is also important that administrators be aware of past research that suggests that particular practices can strengthen or hinder successful inclusion. Moving forward with this awareness, it would be most insightful for administrators to be aware of how specially-designed instruction is being used to ensure that students with disabilities are participating and progressing within it. Research is therefore warranted in examining what organizational and instructional patterns of practice are being used to ensure that high school students with disabilities are receiving specially-designed instruction and are participating and progressing in the general education curriculum.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I have included a description of the methodology that was used to complete an embedded multi-case analysis of the patterns of practice at the high school level that focus on individualized access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. Given the assumption described in the literature review that teaching students in inclusive settings can affect students' *genuine* access to the general curriculum, I explored how the elements affecting the high school educational environment influence patterns of practice that enhance individualization. In this chapter, I also include a description of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, a theoretical framework for the study, a rationale for the study's design, and procedures for data collection and analysis.

#### Studying the Problematic Nature of Access to the General Curriculum

Access to the general curriculum can be defined as providing the opportunity for a student with a disability to learn the same curriculum that is used for a student without a disability (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000). It was the 1997 reauthorization to the IDEA, which introduced the new mandate to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities. The 1997 Senate Report explained that the intent of the legislation was to “encourage exemplary practices that lead to improved teaching and learning experiences for children with disabilities” (p. 5) that would “result in productive independent adult lives” (p. 5). In further review of the 1997 Senate Report, it was clear that it was the belief of the framers of the law that the majority of children with disabilities were capable of participating in the general education curriculum with varying degrees of adaptations and modifications. The new focus was also intended to bring attention to the accommodations and modifications that students with

disabilities need to successfully access the general education curriculum. In the Congressional hearings prior to the reauthorization of IDEA, Heumann (1997) also claimed that the past pattern of excluding students with disabilities from state and district-wide assessments was a form of discrimination due to a lack of accountability. Heumann stressed that children with disabilities must be expected to achieve and that there must be accountability for their results.

Some research studies, however, pointed out that students with disabilities who are placed in regular classrooms may experience limited individualized instruction (Espin et al., 1998; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1997), lower achievement (Daniel & King, 1997; Klingner et al., 1998), lower self-esteem (Daniel & King, 1997; Howard & Tryon, 2002), more behavior problems (Daniel & King, 1997); and that placements could create more parent and teacher concerns (Daniel & King, 1997), as well as student concerns (Vaughn et al., 1995). School administrators must therefore ensure that access to the general curriculum is *genuinely* implemented in their schools by using patterns of practice that focus on appropriate individualization for each student with a disability. School administrators must also ensure that students with disabilities are expected to achieve according to their ability level and that the level of student achievement is measured through state and district-wide assessments, in addition to other measures. Implementing the federal mandate of providing access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities by using patterns of practice that focus on appropriate specialized instruction will help to insure that students with disabilities have a lesser chance of living in future situations that handicap their independence or employment opportunities.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe how specially-designed instruction is being used to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are

participating and progressing within it. Specifically, this study used the embedded case study method to examine the patterns of practice being used across the educational environment to ensure that students with disabilities are being provided with appropriate and *genuine* access to the general curriculum. An embedded multi-case analysis was intended to strengthen the understanding of the special education practices so that educational leaders might appropriately plan for their special education programming to meet successfully the federal mandate and the unique needs of their special education students.

### Research Questions

The central question directing the study was: What organizational and instructional patterns of practice are being used to ensure that high school students with disabilities are receiving specially-designed instruction and are participating and progressing in the general education curriculum? Subordinate questions included the following: (1) What is the state policy context addressing the federal mandate? (2) How have the practices of district level administrators been affected by these policies? (3) How have the practices of building level administrators been affected by these policies? (4) How have instructional and assessment practices used by general and special educators been affected by these policies?

### Significance of the Study

To ensure accountability, the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA, emphasized that that students with disabilities must be included in state and district-wide testing programs (Yell, 1998). The NCLB Act of 2001 promoted a higher level of accountability to close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers by requiring each state to report yearly the achievement or progress of students with disabilities (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2003). The act further emphasized the need for students

with disabilities access the general curriculum by placing special focus on adaptations and accommodations for students with disabilities in relation to assessments (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2003).

Students with disabilities can be successful in state assessment programs only if they have *genuine* and appropriate access to the general curriculum. High schools in Virginia must ensure that students with disabilities have appropriate access to the general curriculum and are equipped to be successful in state testing programs. High school educational leaders must therefore ensure that students with disabilities have been adequately prepared by using patterns of practice of organization and instruction that focus on individualized access to the general curriculum.

#### Theoretical Framework for the Study

Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated, “Public policy has the power to affect the well-being and development of human beings by determining the conditions of their lives” (p. xiii). The federal mandate to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum has the potential to determine the condition of the lives of students with disabilities in a positive manner. If high schools implement this mandate by using patterns of practice that focus on individualization, then students with disabilities will have a greater opportunity to experience *genuine* access to the general curriculum.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system framework provided a useful direction for the examination of the patterns of practice used to implement the mandate that students with disabilities participate and progress in the general education curriculum. The ecological environment defined in Bronfenbrenner’s model is best described as a set of nested structures similar to a set of Russian dolls, each inside the next.

The innermost level, the micro-system, is the setting that contains the developing person. In the instance of this study, the micro-system contained instructional and organizational practices that are used to help students with disabilities to participate and progress in the general education curriculum. The second level within the ecological environment, the meso-system, contained the organizational practices that support administrative practices used at the building level that relate to the school's implementation of its special education program. I paid particular attention to the interconnections between the building administrative practices and the instructional and organizational practices used in the classroom.

The third level of the ecological environment, the exo-system, contained administrative practices that relate to the district's special education program that originate from the district's central office. Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained that the exo-system level is significant in that it "evokes a hypothesis that the person's development is profoundly affected by events occurring in settings in which the person is not even present" (p. 3).

The fourth level of the ecological environment, the macro-system, contained the policy context surrounding the mandate that students with disabilities be provided with access to the general curriculum and that schools monitor their participation and progress within it. The macro-system "is viewed as a manifestation of overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 8).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system framework model described how forces could shape "the development of human beings in the environments in which they live" (p. 15). The benefit of using Bronfenbrenner's model as the theoretical framework of this study was that it helped to describe the manner in which the various levels of the ecological system reacted to

each other to produce patterns of instruction and organization practiced in response to federal, state, and local policies. Public policy, through the directive to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities, has the power to affect the condition of students' lives. If all ecological system levels function together to work towards the vision of establishing patterns of practice that enhance individualization to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities, then *genuine* access can be met.

### Procedures

In the following sections of this chapter, I describe the rationale for a qualitative study design, procedures for collecting data, and strategies that will be used for analyzing data. The credibility, the transferability, and the dependability or trustworthiness of the data sources are discussed in the description of the data analysis.

#### *Rationale for a Qualitative Design*

Behavior is thought to occur in a context, and a more complete understanding of the actual context is required to understand fully the behaviors (Gay, 1996). In qualitative research, the context is described with words that prove to be convincing to another researcher, policy-maker, or practitioner (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The words can describe how things are, how things got to be the way they are, how others feel about the way things are, what others believe, and what meaning others attach to certain activities (Gay, 1996). The words make up a well-grounded explanation of processes that occur in local contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

In looking at patterns of practice that enhance individualization so that access to the general curriculum can be ensured for students with disabilities, the context needs to be understood. Documents need to be examined and observations need to be conducted to understand how things are currently. Interviews across the ecological educational system with

teachers and administrators need to be conducted not only to determine how things are currently but also to determine what people feel and believe about how things are currently. Qualitative research was therefore my choice for this study's design.

### *The Type of Design*

A case study is a detailed investigation of a single unit (Gay, 1996). The unit, however, must be "intrinsically bounded" (Merriam, 2001, p.27) or contained by certain boundaries. The purpose of a case study is to conduct an in-depth examination of the unit of interest so that understanding and meaning about a situation can be gathered. The insights gathered from a case study can be so powerful that what can be learned by the case study has the ability to influence future practices within an organization (Merriam, 2001).

According to Merriam (2001), a case study can be further defined by its particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic characteristics. A case study is particularistic in that it focuses on a particular phenomenon that makes it especially practical for investigating questions that arise from everyday practices. A case study is descriptive in that it produces a rich description of the phenomenon being studied. A case study is heuristic in that it illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study to bring about the discovery of new meaning (Merriam, 2001).

As a part of a qualitative study, some researchers may look at more than one unit. When two or more units are studied, then the process is known as a multi-case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). One reason researchers might choose a multi-case study method is that the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, thus regarding the overall study as more robust (Herriott & Girestone, 1983). For example, researchers might choose to use the multi-case study because the study's conclusion can be viewed as more generic due to

multiple case sampling (Miles & Huberman (1994). Another reason researchers might choose a multi-case study method is to address the question of external validity (generalizability or transferability) in the study. Other researchers might choose a multi-case study method so that the information gathered in the study can be compared and contrasted. Still other researchers might use one of the cases as a pilot examination and then build on that study with other cases (Bogdan & Biklen).

According to Yin (1994), when a case study or a multi-case study involves more than one unit of analysis, the design is known as embedded. Yin further explained that in an organizational study, the embedded units might be process related such as meetings, roles, or locations. Yin also noted that an embedded case study design provides sensitivity to slippage from the research questions due to the set number of subunits. This additional sensitivity to slippage helps to focus the study.

The type of qualitative design that I chose to address the research questions for this study is the embedded multi-case study method. I chose the embedded multi-case study method so that understanding, meaning, and insight could be gathered about the individualized patterns of practice that are used at the high school level. I also wanted to provide a systemic view of what I was studying. The systemic view in the study is based on the four subunits (e.g. the policy context, district level administrative practices, building level administrative practices, and classroom instructional practices) as reflected in the research questions. The four subunits are found within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) structural layers of the educational ecological environment (e.g. macro level, exo level, meso level, and micro level). The embedded multi-case method provided a useful tool to study the patterns of practice that enhance individualization for students with disabilities at the high school level.

### *The Researcher's Role*

The researcher's role in a qualitative study is of utmost importance since "the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data" (Merriam, 2001, p. 20). Merriam suggested that the researcher possess personality characteristics that would facilitate "tolerance for ambiguity" (p. 20), "sensitivity to context and data" (p. 21), and "good communication skills" (p. 23).

The qualitative researcher must possess great patience in order to be tolerant of any ambiguities. The design of the study emerges as the data are collected. The researcher must be able to look at the large picture of a case, recognize the best way to proceed when it is often not obvious, adapt to unanticipated occurrences, and be willing to change the direction of the study as needed. For this reason, the role of the researcher is sometimes described as that of a detective. All clues must be investigated, all leads must be followed, all missing pieces must be found, and all puzzle pieces must be put together (Merriam, 2001). Qualitative research therefore takes great time and patience.

The qualitative researcher must also possess an intuitive personality to facilitate sensitivity to the context and the variables within the context. In working with people in a specific physical setting, the researcher must be able to identify overt and covert agendas and the meaning of any nonverbal behavior. The researcher must watch carefully the information that is gathered so that the researcher can understand what the data mean, can identify any new revelations, and can be able to sense the right action to take based on any new leads (Merriam, 2001). Most importantly, the researcher must have an open mind and be highly self aware in order to be responsive to any contradictory evidence (Yin, 1994). Qualitative research therefore takes a highly intuitive personality.

Being empathic is another personality characteristic that the qualitative researcher needs to possess. “Empathy is the foundation of rapport” (Merriam, 2001, p. 23), which is critical to good communication skills. The researcher must be perceptive of what people are thinking, listen intently to what is and is not being said, and be able to pose quality questions (Yin, 1994). When participants sense they are understood, then an atmosphere of trust begins to develop and communication can flow more openly (Merriam, 2001).

Paramount to the role of the qualitative researcher is being a good writer. Merriam (2001) illustrated this point by quoting Lancy: “Every aspect of one’s work as a qualitative researcher demands more writing than would be the case for a quantitative scholar. Writing is to qualitative research what mathematics is to quantitative research” (p. 234). The qualitative researcher must be able to record what is said and seen, and all insights gathered from any data. The final report of the study is usually in the form of a detailed, lengthy narrative (Merriam, 2001). The qualitative researcher must therefore be able to write well and have command of the language that is to be spoken and written.

As I approached this study, I was aware of the important role I had as a researcher. Many of the qualities that I use on an everyday basis to be an effective high school principal are the same qualities that an effective qualitative researcher also uses. Each day on my job, I must be careful to have tolerance for ambiguity, to have sensitivity to context and data, and to have good communication skills. I use the personality traits of patience, intuition, and empathy to respond to the various situations on my job and I used those traits to collect and produce meaningful information for a qualitative research study.

As the two schools selected for the study were within my school district, I guarded against personal feelings while conducting the study and took extra measures to ensure that the

participants felt comfortable. As a result, I was careful to keep the interviews on a strictly professional basis to ensure quality data collection. I was careful to remain in the role of researcher and not in the role of a principal in the county when I interacted with the participants. I self-monitored how I came across to the participants. When I saw signs of stress or uneasiness in the participants, I concentrated on being friendly, showing extra interest in their work and in them as people, and if necessary, verbally reassuring them that I was just looking for information and was not working in an evaluative position. My goal was to help make all the participants feel comfortable and valued so they would be inclined to provide me with their information and not what they thought I might want to hear.

#### *Gaining Access and Entry*

This study was an embedded multi-case analysis of the patterns of practice that focus on how specially-designed instruction is being used in the total high school educational environment to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities. Access was needed to documents that provided the policy context requiring that students with disabilities be provided with access to the general education curriculum and that schools monitor their participation and progress within it. I was able to download these documents from the Virginia Department of Education Web Site. I was also able to obtain additional Virginia Department of Education documents from personnel who work in a district office. I therefore needed access to a district office to obtain these additional state department documents.

At the district office level, I also needed access to the Director of Special Services, the Director of Instruction, and the Special Education Lead Teacher. I needed access to these district office personnel so that I could interview them.

In addition, I needed access to the two high schools within the district. I needed access to the building administrators and selected regular education and special education teachers.

Before I invited anyone to participate in the study, the district superintendent granted approval for me to conduct the study in the district. I took the following steps to receive access and entry into the field of this study:

1. I sent a letter to the district superintendent requesting permission to conduct the study in the district. The letter described the purpose of the study and the proposed data collection procedure. The letter invited the superintendent or any district office personnel to contact me with questions regarding the study's design.

2. After the division superintendent approved the study, I contacted the Director of Special Services, the Director of Instruction, and the district's Special Education Lead Teacher. I arranged a short visit to explain the study and the access that I needed from the district's main office to complete the study. I obtained written consent from the previously named district office personnel to participate in the study.

3. I then contacted the principal of each high school through an initial phone call. I arranged a short visit to explain the study and the access that I needed to complete the study in that principal's school. I obtained written consent from each principal to participate in the study.

4. Upon visiting with the principal, I obtained access to the general and special education teachers by asking the principal to nominate the teachers from his or her school to participate in the study. I then obtained written consent from the teachers who were nominated by the principal to participate in the study.

Completing these steps provided access and entry across the total high school environment of each high school in the study.

### *Setting Selection*

The setting for this study was provided by the various levels of the educational environment in Amazon County. The school district and the 2 high schools I chose as case studies were located in the Commonwealth of Virginia and were conveniently located to my place of work. Since I currently work as the principal of a high school, the 2 case schools needed to be within an hour's drive from my place of work. Both schools were from the same school district, which supported Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model of the Experimental Ecology of Education that served as the theoretical framework for the study. In the following section, the context of the district is described.

*Describing the context of the district from which the high schools were chosen.* Even though Amazon County is located between two urban areas in the State of Virginia and is considered part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area, its geographical features include a rolling to hilly terrain with elevations from 800 to 4,200 feet above sea level with the geographical boundaries of a lake, a mountain range, and a river. Located in the state's central plateau vicinity, Amazon County consists of a 754 square mile region and offers a blend of industrial, commercial, and agricultural employment opportunities.

The nearby communities surrounding Amazon County provide access to many opportunities for cultural and educational enrichment. Located in the two urban areas that border Amazon County are seven universities and colleges that offer four-year degrees and two community colleges that offer two-year degrees. Located within an hour's drive of Amazon County, there are two other collegiate and university opportunities. There are also six public libraries within the district, which contain more than 100,000 items. The school district

frequently collaborates with the nearby colleges and universities as well as the public library system to provide training opportunities for teachers and enrichment opportunities for students.

The area's demographic growth is demonstrated by a population increase of 9,500 people in an 8-year period with a population of 51,900 people in 1994 and a population of 61,400 people in 2002. From 1992 to 2002, the unemployment rate dropped 1.7% from 6.2% to 4.5%. The personal per capita income for 2000 was \$25,930.00 with 29% of the work force being employed in manufacturing and the next largest percent of the work force being employed in service, retail trade, local government, and construction.

With service to 10,700 students, Amazon County's mission is to ensure that all children of school age receive the highest quality education appropriate to their individual needs and abilities. Since the 1994-1995 school year, the student membership has increased by 12.8%. For the 2001-2002 school year, the local per pupil expenditure was \$2,714.00 and the average class size at the high school level was 24. The district consists of 22 schools: 15 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 3 high schools, and 1 vocational school. High school students select from a wide variety of curriculum choices including college preparatory, work-study programs, vocational and technical training, and advanced placement.

For the 2002-2003 school year, the district reported to the DOE that 66.6% of the teachers held Bachelor's Degrees as the highest degree earned by teachers. In addition, the district reported to the DOE that 33% of the teachers held Master's Degrees as the highest degree earned by teachers and that .4% of the teachers held Doctoral Degrees as the highest degree earned by teachers.

The academic results of Amazon County are impressive; based on the SOL testing data for the 2002-2003 school year that was reported to the DOE, all schools in Amazon County were

fully accredited. However, there were achievement concerns for various subgroups.

Disaggregated 2002-2003 EOC SOL Test data for various high school subgroups were available in the area of reading. Scores on the EOC Reading/Language Arts SOL Test indicate passing rates of 79% for students with disabilities, 89% for black students, 80% for Hispanic students, 90% for white students, 87% for Economically Disadvantaged students, and 67% for Limited English Proficient students.

Disaggregated 2002-2003 EOC SOL Test data for various high school subgroups were also available in the area of math. Scores on the EOC Math Tests indicate passes rates of 40% for students with disabilities, 56% for black students, 82% for Hispanic students, 81% for white students, 64% for Economically Disadvantaged students, and no score was provided for the percent of Limited English Proficient students.

Additional district 2002-2003 information related to numbers of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Enrollment courses, number of students who received certain diplomas, and certain discipline incidents were also available from the DOE. There were 294 students enrolled in AP courses and 224 students enrolled in dual enrollment courses. There were 353 students who received Advanced Studies Diplomas and 286 students who received Standard Diplomas. Only 2 students in the district with disabilities received Advanced Studies Diplomas and 31 students in the district with disabilities received Standard Diplomas. Twenty students with disabilities in the district received a Special Diploma while 8 students with disabilities received a Program Completion Certificate. In the district, there were 56 fights reported to the DOE with 3 incidents listed as serious. There were no firearm violations, but there were 5 incidents of other weapons reported to the DOE. During the 2001-2002 school year, the district also reported 1.49% of students as dropouts.

*Describing the context of Bethany High School.* Serving partially suburban and partially rural communities, Bethany High School reported to the DOE a student enrollment of 1,025 for the 2002-2003 school year. Of those 1,025 students, there was 1 American Indian/Alaskan Native student, 5 Asian/Pacific Islanders, 184 Black students, 4 Hispanic students, 831 White students, and 100 students in the special education program.

During the 2002-2003 school year, the SOL pass rate was over 70% in all core areas at Bethany High School. Disaggregated 2002-2003 EOC SOL Test data for Bethany High School subgroups were available in the area of reading. Scores on the EOC Reading/Language Arts SOL Test indicate passing rates of 41% for students with disabilities, 72% for black students, 89% for white students, 85% for Economically Disadvantaged students, and no available scores for Hispanic and Limited English Proficient students.

Disaggregated 2002-2003 EOC SOL Test data for various Bethany High School subgroups were also available in the area of math. Scores on the EOC Math SOL Tests indicate passing rates of 26% for students with disabilities, 56% for black students, 77% for white students, 66% for Economically Disadvantaged students, and no available scores for Hispanic and Limited English Proficient students.

Additional Bethany High School 2002-2003 information related to numbers of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Enrollment courses, number of students who received certain diplomas, and certain discipline incidents were also available from the DOE. There were 66 students enrolled in AP courses and 44 students enrolled in dual enrollment courses. There were 93 students who received Advanced Studies Diplomas and 102 students who received Standard Diplomas. Three students with disabilities at Bethany High School received a Special Diploma while 3 students with disabilities received a Program Completion Certificate.

At Bethany High School, there were 11 fights reported to the DOE with no incidents listed as serious. There were no firearm violations and other weapons reported to the DOE. During the 2001-2002 school year, Bethany High School also reported 1.56% of students as drop outs.

For the 2002-2003 school year, Bethany High School reported to the DOE that 67.6% of the teachers held Bachelor's Degrees as the highest degree earned by teachers. In addition, Bethany High School reported to the DOE that 32.4% of the teachers held Master's Degrees as the highest degree earned by teachers and that none of the teachers held Doctoral Degrees.

Students with disabilities at Bethany High School were assigned to regular education classes but not in a cluster setting. If a student with a disability needed assistance from a special education teacher during the class, the student was most likely assigned to a self-contained class through the IEP process. The administrator from Bethany High School said it was important not to single out students with disabilities and if they are in a cluster group with a special education teacher in a regular classroom, then they are singled out.

Even though type of disability breakdown data was not available, it can be seen from types of diplomas awarded that most students with disabilities graduate with a regular diploma. For example, at Bethany High School only 3 Special Diplomas and 3 Certificates of Completion were awarded to students with disabilities at the conclusion of the 2002-2003 school year.

*Describing the context of Carson High School.* Serving partially suburban and partially rural communities, Carson High School reported to the DOE a student enrollment of 1,217 for the 2002-2003 school year. Of those 1,217 students, there was 1 American Indian/Alaskan Native student, 10 Asian/Pacific Islanders, 88 Black students, 6 Hispanic students, 1,112 White students, and 99 students in the special education program.

During the 2002-2003 school year, the SOL pass rate was over 70% in all core areas at Carson High School. Disaggregated 2002-2003 EOC SOL Test data for Carson High School subgroups were available in the area of reading. Scores on the EOC Reading/Language Arts SOL Test indicate passing rates of 75% for students with disabilities, 67% for black students, 97% for white students, 77% for Economically Disadvantaged, and no scores were available for Hispanic and Limited English Proficient students.

Disaggregated 2002-2003 EOC SOL Test data for various Carson High School subgroups were also available in the area of math. Scores on the EOC Math SOL Tests indicate passing rates of 40% for students with disabilities, 61% for black students, 86% for white students, 59% for Economically Disadvantaged students, and no available scores for Hispanic and Limited English Proficient students.

Additional Carson High School 2002-2003 information related to numbers of students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Enrollment courses, number of students who received certain diplomas, and certain discipline incidents were also available from the DOE. There were 139 students enrolled in AP courses and 86 students enrolled in dual enrollment courses. There were 196 students who received Advanced Studies Diplomas and 78 students who received Standard Diplomas. Seven students with disabilities at Bethany High School received a Special Diploma while 4 students with disabilities received a Program Completion Certificate. At Carson High School, there were 21 fights reported to the DOE with 2 incidents listed as serious. There were no firearm violations and 3 other weapons reported to the DOE. During the 2001-2002 school year, Carson High School also reported 1.15% of students as drop outs.

For the 2002-2003 school year, Carson High School reported to the DOE that 60.2% of the teachers held Bachelor's Degrees as the highest degree earned by teachers. In addition,

Carson High School reported to the DOE that 38.6% of the teachers held Master's Degrees as the highest degree earned by teachers and that 1.2% of the teachers held Doctoral Degrees.

The feeder middle school from Carson High School has implemented an inclusion program for the past several years. The inclusion program involved placing clusters of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom with a special education teacher. Most all other students with disabilities were placed in the regular education classroom. This type of inclusion program has also been implemented at Carson High School. The parents at Carson High School favored this program and with the NCLB 95% participation testing requirement, the Carson High School administrator designed his school's master schedule around an inclusion program as set up at the feeder middle school. Students with disabilities at Carson High School are grouped in clusters in regular classrooms with an assigned special education teacher. Most of these inclusion students end up having most of their classes together as they go from class to class in their clusters.

Even though type of disability breakdown data was not available, it can be seen from types of diplomas awarded that most students with disabilities graduate with a regular diploma. For example, at Carson High School only 7 Special Diplomas and 4 Certificates of Completion were awarded to students with disabilities at the conclusion of the 2002-2003 school year.

### *Participant Selection*

The sampling strategy I chose for this study was purposeful, which is considered the most appropriate for qualitative studies because it is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand or gain insight about an item of interest (Merriam, 2001). Being that the study was a multi-case study and each high school served as a single case, the sample selection occurred at two levels (Merriam, 2001). The first level of sampling occurred at the case level

(district) and the second level of sampling occurred within the cases (2 high schools). At the first level of sampling, the choice of which district administrators to interview was limited by the reality that the district setting was chosen for reasons of convenience. Within the district, however, I had the opportunity to choose 3 participants to interview from a district administration staff of 18. I chose 3 particular district administrators because they worked specifically with either special education or instruction and I felt they would have the most knowledge regarding their district and the topic of research.

At the second level of sampling, the participants in the study included a school administrator, 1 regular education English teacher, 1 regular education math teacher, 1 regular education science teacher, 1 regular education social studies teacher, and 1 special education teacher from each school. The choice of principals at the meso-system level was also somewhat limited by the reality that my settings for research were essentially convenience settings. I had to choose between the 3 administrators at Bethany High School and the 4 administrators at Carson High School. At Bethany High School, I choose an assistant principal because he was recommended by the principal. At Carson High School, I choose the principal because of his special education teaching background and desire to participate.

The choice of teachers at the micro-system level was purposeful based on their nominations by the principals. Each high school principal nominated the regular education teachers who they believed to be highly qualified, and who taught special education students in their classrooms. The two high school principals also nominated the special education teachers they believed to be highly qualified, and who had students with disabilities on their caseloads receiving instruction in the regular classroom.

A combined total from both schools of 2 administrators, 8 general education teachers,

and 2 special education teachers participated. At the central office level the district's Director of Special Services, Director of Instruction, and Special Education Lead Teacher participated. A combined total from the school level and the district level of 15 people participated.

#### *Consent and Assurance of Confidentiality*

Before communicating with the division superintendent and other participants, I submitted for approval a consent form that explained the study's purpose, procedures, and future use for data to the institutional review board of the university. The consent form was thereafter given to the division superintendent, each school's administrator, and all other persons who were invited to participate in the study. Data was not collected from any participant until the consent form had the necessary signature.

As a part of the procedures of the study, I kept the name of the school district and all schools used as case studies confidential. Furthermore, the names of the central office personnel who were interviewed, the principals who were interviewed, and the teachers who were interviewed and observed, remained confidential. I assigned the school district and each school a pseudonym. A letter based on the school or district office and a number identified each participant (e.g. A1, B1, and C1). I destroyed all tape recordings at the completion of the study. Assuring confidentiality and anonymity helped establish a bond of trust between the participants and me as well as facilitate open communication.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

Qualitative data can be collected from studies of documents, interviews, and observations. In most qualitative studies, interviewing is the most common technique; however, including a combination of any of the three techniques is acceptable (Merriam, 2001). I collected data in this study across the four levels of the ecological educational environment. At the macro-

system level, I reviewed state documents. At the exo-system level, I interviewed district office personnel. At the meso-system level, I interviewed high school administrators and observed their schools. At the micro-system level, I interviewed general education and special education teachers and observed classroom activities. All three techniques provided a perspective on the individualized practices that are used at the high school level for students with disabilities that could not be obtained by use of a single technique.

*Means of Collecting Data: Instrument Selection and Construction*

In two of the four ecological system levels, the macro-system and the exo system, I reviewed and analyzed documents that related to the policy context of the study. In three of the four ecological system levels, the exo-system, the meso-system, and the micro-system, I interviewed personnel. In two of the four ecological system levels, the meso-system and the micro-system, I also conducted observations. In studying the various levels, I first examined the macro-system level. Thus, the pattern of gathering data began from the outermost level of the core and moved inward. Along with my review of literature, my professional experience as a teacher, a Carson High School consultative Team Coordinator, and an administrator steered the development of the written guides that assisted me in gathering data from state documents, interviews, and observations.

*Document data collection procedures.* I began the collection of data for this study at the macro-system level where state documents were examined and then continued to collect data at the exo-system level where local documents were examined. One of the greatest benefits of using a document as a source of data is that the presence of the document does not “alter the setting in ways that the presence of the investigator often does” (Merriam, 2001, p. 112). However, even though documents are ready-made and convenient sources of data, I was careful

to ensure that there was congruence between the documents and the research problem (Merriam, 2001).

At the macro-system level, I examined state regulations, state memos, and other documents available on the Virginia Department of Education Web Site. I also studied local regulations and any other district level documents available at the exo-system level. I studied these documents until I could fully answer the question, “How is the policy context surrounding this mandate described?” As I studied the documents, I transferred the information gathered to a Document Summary Form.

*Interview procedures.* I collected data at the exo-system, the meso-system, and the micro-system levels of the ecological educational environment through the interviewing of participants. The purpose of interviewing is to gain an understanding of what others experience and the meaning others have obtained from their experiences (Seidman, 1998). One benefit of collecting data through interviewing is that interviewing helps to put people’s behavior into a context, thereby giving the researcher access to understanding those actions (Seidman).

Yin (1994) described the most common form of interviewing as featuring an “open-ended nature” (p. 84) where respondents are asked about facts as well as opinions. In the open-ended interview format, the respondent can be asked to offer personal insights into situations. The researcher can then develop further inquiry based on the respondents’ insights. When those being interviewed provide opinions, then the ones being interviewed turn from respondents to informants, which is very helpful to the success of a case study. Informants are not only able to “provide the case study investigator with insights into a matter but can also suggest sources of corroboratory evidence – and initiate the access to such sources” (p. 84).

In developing the interview guides, I used Glickman's (2002) "Elements That Influence Student Learning in Renewing Schools and Classrooms" as a framework on which to build. I chose this framework because I felt it fit nicely into Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system framework model that I chose as a conceptual framework on which to base the study.

Glickman's areas of school renewal priorities, professional development, and evaluation were used to construct open-ended questions for those interviewed from the exo-system level.

Glickman's areas of focus, approaches, and structures and formats were used to construct open-ended questions for those interviewed from the meso-system level. Glickman's areas of content, method, assessment, and student learning were used to construct open-ended questions for those interviewed from the micro-system level. Glickman maintained that when these areas are emphasized, improved classroom learning would occur. Activities that fell into these areas therefore guided the illumination of key patterns of practices.

Using the Exo Interview Guide, I conducted open-ended interviews at the exo-system level with district personnel to determine how administrative practices at the district level have been affected by the new mandate. Using the Meso Interview Guide, I conducted open-ended interviews with high school special education administrators at the meso-system level to determine how administrative practices at the building level have been affected. Finally, I conducted open-ended interviews at the micro-system level using the Micro Interview Guide. I conducted the interviews at the micro-system level with regular education and special education classroom teachers to determine how instructional and assessment practices used by general and special educators have been affected.

Each interview that I conducted was not less than 45 minutes. The suggested length of the interviews was based on the amount of time I felt I needed to conduct a thorough interview. I left

the option open of conducting additional interviews with other personnel at the exo-system, the meso-system, and the micro-system levels in case I found I needed more data to assist in answering the specific research questions for the systems I was studying.

*Observation procedures.* I also collected data at the meso-system and micro-system levels of the ecological educational environment through observations. The data from the observations were used to confirm the data obtained from the interviews with the administrators and teachers.

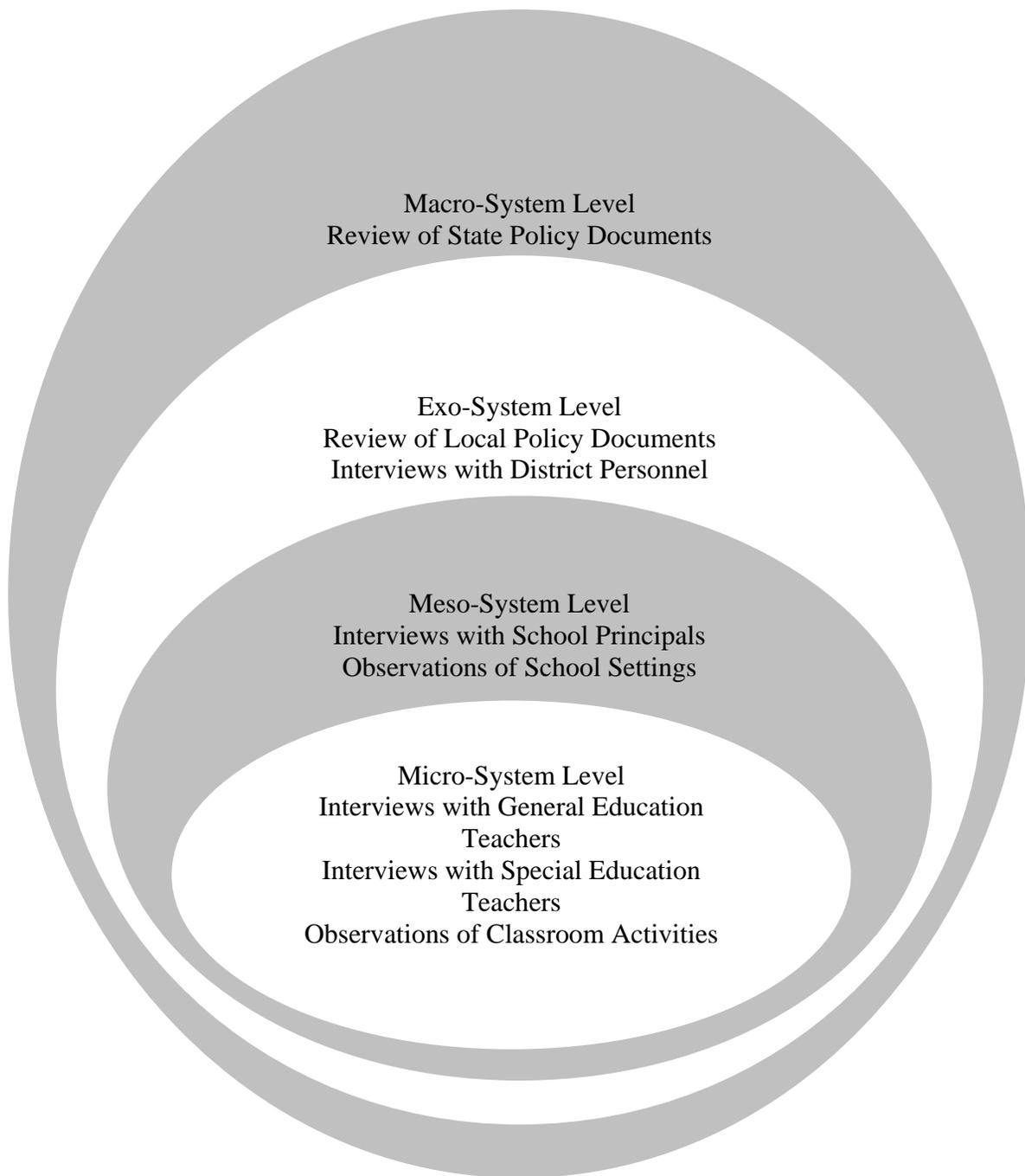
Observations take place in “the natural field setting” (Merriam, 2001, p. 94) and “represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest” (p.94). The challenge in collecting data through observations is that observers must look at an event through their own perceptions, and human perceptions can be very selective (Merriam). I therefore guarded against the problem of allowing my human perception from interfering with the recording of data. Citing Patton, Merriam shared that the researcher can learn to avoid this problem by learning to write descriptively, practice the recording of field notes, know how to separate detail from trivia, and use rigorous methods to confirm observations. I therefore used the skills of writing descriptively, recording field notes, separating detail from trivia, and confirming observations to avoid any human perception problem that encountered.

To help confirm the data obtained through the interviews at the exo-system level with the administrators, I conducted observations of the school setting. I observed the high school settings before and after the interviews with the administrators and as I toured the buildings. I made notes of my observations immediately after the building tours. Until I acquired an understanding of the administrative practices that are used to help students with disabilities access the general education curriculum, the school observations continued.

To help confirm the data obtained through the interviews at the micro-system level with the regular education and the special education teachers, I used an observation guide to conduct observations of classroom activities. I observed regular classroom activities during the school day. In each school, I observed each regular education teacher that I interviewed at least 2 times for a minimum of 30 minutes per each observation. I made 16 total observations that took approximately 8 or more hours. I transferred activities observed during the observation to an observation guide. I continued to observe classroom activities until I believed I had a complete understanding of the patterns of practice used in the classroom to help students with disabilities to participate and progress in the general education curriculum. Figure 6 provides a summary of instrument selection and construction for this study.

*Assessing the cultural context.* In Chapter Three of this document, I also include contextual information that related to the total high school environment such as demographics, enrollments, and average test scores. In the appendix of this document, I also included relevant characteristics of participants in the study such as teacher and administrator age, gender, years of experience, educational credentials, and endorsements. Participant characteristics are also provided for each level of the ecological educational environment.

*Pilot study.* I conducted a pilot study at a school not designated as part of the study. At the macro-system level, the review of Virginia State Department of Education documents was conducted. At the exo-system level, a central office specialist was interviewed. At the meso-system level, an assistant principal who worked closely with the special education program was interviewed. An observation of the school setting was made as a tour of the facility was conducted. Finally, at the micro-system level, a general education and a special education teacher were separately interviewed. At least two classes within the pilot school were also observed.



*Figure 6.* Summary of instrument selection and construction.

I utilized the proposed document summary form as well as the proposed interview and observation guides. All interviews and observations that were a part of the pilot study were taped and transcribed. After the document had been reviewed and the interviews and observations were completed, I invited the participants to comment on the effectiveness of the guides in terms of their ability to elicit important understandings. Each participant was also given the opportunity to suggest alternate or additional questions for the interview and observation guides.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

The purpose of data analysis is to transform the data into findings. There are many analogies used to describe this process. Some compare the process to a metamorphic experience similar to the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. Others compare the process to the creation of a large mural constructed from pieces of a collage. When pieced together in the form of a mural, new meaning emerges from the individual pieces when seen with the whole. The individual pieces represent new meaning when observed as part of the entire mural (Patton, 2002).

Merriam (2001) explained that the data analysis procedure actually begins as the data are collected. With the very first document reading, interview, or observation, insights emerge that lead to refinement of questions being asked. Merriam emphasized it is this interactive process between collecting the data and analyzing the data that leads to “believable and trustworthy findings” (p. 151). Merriam also pointed out, however, that the data analysis does not end once all the data have been collected. Instead, the opposite occurs; data analysis becomes more intensive once all the data have been collected.

From beginning to end, the key to implementing a quality data analysis process is establishing a system that can be trusted, or a system with sound validity and reliability. For any

study to have a positive effect, the study must be conducted in a rigorous manner so that a sense of truth can be generated regarding the insights that are obtained and the conclusions that are reached (Merriam, 2001). In the following sections, I will describe the manner in which internal validity, external validity, and reliability were promoted in the study. There will also be additional exploration of how the role of data management was used to ensure that data were of high quality and easily accessible.

### *Addressing Quality*

For a research study's findings and conclusions to be of value, the quality of the study is critical. Qualitative researchers utilize certain techniques to protect the study's internal validity, external validity, and reliability. I selected the approaches to be used in this study to match the overall study's design. These approaches will be described in the upcoming sections.

*Internal validity.* Merriam (2001) explained that internal validity questions whether the research findings are equivalent to reality. Grasping reality, however, is something that cannot be done completely. Merriam cited Steinbeck who described how the Mexican sierra fish's spine could only be counted effectively if the animal were preserved as a laboratory specimen. Studying the fish once it is dead, however, changes the reality. The fish no longer has its real color and texture. The observations of the researcher must then be constructed through the researcher's understanding of the fish's world or reality. A researcher must therefore make inferences about an event that resulted from an earlier occurrence (Yin, 1994).

For research involving case studies, Yin (1994) emphasized that the inferences drawn must be "airtight" (p. 35) or that all conflicting explanations and possibilities have been considered and that the evidence converges. To deal with the overall problem of making

appropriate inferences, I used a combination of triangulation, member checks, and peer examination to promote internal validity.

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data collection methods and strategies that assist in obtaining “a more complete picture of what is being studied” (Gay, 1996, p. 217) and “to cross-check information” (p. 217). To corroborate the inferences made in the study, I used document analysis, interviews, and observations.

Member checks refer to having the people observed or interviewed review the data collected and the tentative interpretations to determine if the results are credible (Merriam, 2001). I asked the central office personnel, the administrators, and the teachers to review the transcribed notes and tentative interpretations that related to the data collected from their involvement in the study. I requested that these participants provide feedback on the credibility of the transcriptions and interpretations of that data.

Peer examination refers to requesting colleagues to review the emerging findings of the study and providing feedback to the researcher about the findings (Merriam, 2001). I asked the district Special Education Lead Teacher to review emerging interpretations of the data.

*External validity.* Gay (1996) described external validity as the “degree to which results are generalizable, or applicable, to groups and environments outside of the experimental setting” (Gay, 1996, p. 620). Yin (1994) stated, however, that in doing case study research, there has been a major barrier regarding a problem with external validity. Yin explained that some critics implicitly contrast the case study situation to survey research where the sample generalizes to a larger universe. Yin maintained that this “analogy to samples and universes is incorrect when dealing with case studies” (p. 36) “because survey research relies on statistical generalization” (p. 36) and case study research relies “on analytical generalization” (p. 36).

Merriam (2001) stressed that in qualitative studies what is learned in a particular situation can be transferred or generalized to similar situations later encountered if the researcher assumes that the “general lies in the particular” (p. 210). Merriam gave the example of a person’s getting a speeding ticket at a particular concrete buttress and thereafter slowing down at any concrete buttress. Merriam stated that most people cope with everyday life in this manner, by taking a particular incident and forming “a concrete universal” (p. 210). To promote external validity or generalizability, I chose the site selections for a multi-case study design that served a diverse population. I also included a detailed description of the total high school environment’s data in the study to assist readers in determining how well the cases match their own situations.

*Reliability.* Gay (1996) used the words “dependability” (p. 114) and “trustworthiness” (p. 114) to describe the term reliability. Gay also described the term reliability by using the word consistency in relation to the number of times a study is conducted. Merriam (2001), however, pointed out that qualitative research is conducted to describe and explain the world as people experience it and when experiments are repeated, it is very possible that different outcomes will occur because people are different. Merriam therefore suggested that the question should not be whether the findings will be found again but “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 206). To ensure that the results of this study were consistent with the data collected, I used triangulation, as described earlier, and the construction of an audit trail.

The audit trail requires the researcher to describe in detail how the “data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2001, p. 207). The purpose of the detailed trail is to assure that an outsider can carefully review the steps in the study and determine the same results as the researcher. In this study, I gave

careful attention to describing the collection of data, the development of categories, and the decision making process.

### *Data Management*

Merriam (2001) suggested that a system for data management should be devised early in a study. Data management begins with a plan for management that proposes a way to prepare and organize the data for analysis. The data management plan I used for this study includes the following: (a) identifying the data for analysis, (b) summarizing the data from documents by completing document summary forms, (c) transcribing and coding the data for analysis, (d) summarizing the observation data for analysis, and (e) organizing the data for analysis.

*Identifying the data for analysis.* Identifying the data for analysis involved assigning a specific identification label to each document reviewed, each interview, and each observation conducted. At the macro-system and the exo-system levels, after each document was chosen I made a copy of the document to prepare it for study. I labeled the document for identification according to the type of document, the identification number assigned, and the type of data collected (e.g. M/1/SDoc).

At the exo-system, the meso-system, and the micro-system levels, I prepared to conduct interviews through the assigning of identification labels to the participants. Prior to the commencement of any interview I assigned a letter representing the school or district office in which the participant works, a letter and number in which to identify each participant, a letter or letters identifying the participant's job, and a letter by which to identify the type of data collected (e.g. L/L1/SA/I).

At the meso-system level, I prepared to conduct observations of the two school settings while touring the two facilities. I assigned a letter representing the school and another letter in which to identify the type of data collected (e.g. L/SO).

At the micro-system level, I prepared to conduct observations of classroom activities through the assigning of identification labels. Prior to an observation, I assigned a letter representing the school in which the observation was to be made, a letter and number in which to identify the teacher being observed, a letter(s) to identify the participant's job, and a letter in which to identify the type of data collected (e.g. L/L3/RE/CO).

*Summarizing the data from documents for analysis.* I reviewed the content of the documents and summarized the information on a document summary form at the macro-system level. The information from the documents was summarized on a document summary form. Miles and Huberman (1984) stressed that the researcher needs to develop and complete a "document summary form" (p. 51) that can be attached to the original document. They also emphasize that the document summary form should put "the document in context," (p. 51), explain the significance, and provide a short "content summary" (p. 51). The document summary form included the following items: (a) the document identification code, (b) the type of state document (e.g. memo), (c) the date the document was published, (d) to whom or for whom the document is written, (e) the topic of the document (f) the context of the document, (g) the significance of the document, and (h) the content summary of the document.

*Transcribing and coding the interview data for analysis.* Merriam (2001) suggested that transcribing data from recordings is "the best database for analysis" (p.88). I therefore recorded the dialogue from the interviews at the exo-system, the meso-system, and the micro-system levels. I then had a professional to transcribe the dialogue. When transcribed, each line of the

transcript was given a number for easy identification of content. All tapes were destroyed after the completion of the study to ensure complete confidentiality. I will however, keep the transcriptions on file for at least one year after the study has been completed.

As data was collected, I further organized the data from the transcriptions for analysis through coding. Miles and Huberman (1984) explained that a code is a “symbol applied to a segment of words” (p. 56). The segment of words could be a word, sentences, or even “chunks” (p. 63) of sentences. They further explained that “codes are categories” (p. 56) that can be developed from the “research questions, hypotheses, key concepts, or important themes” (p. 56). Merriam (2001) explained that the most common way categories are named reflect what the researcher “sees in the data” (p. 182). I therefore coded the data in the transcriptions according to the research questions, repeated concepts, or significant themes.

*Summarizing the observation data for analysis.* Merriam (2001) stated that what is written down from an observation “becomes the raw data from which a study’s findings eventually emerge” (p. 104). She further described that the words written down from an observation are referred to as field notes and that the field notes are comparable to the interview transcript. Merriam suggested that the content of the field notes be comprised of a description of the setting, the people and the activities observed; direct quotes or summaries of what people say; and any thoughts the observer has.

I prepared an observation guide to list the field notes I collected from the tour of the facilities and from the classroom observations. The observation guide included a place to list the code assigned to the observation session, a place to list the description of the setting, a place to list a description of the people observed, and a place to list a description of the activities seen and heard. The guide also included a place to list direct quotes or summaries of what people say as

well as a place to list my thoughts about what I was observing. The observation guide was on a template on my computer so modifications to the form related to spacing could be made spontaneously. I used either my laptop computer or my hand-held computer to type in the field notes on the document review guide.

*Organizing the data for analysis.* Merriam (2001) described that coding is a way of assigning a “shorthand designation” (p. 164) to assist the researcher in easily retrieving the specific pieces of data. Coding not only involves “identifying information about the data” (p. 164) but also determining “interpretive constructs related to analysis” (p. 164) in the sense of developing themes or patterns.

As data emerged through the document summary forms, transcripts, field notes, and memos, I copied all data management documents. The copies were used as tools for coding. The naturally occurring words or sentences were extracted from the copied documents and organized into “cluster” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 56) groups to determine categories that were initially based on the research questions. I maintained a master list of the categories and the location of the data representing the categories.

The interpretive constructs related to analysis of the developing themes or patterns emerged as the data were collected. As new categories emerged from the data, I compared and contrasted the new categories with the established categories. I continually reevaluated the established categories to determine their current authenticity. If I found inconsistent patterns in the categories, then the categories were refined. I made careful comparison of categories within each case as well as across the two cases (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

I also constructed matrix displays as authentic categories were established for more complete organization of the data within each case and across the two cases. A matrix is a table

made up of rows and columns. The content that I placed in the matrix evolved as the categories were defined. I used the suggestions on how to build matrix displays provided by Miles and Huberman (1984) as a guide.

The matrix displays not only helped organize the data to develop categories, but also helped in analyzing the data to determine conclusions and findings. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggested several ways that matrix displays could be used to draw and test conclusions. One of the most concrete and descriptive tactics is “Noting Patterns, Themes” (p. 216). They pointed out that noting patterns or themes could be especially useful for analyzing data when there is an overload of data. They advised, however, that it is important for the researcher to make sure that what is observed is “real added evidence of the same pattern” (p. 216) and to “remain open to disconfirming evidence when it appears” (p. 216). A way to confirm the presence of patterns is to subject the patterns to “skepticism – one’s own or that of others – and to conceptual and empirical tests (Does it really make sense? Do we find it elsewhere in the data where predicted?)” (p. 216).

In this study, I used the strategy of noting patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 216) to analyze the data. To confirm the presence of patterns, I wrote memos explaining the conclusions derived from the display matrices. Miles and Huberman maintained that writing memos is “a form of analysis” (p. 213) that will lead to “reformulation, added clarity, and ideas for further analysis” (p. 213). The memos also helped to document the comparison process and the trail that led to the conclusions. To confirm the presence of patterns, I documented the analysis procedures and asked a qualified colleague to audit my work. I asked the colleague to review the final matrices, the decision rules for constructing the matrices, and the written memos. The following sections describe the specific methods used in analyzing the educational systems.

### *Methods Used in Analyzing the Macro-System*

To answer the macro-system level research question, Fifteen Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) documents that were related to access to the general curriculum were reviewed and summarized. Four of the documents were State Superintendent's Memos. Four documents attached to the State Superintendent's Memos were also reviewed. Additionally, five of the documents reviewed were State Regulations and two of the documents reviewed were VDOE in-service handouts.

As documents were reviewed, Document Summary Forms were completed. The Document Summary Forms included the following information: the document identification code, the type of document, the date the document was published, to whom or for whom the document was written, the topic of the document, the context of the document, the significance of the document, and the content summary of the document. As Document Summary Forms were completed and reviewed, a display matrix that included the documents' identification codes, significance, and emerging categories was constructed. To help understand the data more fully, a second display matrix was developed through the ordering of categories in a logical progressive manner to reflect a possible sequence from regulation to implementation. As the information on the display matrix was compared and contrasted, emerging themes were identified. A third display matrix was then designed with the newly identified themes in the place of the categories.

Based on an analysis of the third display matrix that included comparing and contrasting the identified themes, the answer to the macro-level research question was determined and a fourth display matrix was created. The answer included an inferred vision of the Virginia State Department of Education and around what areas the strategies to meet the vision were built. The vision emerged from the review and generalization of all the themes. The areas around which the

strategies to meet the vision were built emerged from a further review and generalization of the themes.

### *Methods Used in Analyzing the Exo-System*

To analyze the role that Amazon County's central office plays in initiating and developing the patterns of practice that ensure access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities, three district level administrators, the Director of Instruction, the Director of Special Services, and the Special Education Lead Teacher, were interviewed. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Each line of each transcription was given a number that was placed at the beginning of each line for easy identification of content. At that point, a copy of each transcription was made for analysis purposes.

A spreadsheet was then designed to help further organize the data. The spreadsheet was designed with four columns to include the following information: the identification code, the analysis code, the main idea from the data "chunk," and the category.

From the copy of each transcript, the data were then further reviewed and organized for analysis through coding. As described by Miles and Huberman (1984), a symbol, which was chosen to be an analysis number, was assigned to a segment or "chunk" (p. 63) of words that related to the purpose of the study. The data that had been given an analysis number was then cut out of the transcription. The identification code for the corresponding interviewee as well as the analysis number was written on the data "chunk" for future reference. The information from the data "chunk" was then entered into the spreadsheet in the appropriate columns. After each "chunk" of data was entered into the spreadsheet, the cutout hard copies were placed in file folders with a label of the appropriate newly identified category.

When all the transcripts from the exo-system had been reviewed and the data had been entered into the Excel spreadsheet, the data was then sorted according to categories through the sort command of the spreadsheet. At that point, patterns of ideas that were stated by each interviewee became obvious. As the patterns were reviewed, specific practice themes emerged. A second display chart listing the identification code, the analysis number, the condensed idea from the data “chunk,” and the practice themes to which the “chunk” related was then created.

The state policy context was then compared and contrasted to the district administrative practice themes. District administrative practice themes that related to the state policy context were then entered into a two-column display chart. Based on the analysis of the display matrix that included comparing and contrasting the identified themes, the answer to the exo-system research question was determined and a fourth display matrix was created.

In addition to interviews with school personnel, six key documents were provided for review from the exo-system level. The documents included the Secondary Program of Studies for the 2002-2003 school year, the Six-Year School Improvement Plan for 2002-2008, the Individualized Education Program forms, the Special Education Process Manual, the district’s Special Education Department web site, and Power Point slides from the district’s “access to the general education curriculum” in-service sessions.

As documents were reviewed, Document Summary Forms were completed. The Document Summary Forms included the following information: the document identification code, the type of document, the date the document was published, to whom or for whom the document was written, the topic of the document, the context of the document, the significance of the document, and the content summary of the document. As Document Summary Forms were completed and reviewed, the information was merged with the display matrices from the

interviews with the district level administrators. The following section describes the categories supporting each theme, the identified themes, and the specific practices related to each theme.

#### *Methods Used in Analyzing the Meso-System*

Since the role of high school administration is to manage and lead teachers and students in the high school environment, interviews with high school administrators were the primary source of data collection for the exploration of the meso-system. Tours of the two high school facilities were also used to confirm and add to the data gathered through the interview process. Two building level administrators from the district, one from Bethany High School and the other from Carson High School, were interviewed. The administrator from Bethany High School was an assistant principal and the administrator from Carson High School was the building principal. Each interview with the school administrators was recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were prepared for analysis just as the transcriptions from the exo-system level were prepared for analysis. In addition to interviewing the school administrators, tours of both facilities were taken. Information from the tours helped to confirm the data obtained in the interviews.

A spreadsheet was designed to help organize the data from the transcriptions. The spreadsheet was designed in the same five-column format as the spreadsheet from the exo-system level. To review and organize the data for analysis, the same coding process used with the data from the exo-system level was applied.

As with the data from the exo-system, when all the transcripts from the meso-system had been reviewed and the data had been entered into the Excel spreadsheet, the data was then sorted according to categories through the sort command of the spreadsheet. Patterns of ideas that were stated by each interviewee became obvious. As the patterns were reviewed, specific practice themes emerged. A second display chart listing the identification code, the analysis number, the

condensed idea from the data “chunk,” and the practice themes to which the “chunk” related was then created.

The state policy context was then compared and contrasted to the school administrative practice themes. School administrative practice themes that related to the state policy context were then entered into a two-column display chart. After further comparison and contrast of the display matrices, the answer to the meso-system research question was determined and a fourth display matrix was created. Data collected at the meso-system level reiterated the themes identified in the macro-system and the exo-system levels. As with the themes from the exo-system level, each meso-system theme could be categorized into one of the three state provision and implementation strategies for the state policy enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum (e.g. state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures).

#### *Methods Used in Analyzing the Micro-System*

Representing the micro-system level, an English teacher, mathematics teacher, social studies teacher, science teacher, and special education teacher from Bethany High School and from Carson High School were interviewed. To confirm and add to the data obtained from the teacher interviews, two classroom observations were conducted with the English, mathematics, social studies, and science teachers from each school. Ten teachers were interviewed and 16 classroom observations were conducted.

All interviews with the teachers were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were prepared for analysis just as the transcriptions from the exo-system and meso-system levels were prepared for analysis. All observation notes were collected on a Classroom Observation Guide

form. Since all observations were tape recorded, the observation notes were compared with the tape recordings to ensure note-taking accuracy.

Two separate spreadsheets, one for Bethany High School and one for Carson High School, were designed to help organize the data from the transcriptions and the observations. The spreadsheets were designed in the same five-column format as the spreadsheets from the exo-system and meso-system levels. To review and organize the data for analysis, the same coding process that was used with the data from the exo-system and the meso-system levels was applied.

As with the data from the exo-system and the meso-system levels, when all the transcripts and observation forms from the micro-system level had been reviewed and the data had been entered into the 2 spreadsheets, the data were then sorted according to categories through the sort command of the spreadsheets. Patterns of ideas that were stated by each interviewee and seen in each observation became obvious. As the patterns were reviewed, specific practice themes emerged. A second display chart for each school was then created listing the identification code, the analysis number, the condensed ideas from the data “chunk,” and the practice themes to which the “chunk” related.

The practice themes for each school were then compared, contrasted, and merged together into a fifth display chart. The state policy context was then compared and contrasted to the classroom practice themes found in each school. Classroom practice themes that related to the state policy context, areas of provision and implementation, were then entered into two-column display charts for each school. After further comparison and contrast of the display matrices, the answer to the micro-system research question was determined and an eighth display matrix was created.

The themes for each case school were then compared and contrasted. Differences were noted and traced back to the meso-system level, where the differences originated through a differing of interpretation of the policy context.

### Reporting the Findings

One of the most important parts of conducting a research study is reporting the results (Merriam, 2001). Yin (1984) maintained that an exemplary case study goes beyond methodology and into the production of “insights into human or social processes” (p. 147). Yin further described five general characteristics that help determine quality insights and help produce an exemplary case study. These characteristics, which I will observe in this study, may be summarized as:

(1) The issue studied must be significant. One way to ensure this is to select an issue that has importance nationally for either theoretical, policy, or practical reasons.

(2) The case must be complete. Completeness can be obtained by observing three approaches to the data. First, the boundaries of the case study must be carefully defined and tested. Second, the investigator needs to demonstrate thoroughness in collecting all relevant evidence. Third, the case study must be ended when complete, not merely when time or resources have been exhausted.

(3) The case must consider alternative perspectives. This includes an intentional seeking out of opposing perspectives and ensuring that the case study presents the point of view of all the major actors in the case.

(4) The case study must display sufficient evidence. The evidence must be presented in a neutral manner so the reader can make independent judgments and conclusions. The researcher

should present evidence that the researcher is knowledgeable in the subject matter of the study, and that validity was maintained.

(5) The case study must be composed in an engaging manner. This requires the researcher to write with such clarity that the reader is engaged, enticed, and seduced.

The compositional stage of the case study report was given careful attention. Both Yin (1994) and Merriam (2001) recommended that the writing for the case study report begin when the very first pieces of data are collected. I began writing as the data became available. I believe starting to write the narrative early provided more opportunity for reflection and rewriting, thus yielding a better final document.

The compositional structure for this study was guided by the research questions and fell into the category of “linear-analytic” (Yin, 1994, p. 138). Chapters Four through Six contain the findings from “the data collected and analyzed” (p. 138). Those chapters describe the findings by using Bronfenbrenner’s (1976) theoretical model of the Experimental Ecology of Education. The model helped to determine how specially-designed instruction is being used across the total high school educational environment to ensure access to the general curriculum to secondary students with disabilities. To describe the findings there is special use of direct quotes and commentary that illustrate the patterns observed. Specifically, Chapter Four describes the findings from the macro-system, the exo-system, and the meso-system levels. Chapter Five describes the multi-case analysis and illustrates how information from each case school was used to support the analysis. Chapter Six includes a synthesis of patterns across the Amazon County high school environment. The study then concludes with a discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications, recommendations for future research, and personal reflections on the research process (Yin, 1994) in Chapter Seven.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FINDINGS: PART I

#### Overview and Practices at the Macro, Exo, and Meso Systems

Based on an examination of the high school educational environment in Amazon County, this study was proposed to describe how specially-designed instruction is being used to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are participating and progressing within it. This chapter examines how Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model, which depicts the educational environment as a system of nested structures, was used as a guide to explore the structures that work together to produce patterns of instruction and organization practiced in response to public policy in a Virginia school district.

The pseudonym, Amazon County, is used to represent the school district throughout the study. The pseudonym, Bethany High School, is used to represent one of the high schools in the study while the pseudonym, Carson High School, is used to represent the other high school in the study. Participants in the study are referred to on the basis of their associations with the district office (e.g. the Director of Instruction, the Director of Special Services, and the Special Education Lead Teacher) and respective schools (e.g. Bethany High School Administrator, Bethany High School Math Teacher, Bethany High School English Teacher, Bethany High School Science Teacher, Bethany High School Social Studies Teacher, Bethany High School Special Education Teacher, Carson High School Administrator, Carson High School Math Teacher, Carson High School English Teacher, Carson High School Science Teacher, Carson High School Social Studies Teacher, and Carson High School Special Education Teacher).

Data collection began in the outermost circle of Bronfenbrenner's (1976) educational environment, known as the "macro-system." Represented in this study by the review of

documents from the State Department of Education, macro-systems are “a manifestation of overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 8). The macro-system in this study contains the policy context surrounding the mandate that students with disabilities be provided with access to the general curriculum and that schools monitor students’ participation and progress within it.

Data collection continued moving inward to the next level of the educational environment, the exo-system. Represented in this study by interviews with district administrators and the review of district documents, exo-systems are an extension of the macro-systems and include formal and informal social structures that mirror the ideology of the macro-system. The exo-system of Amazon County is denoted in this study by three district office administrators, whose role according to Bronfenbrenner’s model is to convey and institutionalize the information and ideology of the macro-system. The exo-system in this study contains the administrative practices originating from the district’s central office that relate to the district’s special education program.

Moving closer to the core of the educational environment is the meso-system level. Represented in this study by two administrators, one from Bethany High School and the other from Carson High School, and the tours of their facilities, meso-systems consist of the “interrelations among the major settings containing the learner” (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p. 5). The meso-system in this study contains the organizational practices that support administrative practices used at the building level that relate to the school’s implementation of its special education program.

Lastly, the study explored the micro-system level, which is the innermost level of the educational environment. Represented in this study by interviews with five teachers from Bethany High School and five teachers from Carson High School plus eight observations in classrooms at Bethany High School and eight observations in classrooms at Carson High School, micro-systems contain the developing person. The micro-system in this study contains the instructional and organizational practices that are used to help students with disabilities participate and progress in the general education curriculum. At the classroom level, instructional and organizational practices are implemented as the various levels of the ecological system react to each other producing patterns of practice in response to the policy context.

#### Overview of the Findings

Chapters Four through Six describe the patterns of practice revealed at each level in the educational environment and consider the interrelationships among the levels of the educational environment in Amazon County. A great deal of information related to the patterns of practice used to provide access to the general curriculum for secondary students with disabilities was collected throughout the course of this study. Detailed information is provided in a narrative format as each level of the educational system is discussed in Chapter Four, Five, and Six. Each quote and insight provided from each participant presents a perspective that is necessary to the complete understanding of how students with disabilities are accessing the general curriculum in Amazon County.

The sheer volume of 40 identified themes with 206 related practices, however, made it necessary to organize the themes into theme topics. Out of the 40 themes, 13 different theme topics could easily be seen which meant that most all the themes were similar but varied enough to require distinct wordings in the early stages. In comparing and contrasting the 13 theme topics

across the total high school environment, 5 theme topics were found to be constant. The theme topics of (a) accommodations and modifications, (b) collaboration, (c) monitoring student learning, (d) placement, and (e) professional development could all be viewed across the total setting as the prominent patterns of practice used to provide access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities. At the end of Chapter Six, a discussion of the how the 5 theme topics relate to past research is included.

By referring to the chart of the specific practices from each sub-system by each theme topic as illustrated in Appendix D, it can be seen that each sub-system and each case school brings its own uniqueness and emphasis to the task of providing access. For example, in reviewing the specific practices under the theme category of accommodations and modifications, it can be seen that the district office emphasizes the IEP process while the other sub-systems focus on specific accommodation and modification actions. In comparing specific practices under the theme category of collaboration, it can be seen that even though collaboration is encouraged by administrators and is present in the micro-system, in an inclusion setting there are collaboration concerns. Under the theme topic of monitoring student learning, it can be seen how district administrators, building administrators, and teachers all monitor the students' progress. Under the theme topic of placement, the emphasis of a continuum of placements is present at the district administrative level but at the building administrative level, the practice of implementing an inclusion model at one school is motivated by the need to ensure a 95% participation rate in state testing for students with disabilities. In comparing specific practices under the theme category of professional develop, an emphasis is noted at the district level but the level of importance is not observed in the micro-system even though all high school teachers experienced training specifically related to access to the general curriculum.

The large amount of information collected across the educational environment also details how the policy context is established at the macro-system level and penetrates to all other sub-systems. The state department's policy context is articulated and initiated at both the exo-system and meso-system levels. All the practices that emerged at the micro-system level could be traced back to the state's policy context. Information collected at the meso-system level that was categorized in the theme topic of placement, however, did vary. The variance in the placement practices could be traced to the factors that created differences in collaboration practices at the micro-system level between the case schools.

### Describing the Findings

In this chapter and the following two chapters, the patterns of practice are described in detail as each educational environment is addressed. The patterns of practice introduced into the high school environment at the macro-system, exo-system, and meso-system levels are first described. Through a multi-case analysis, the findings from the 2 high schools in Amazon County are then described and compared. Finally, a synthesis of the patterns across the Amazon County high school environment is presented.

### The Macro-System and the State Policy Context

Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained that public policy has the power to determine the condition of people's lives thus affecting their wellbeing and development. It was determined that the VDOE has established a policy context related to the access to the general curriculum mandate. The establishment of the state's policy context has in turn initiated patterns of practice that have penetrated through all levels of the Amazon County total high school educational environment and have reached the inner core where the students with disabilities are located. The state policy context was identified as enabling students with disabilities to access the general

curriculum. It was further identified that state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures have been provided and implemented to enable students with disabilities to access the general curriculum.

### *Enabling Requirements*

Analysis of the documents related to the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* provided evidence that the state is providing directions as to what the content of IEPs should include in relation to access to the general curriculum. The five *Document Summary Forms* developed from the state regulations demonstrated that guidance has been provided to local school systems. In reviewing the regulatory definition of “general curriculum,” it is clear that the state’s intention is that the “general curriculum” refers to what is taught to students in the regular classroom and not to a particular setting. The state regulations also summarized IEP directions related to connecting students with disabilities’ current levels of performance to their access to the general curriculum, and to connecting students’ goals and objectives to their access to the general curriculum. The state regulations summarized IEP directions related to connecting the related services, supplementary aids and services, and program modifications and supports of students with disabilities to their access to the general curriculum as well as their access to state assessments. The overall category assigned to summarize the significance of the documents developed from the state regulations was “enabling requirements.” This term was chosen to communicate the meaning that implemented state requirements enable students with disabilities to access the general curriculum.

### *Access to the General Curriculum and Professional Development*

Analysis of the documents related to in-service training by the VDOE provided evidence that the state is providing training to teachers on how students with disabilities are to have access to the general curriculum. The first Document Summary Form developed from the in-service training handouts summarized the way in which the state detailed how students with disabilities' IEPs are to be connected to the students' access to the general curriculum. The second Document Summary Form developed from the in-service training handouts summarized how the state specified that students with disabilities should participate in the Virginia Assessment Program. The overall category assigned to summarize the significance of the documents developed from the VDOE in-service handouts was "access to the general curriculum professional development." This term was chosen to communicate the meaning that the state is training educators how to implement the state regulations to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities.

### *Assessment Specifications*

Analysis of communications from the State Superintendent of Instruction provided evidence that the state is specifying how students with disabilities are to be included in the Virginia Assessment Program. In a January 3, 2003 State Superintendent's Memo, the State Superintendent informed District Superintendents about the guidelines adopted by the Board of Education regarding a substitute SOL Evaluation Program for certain students with disabilities who cannot be accommodated on SOL tests. In a January 3, 2003 attachment to the State Superintendent's Memo, the proposed implementation guidelines for a substitute SOL Evaluation Program for certain students with disabilities who cannot be accommodated on Standards of Learning tests was described.

In a March 7, 2003 State Superintendent's Memo, the State Superintendent informed District Superintendents that students with disabilities seeking a Modified Standard Diploma will be able to qualify for expedited re-tests after taking the 8<sup>th</sup> grade English and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics SOL tests. District Superintendents were also informed in the memo that students with disabilities seeking a Modified Standard Diploma can substitute higher level SOL tests for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade English and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics SOL tests.

In an October 11, 2002 State Superintendent's Memo, the State Superintendent informed District Superintendents that the State Board of Education had approved guidelines for the participation of students with disabilities in Virginia's Accountability System. These new guidelines address both the SOL Assessment Program and the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program and replace the adopted October 1997 guidelines. In an October 11, 2002 attachment to a State Superintendent's Memo, guidelines for how students with disabilities are to participate in the assessment component of Virginia's Accountability System were provided. In another October 11, 2002 attachment to a State Superintendent's Memo, procedures for participation of students with disabilities in the assessment component of Virginia's Accountability System were also provided.

It is clear from the State Superintendent's Memos and various attachments to the memos that the state is committed to finding ways to include all students in its assessment program. This commitment is evident through the state's specification of how students with disabilities are to be included in its assessment program. The words "assessment specifications" were therefore chosen as a category to communicate the meaning that the state is specifying how students with disabilities are to be included in the state's testing program.

### *Monitoring and Reporting Results*

Analysis of additional State Superintendent's Memos provided evidence that the state has achieved improved academic results since the administration of SOL tests. In a December 22, 2000 State Superintendent's Memo, the State Superintendent informed District Superintendents that the improved results found in Virginia's Special Education State Improvement Plan Report are due to students with disabilities' increased school completion and higher proficiency levels on the SOL tests. In a December 22, 2000 attachment to a State Superintendent's Memo, a report showing the status of the state's special education program is provided. There was an increase of 4 percentage points in improved EOC SOL scores from 1997-1998 to 1998-1999. In the 1997-1998 school year, 29% of students with disabilities who took an EOC SOL test passed. In the 1998-1999 school year, 33% of students with disabilities who took an EOC SOL test passed. The state is monitoring and reporting EOC SOL testing results in Virginia's Special Education State Improvement Plan. The words "monitoring and reporting results" were chosen as a category to communicate that the state is tracking and publishing EOC SOL testing results.

### *Enabling Students with Disabilities to Access the General Curriculum through the Provision and Implementation of State Regulations*

One of the themes that emerged from the review of state documents was enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations. The state has established a policy context that addresses the federal mandate through the development of regulations that will enable students with disabilities to access the general curriculum as the regulations are implemented. The regulations dictate what IEPs should include in order to help students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. Dictating what IEPs should include has a direct relationship on how students with disabilities are

being taught. As a result, enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations has the potential to affect the inner core of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Framework, the micro-system level. Enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations can also affect the exo-system level and the meso-system level. District and school administrators are to use the state regulations to develop the IEP forms and to monitor that the state regulations are being met.

*Enabling Students with Disabilities to Access the General Curriculum through the Provision and Implementation of State Professional Development*

A second theme that emerged from the review of state documents was enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state professional development. The state has strengthened its policy context to enable students with disabilities to access the general curriculum by providing professional development training to district administrators, principals, and teachers on how students with disabilities are to have access to the general curriculum through the development and implementation of required IEP components. As a result, enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state professional development has the potential to impact the three sub levels of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Framework, the exo-system level, the meso-system level, and the micro-system level.

*Enabling Students with Disabilities to Access the General Curriculum through State Accountability Measures*

A third theme that emerged from the review of state documents was enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through state accountability measures. The state

has included accountability measures to reinforce its policy context of enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. The state has provided assessment specifications that detail how students with disabilities can participate in the state assessment program. District administrators, principals, and teachers must ensure that all assessment specifications are followed as students with disabilities participate in the state assessment program. The state has also included additional accountability measures that monitor and report assessment results related to SOL testing. As a result, enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state accountability measures can impact the three sub levels of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Framework, the exo-system level, the meso-system level, and the micro-system level.

#### *The State Policy Context Addressing the Federal Mandate*

A review of VDOE documents showed that the state policy context addressing the federal mandate is built on the vision of enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. The strategies to meet this vision are designed around the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures.

The state policy context addressing the federal mandate was therefore identified as enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. In the sections and chapters that follow, the findings across the other three levels of the educational system are described along with consistent themes and specific practices. The detailed descriptions illustrate how the state's policy context has initiated patterns

of practice that have penetrated through all levels of the Amazon County total high school educational environment.

### The Exo-System and District Level Practices

Bronfenbrenner (1976) described how the exo-system includes the “concrete social structures, both formal and informal, that impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings containing the learner and, thereby, influence and even determine or delimit what goes on there” (p. 6). It was determined that the expectations of the state policy context were identified and initiated at the district office level. The expectations of how students with disabilities should be supported penetrated from the macro-system level to the exo-system level. The exo-system level then initiated practices that would penetrate to the meso-system and the micro-system levels of the high school environment so students with disabilities could access the general curriculum.

Eight themes illustrated how the macro-system level policy context of enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures was supported and initiated at the exo-system level. The 8 exo-system themes included: (a) the district administrator identified ways to provide accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities so students are able to access the general curriculum, (b) the district administrator initiated collaboration between regular education departments and special education departments, (c) the district administrator initiated monitoring student learning, (d) the district administrator initiated monitoring teachers, (e) the district administrator initiated the examination of student placement, (f) the district administrator initiated professional development, (g) the district administrator allotted resources, and (h) the district administrator initiated school renewal concepts. State regulations were addressed as the district administrator

identified ways to carry out the multiple tasks that addressed enabling students to access the general curriculum through the implementation of state regulations, providing state professional development training, and assuring participation in state accountability measures.

### *Accommodations and Modifications*

One category that emerged from the data was called accommodations and modifications. All three district level administrators who were interviewed shared relevant information that fell into this category. The Director of Special Services articulated the need for accommodations and modifications and how the IEP is the tool for access. The Director of Instruction described ways to differentiate instruction, and the Special Education Lead Teacher described how the IEP committee must identify the accommodations and modifications.

The Director of Special Services in her interview shared how important it was for educators to find ways to re-teach, re-test, and remediate during the school day for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities need the opportunity for more review and drill to master the curriculum. Finding ways to re-teach, re-test, and remediate can be important forms of providing accommodations and modifications.

The Director of Instruction spoke of the importance of differentiating the curriculum for all learners which, when put into practice, would allow for the re-teaching, re-testing, and remediation opportunities identified by the Director of Special Services. The Director of Instruction explained that “differentiation occurs in content, process, and pacing” and that “there are lots of different ways to differentiate.” She shared that differentiation “doesn’t have to mean that there are multiple lesson plans” but that differentiation could “occur just in the questioning of students.” She explained that in heterogeneously grouped classes, teachers “could plan ahead

of time how to ask different students questions on their level so they could be successful and move forward at their levels.”

The Director of Instruction also noted how curriculum compacting, a practice that is often helpful to students who learn quickly, is also helpful for students with disabilities. Curriculum compacting is the practice of pre-testing students and allowing the curriculum, for those students who have already mastered a specific part, to be compacted. Because of the compacting, the students who learn quickly do “not have to sit through the learning of objectives that they have already mastered,” the Director of Instruction stated. Likewise, for the group who may not have mastered a certain part of the curriculum, the teacher can plan for more review and drill through other instructional activities so that group of students can progress. One benefit of compacting the curriculum for the learner who needs more review and drill is that the student does not have to experience the stress of thinking he or she is slowing the class down when the teacher repeats information and drills several times.

The Director of Instruction also described tiered assignments as a way to differentiate instruction. She described tiered assignments as a practice in which teachers can take a lesson and build activities onto the foundation of the lesson format. She spoke of how tiered assignments “allow students to move through their materials more at their own pace.”

The Director of Special Services discussed how “the IEP is the tool that describes what modifications are going to be used” and how the “IEP becomes the tool for access.” The Special Education Lead Teacher described how the IEP committee must identify accommodations and modifications that the student needs in order to access the general curriculum. She noted that some of the accommodations and modifications may be having books and tests read out-loud, using a calculator, or modifying the length of an assignment. She further pointed out that each

student's present level of performance and test evaluations must be reviewed by the IEP committee to determine what the student can do and what the student needs to be able to do to access the general curriculum. The Special Education Lead Teacher described how each student must be looked at individually and how the student's disability needs must relate to the need for certain accommodations and modifications. She also emphasized that the accommodations and modifications used must follow the student through to the SOL tests and that "the modifications they receive on the SOL should be the same modifications that they receive on the IEP."

In contrasting the conversations, it was interesting to note how each district administrator approached the topic of accommodations and modifications. The Director of Special Services emphasized how important it was to find ways to re-teach, re-test, and remediate and how the IEP is the tool that provides access. The Director of Instruction approached the topic through differentiating classroom instruction and the Special Education Lead Teacher approached the topic through the IEP process. The two different approaches of the Director of Instruction and the Special Education Lead Teacher nicely fit the vision of the Director of Special Services to find ways to re-teach, re-test, and remediate. Thus, an important practice theme that emerged from the category of accommodations and modifications was that the district administrator identified ways to provide accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities. With the identification of accommodations and modifications, the district administrator can then inform, encourage, and support building administrators and teachers regarding appropriate accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities.

### *Collaboration*

Another category that emerged from the data was collaboration. All three district level administrators who were interviewed shared relevant information that fell into this category. The

Director of Special Services articulated the expectation and the need for collaboration. Likewise, the Special Education Lead Teacher cited the need for collaboration and explained how the practice is starting to occur. In addition, the Director of Instruction described how the practice of collaboration has begun to occur at the district level.

The Director of Special Services explained that special education teachers and regular education teachers should be sharing planning time as well as information related to curriculum, pacing guides, and lesson plans. She stressed that when special education teachers and regular education teachers share information, then students with disabilities can move forward with their grade level peers.

The Special Education Lead Teacher also emphasized that collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers is needed. She explained that both special education teachers and regular education teachers are experts in their areas and should share the information from their fields of study with each other. She stated that in the past, collaboration has not been done. She said that this lack of collaboration in the past was mainly due to the old concept that special education teachers are to deal just with special education students and regular education teachers are to deal just with regular education students. She said that those ideas are changing but need to meld together even more. To illustrate the new practice of collaboration, she pointed out that the three high schools in the district have requested that all special education teachers have access to the regular education curriculum maps as well as the regular education lesson plans. She also said that one of the high schools in the district had moved the special education classrooms to the corresponding subject area hall. For example, now along the hall where the social studies classrooms are located there is also a special

education classroom so it is not just, “Well, special education is a separate little department over there.”

The Director of Instruction brought further insight on how the practice of collaboration is changing in the district. She pointed out that she is seeing more and more collaboration not only between the special education teachers and the regular education teachers, but also between the special education department and the regular education department at the district office. She used the illustration of how staff development activities have been planned through collaborative efforts. She explained that holding a staff development activity on the practice of differentiation not only benefits students with disabilities, but also gifted and talented students.

Thus, an important practice theme that emerged from the category of collaboration was that the district administrator initiated collaboration between regular education departments and special education departments. The district administrator initiated collaboration by articulating the expectation and the need for collaboration to take place between departments. Collaboration has not only been encouraged at the classroom level, but also at the district level. With the initiation of collaboration between regular education and special education departments, the district administrator can then facilitate more sharing of knowledge among district administrators, between district administrators and building administrators, and between regular education teachers and special education teachers.

#### *Monitoring Student Learning*

A third category that emerged from the data was monitoring student learning. All three district level administrators who were interviewed shared relevant information that fell into this category. The Director of Special Services described school-based meetings. The Special Education Lead Teacher shared about the examination of placement. The Director of Special

Services, the Director of Instruction, and the Special Education Lead Teacher all cited how SOL testing data is being disaggregated. The Special Education Lead Teacher also described how Flanagan practice test results were monitored as well as the curriculum mapping process. In addition, the Director of Instruction explained about the establishment of a diversity task force and the Director of Special Services stressed the importance of communicating with parents to assist in the monitoring process of students.

To meet the access to the general curriculum mandate, educators must ensure that students with disabilities are progressing in the general curriculum. A new district level practice for the 2002-2003 school year, cited by the Director of Special Services, was school-based meetings. The meetings occurred at each school in the division and included the Director of Special Services, the Special Education Lead Teacher, the school's Principal, and the school's Special Education Department Chairperson. At the meetings disaggregated SOL testing data, master schedules, and several questions directed the dialogue. According to the Director of Special Services, some of the questions included "How do your kids access the general curriculum?" and "Where do your kids access the general curriculum?" The dialogue that stemmed from these questions as well as the data reviewed assisted the district level administrators in the monitoring of student learning. In some cases, the Director of Special Services said she had to inform the school, "What you're doing isn't working, and we've got to change it." The Director of Special Services said it was "a great process" and that her plan next year is "to start this process in October."

The Special Education Lead Teacher explained that having to monitor student progress due to the access to the general curriculum mandate has made the division examine the issue of placement. She said, "It has made the division have to examine how it is giving students with

disabilities services. An older method of pulling students out may not be the most effective way of giving them access to the curriculum as well.” In relation to student achievement and placement, she cited an elementary school that had a large number of students with disabilities in self-contained classes and how those students had been put back into regular education classes. She said, “They have put that large number of kids back into regular education and have actually seen growth and improvement in the student scores through use of different assessments.” She explained how this process must begin at the elementary level and continue through the high school level. The Special Education Lead Teacher also added that it is important to have students placed in the general curriculum due to the “NCLB Act” mandate that requires a 95% participation rate of students with disabilities in state assessments. Because of the monitoring of student learning, the issue of placement is being examined by the district administrators.

The Director of Special Services, the Director of Instruction, and the Special Education Lead Teacher all related how SOL EOC Test scores were being disaggregated to determine how students with disabilities were progressing. The Director of Special Services explained, “One of the measures of improvement in student achievement is the SOLs. This year we have started to take a very, very hard look. We disaggregated all the data for the students with disabilities.” The Special Education Lead Teacher pointed out that each year under NCLB Act, districts are required to disaggregate all the special education data. She went on to explain how the DOE sends a computer disk called the Disaggregator to help with this process. From that disk, she says districts are able to identify the SOL testing scores of students with disabilities. She noted that from the disaggregated data, she saw that the SOL testing scores of students with disabilities who were in regular education classes tended to be higher than the scores of those students who were in self-contained classrooms and who still wanted to participate in the state assessment. This may

be because the students still in self-contained classes have more severe disabilities. The Director of Instruction emphasized again the practice of collaboration as she described how the district's student services department, the district's instructional department, and the school administrators look at the disaggregated data to determine how students with disabilities are doing and what instructional strategies are needed to support those students.

The Special Education Lead Teacher also mentioned how SOL practice tests, called Flanagan Practice Tests, were being administered to students so schools could determine how students were progressing. She said, "There are several people from the district level that look at the Flanagan scores to see how students are doing." She also mentioned that if a student with a disability is having trouble with the Flanagan practice tests, then the student's IEP committee should look at why the student is having trouble. "It may be," she explained, "that they need to simply add or change a modification, or they need to change a goal."

To help monitor what students with disabilities are learning, the Special Education Lead Teacher cited curriculum mapping. General education teachers in the district teach from a map that lists the date specific content that is to be taught, the objectives that are to be taught, the skills that are to be learned, and the assessments that are to measure the achievement of the objectives. The Special Education Lead Teacher explained, "We have requested that the special education staffs in all the schools have access to [the general education] curriculum maps." She further elaborated on the fact that "There is no separate special education curriculum. The [special education] curriculum is the general education [curriculum], unless you're getting students who need functional skills." She said that in some of the school-based meetings that she has had to sit in on, administrators are saying they are emphasizing this practice by expecting special education teachers to be following the general education curriculum maps. She

summarized that administrators are looking “at what goes on in special education classrooms and what the students are actually learning” through curriculum mapping.

The Director of Instruction stressed that she and others have been concerned for the achievement of the different student groups in the division. To address this concern, she explained how the district convened a diversity task force. “Our district’s school counseling and testing director coordinated the effort. Central office people, special education people, and community leaders were involved,” she explained. “We worked with a consultant who came through a group from Washington, D.C.,” she continued. In the meetings, she said the group talked about the issues involved with diversity and the achievement gap, while focusing on the different student groups (e.g. special education, poverty, minority students, etc.). One outcome of the diversity task force was a major professional development series for administrators and teachers based on the materials from Ruby Payne.

The Director of Special Services related how important it is to talk to students and their parents about their students’ progress. She explained that we “have to talk openly with parents about the graduation requirements.” She also stated the importance of explaining to parents the consequences of not participating in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade SOL tests and what the long-term effects are. The district’s *Program of Studies* has several charts illustrating the different diploma options (e.g. Standard Diploma, Advanced Studies Diploma, and Modified Standard Diploma). The *Program of Studies* also describes the courses and programs offered in the district’s high schools. The *Program of Studies* is an additional communication tool that can be used by educators to help parents understand more about their children’s progress. The Director of Special Services further detailed how important it is to talk to parents about their child’s disability and the needs of their child. The district IEP form serves as the framework for the education program of

students with disabilities. The IEP can be a tool to facilitate the monitoring of student progress and a further communication tool.

Having school-based meetings, examining the placement of students with disabilities, disaggregating the SOL testing data, using Flanagan practice test results, using the general education curriculum map for students with disabilities, establishing a diversity task force, and communicating openly with parents have assisted the district administrators in monitoring student learning. As a result, the practice theme that emerged from the category of monitoring student learning was that the district administrator initiated monitoring of student learning. With the initiation of student monitoring, district and building level administrators and classroom teachers can track whether students with disabilities are progressing in the general curriculum and can make instructional changes as needed.

#### *Monitoring Teachers*

A fourth category that emerged from the data was monitoring teachers. All three district level administrators who were interviewed provided pertinent information that could be classified into this category. The Director of Instruction shared information about the increase in district office administrative positions. The Director of Special Services emphasized the importance of setting the tone for staff regarding what is expected of them. The Special Education Lead Teacher cited the importance of setting expectations for principals in completing classroom observations and in tracking curriculum map progress. Lastly, the review of documents showed how professional resource materials at the district level have served as tools to ensure teachers are able to complete their tasks.

The Director of Instruction stated that there are more personnel from the central office in the schools “to support the evaluation of teachers.” The new positions of Social Studies

Specialist, English Specialist, and Special Education Lead Teacher are examples of the additional district office support staffing to which the Director of Instruction referred. In the past few years, central office personnel have become more visible in the schools and in classrooms.

The Director of Special Services discussed that the tone must be set with staff regarding what is expected from them before there can be student improvement. The Special Education Lead Teacher cited that principals are being asked to go in the classrooms and review lesson plans to see what access students are experiencing. The Special Education Lead Teacher also explained how principals have been encouraged to observe teachers to see if modifications on IEPs are being followed and to see if differentiated instruction is occurring. The Special Education Lead Teacher stated,

We have encouraged administrators that when they are in classrooms and they know there is a student with a disability in there, to see where those modifications are and whether they are being followed. We also encourage as part of the evaluation process that they look at how things are being differentiated.

The Director of Special Services discussed the expectation for principals to be monitoring what special education teachers are teaching through the curriculum mapping process. She also mentioned how she hoped that administrators are allowing for planning time between regular education teachers and special education teachers to discuss curriculum map issues.

Two district documents that were provided for review, the district's Process Manual and the district's special education web site, are tools for teachers to use to help them properly complete their tasks. The Process Manual helps teachers to know and understand the requirements of the *Code of Virginia* and IDEA so they are enabled to comply. The district's

special education web site provides additional information to help teachers to know and understand the district's special education program.

According to these participants, teachers must be monitored to confirm they are enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. Providing more personnel support at the district level, setting the tone for staff regarding what is expected of them, setting expectations for principals to complete classroom observations and tracking of curriculum mapping progress, and furnishing professional resource materials have all assisted the district administrator in monitoring teachers. As a result, the practice theme that came forth from the category of monitoring teachers was that the district administrator initiated monitoring of teachers. With the initiation of teacher monitoring, district and building level administrators can track whether teachers are delivering the necessary instructional access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.

#### *Placement*

A fifth category that came from the data related to the exo level was placement. The Special Education Lead Teacher and the Director of Instruction provided applicable information that could be grouped into this category. The Special Education Lead Teacher described how placement has been examined to ensure that student placements are determined on a continuum basis and through a process by the IEP committee. The Special Education Lead Teacher also elaborated on how placement has been examined through certain criteria at the school-based meetings. The Director of Special Services discussed the resource period that is available to students with disabilities as an elective course. The *Program of Studies* that was reviewed illustrated that a high school student with a disability could remain in the regular classroom yet

still obtain help from a special education teacher through an elective course known as “Fundamental Skills.”

The Special Education Lead Teacher stated, “There has to be a continuum of placement” and “for some students, receiving their services in the regular classroom may not be appropriate.” She said the district does not implement “full-blown inclusion. It’s including the student in the regular curriculum to the best and most appropriate way possible for that particular student.” She explained that each IEP committee must go through the process of reviewing the present level of performance and goals, asking if the student needs a particular service for a particular goal, and then asking how the student can best be served. She said that a placement decision is to be “one of the last components” of the IEP process and that it “should not be a preconceived notion.” Ensuring placement is being determined on a continuum basis and through a process by the IEP committee, helps to ensure that students with disabilities are able to learn the material taught in the general curriculum to the greatest extent possible.

The Special Education Lead Teacher also said that as a part of the school-based meetings, the district requested information in relation to how students with disabilities are accessing the general curriculum. She said they requested a list of students with their disabilities, the percentage of time the students are being pulled out of their classes, and the services that are being provided. Reviewing student placement criteria in this manner helps the district administrator to ensure that students with disabilities are placed appropriately so they can access the general curriculum.

The Director of Special Services discussed the resource period that is available for students with disabilities. In the district’s Program of Studies, an elective class entitled Fundamental Skills is presented as an option for students with disabilities in the course list. This

elective course is with a special education teacher. The special education teacher is to maintain communication with the regular education teacher to determine areas in which the student needs further review and drill. Having a student with a disability placed in an elective resource course at the high school level allows the student to remain in the regular classroom, yet still obtain help from a special education teacher in identified areas of weakness. The Director of Special Services emphasized how important it was to “use the content of the general curriculum in the resource time” to enable students to learn the general curriculum. As the district reviews student placement criteria in the school-based meetings, district administrators should also be able to get an idea of whether the elective is being scheduled appropriately.

Placement has been examined to ensure that student placements are determined on a continuum basis and through a process by the IEP committee. Placement has also been examined through certain criteria at the school-based meetings and regarding student elective needs. A theme that emerged from the category of placement was that the district administrator initiated the examination of student placement. With the examination of student placement, the district administrator can then help ensure students with disabilities are appropriately placed, and are receiving access to the general curriculum.

#### *Professional Development*

A sixth category that emerged from the data from the exo-system level was professional development. All three district level administrators who were interviewed shared relevant information that fell into this category. The Director of Special Services discussed how the district’s professional development plan was devised. She also told about a Train the Trainer project that was an integral part of the plan. The Special Education Lead Teacher explained how district survey results were used to plan for professional development activities. Both the

Director of Special Services and the Special Education Lead Teacher explained how regular education staff and special education staff participated in professional development courses at nearby universities and colleges. The Special Education Lead Teacher told of how special speakers were brought to the district for professional development training and how district administrators provided professional development training. The Director of Instruction shared about professional development training for regular education teachers and special education teachers in the area of differentiating classroom instruction. Lastly, the Special Education Lead Teacher shared how the district provided professional development literature to teachers in the schools.

According to the Director of Special Services, the district's professional development plan has stemmed from the DOE's Special Education Improvement Plan. One of the indicators from the state's plan has been professional development. For the past two years, the district has made professional development an emphasis as well. The topic of access to the general curriculum has been a focus of the district's professional development training. For example, a team comprised of one high school principal, a special education teacher, and a regular education teacher were trained in the area of Accessing the General Curriculum. The team then went to every high school and middle school in the district as trainers to share what they had learned about the access to the general curriculum federal mandate. Based on the review of the Power Point slides from the Train the Trainer sessions, an introduction of the mandate was provided and several checklists for teachers and administrators were provided as tools to help ensure that students with disabilities were being provided access to the general curriculum.

In addition to the State's Special Education Improvement Plan directing the professional development activities, survey results also help guide the plan. A survey seeking professional

development needs was distributed from the district office. The Special Education Lead Teacher explained that the surveys were sent to educators as well as to parents. The survey results were then used to help develop the special education professional development calendar for the district.

It has also been a local goal, according to the Director of Special Services, “to increase regular education staff” in the participation of special education professional development opportunities. For example, the district coordinated and provided funding for professional development opportunities through nearby colleges for regular education educators and special education educators. According to the Director of Special Services, several district teams, made up of regular education teachers and special education teachers, attended SOL Content Academies at James Madison University. Differentiation was listed as a sample topic covered in the academies. The Director of Special Services and the Special Education Lead Teacher both mentioned that the district also coordinated efforts to send regular education teachers, special education teachers, and school counselors to Lynchburg College to participate in a course on the topic of collaboration. Another professional development opportunity coordinated by the district was to send teams of educators to a course at Lynchburg College on mental retardation.

According to the Special Education Lead Teacher, the district also brought professional development opportunities to educators in the county by bringing in special speakers from groups such as T-TAC and the DOE. Special in-service topics from the DOE included accessing the general curriculum, SOL testing, and placement.

The Special Education Lead Teacher also shared that professional development training presented by district administrators have included topics such as writing appropriate goals and objectives that will allow students to access the general curriculum, using the new IEP forms,

and the IEP process. For all the IEP training sessions, parents were also invited and several attended.

Just as the special education administrators seek to include regular educators as well as special educators in their training, other district level administrators from other departments such as gifted education seek to be inclusive as well. For example, the Director of Instruction shared that when professional development training was initiated across the county in the area of differentiation, regular educators and special educators were included. “We’ve tried to expand to include everybody,” she explained. The Director of Instruction also cited that much of the training on getting “all students to read on grade level” has “come through special education.”

Another important part of the professional development program at the district level was the providing of literature to educators in the schools. The Special Education Lead Teacher said that schools received books for their professional libraries on the topics of various disability conditions and accessing the general curriculum. Research articles on special education issues are also frequently copied to building principals for them to share with their staffs.

A theme that emerged from the category of professional development was that the district administrator initiated professional development activities. The district administrators created a plan for professional development. The plan was based on the State’s Special Education Improvement Plan and local survey results from educators and parents. The plan included training activities that involved regular educators, special educators, and parents. Professional development training events occurred as a part of a Train the Trainer program, the offering of college courses, the bringing in of special speakers, the presentation of workshops by district administrators, and the providing of professional literature to the schools. It was significant that a large portion of training was devoted to sessions on the topic of Access to the General

Curriculum through the Train the Trainer program. With the initiation of professional development activities, the district administrator can build a greater knowledge and technique base regarding ensuring that students with disabilities are accessing the general curriculum.

### *Resources*

A seventh category that emerged from the data from the exo-system level was resources. All three district level administrators who were interviewed shared pertinent information that related to this category. The Director of Instruction explained that instructional money was appropriated for all students on the district level. She also discussed how extra textbooks have recently been purchased to assist regular education students, students with disabilities, and struggling readers. The Special Education Lead Teacher also described how recent textbook purchases have been used to accommodate students with disabilities. In addition, the Director of Instruction shared how technology purchases and additional personnel positions have benefited students. The Director of Special Services explained how the district utilized grant money for several of its professional development programs and the Director of Instruction noted how the different grants for professional development have often supported teachers who work with a variety of learner needs.

The Director of Instruction explained that instructional money is given to all schools for all students. She said, “We’re hoping that the instructional money at the building level benefits all students.” She shared that over the last five years principals have “had more access to instructional money” and that more textbooks “have been selected according to reading levels.” She also said that extra textbooks have been purchased so students can have key words and concepts highlighted. The Director of Instruction cited that now textbook companies are offering classroom sets of textbooks as an extra buying bonus. Students can then keep their copies of their

textbooks at home and use textbooks from the classroom sets during the instructional day.

Teachers are also using textbooks from these classroom sets to highlight or to have students highlight important information for students with disabilities and struggling readers.

The Special Education Lead Teacher stated that additional textbooks that are on a lower reading level have been purchased. For example, a student with a disability can have access to the regular education textbook and a textbook that covers the same SOLs but on a lower reading level. The Special Education Lead Teacher explained that when students read the information on their reading levels they are able to experience better achievement.

The Director of Instruction explained how more resources have been provided for technology in the district. As an example of how resources have been used for technology, she cited a Criterion Writing Program. Students are able to write a selection online and then have the computer program check their writing. Students “get immediate feedback. They’re able to do their revisions, their editing, and it identifies areas of weakness – sentence structure, that kind of thing, and moves them forward.”

Resources for additional personnel have also been provided. The Director of Instruction explained that there have been more instructional positions added such as aides and reading teachers who support the struggling student. She stated that due to the need for accountability, data collection, data disaggregation, and the analysis of data, the position of school counseling and testing director has been added.

The Director of Special Services said that the state department has provided what they call special education local education improvement grant funds. As an example, she said that last year the district applied for this grant and received \$25,000.00 under the indicator of professional development. The money from this grant funded courses from Lynchburg College that special

educators and regular educators took as well as professional development resource materials. The Director of Special Services discussed how she used federal special education funds for staff training. She said that the federal funding is not a lot, but it is available for times when a principal might learn of a special conference and would like to send a teacher. The Director of Instruction also noted how the different grants for professional development often support teachers who work with a variety of learning needs that range from gifted education needs to students with disability education needs.

An important practice theme that emerged from the category of resources was that the district administrator allotted resources. At the district level, money was allotted to individual schools for their basic instructional funds for schools to use for all students. Money was also allotted at the district level for textbooks, technology, and additional personnel in the district's schools. In addition, at the district level money that was received from grants for professional development training was allotted.

#### *School Renewal*

An eighth category that emerged from the data from the exo-system level was school renewal. All three district level administrators who were interviewed shared information that pertained to this category. The Special Education Lead Teacher, the Director of Instruction, and the Director of Special Services all spoke about key elements of the district's Six-Year Plan that affected ensuring access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. In addition, the Director of Special Services and the Special Education Lead Teacher shared the importance of helping educators work together in the future. The Director of Special Services, the Director of Instruction, and the Special Education Lead Teacher also emphasized how important it is in the future to have more students with disabilities placed in the regular classroom. The Director of

Special Services elaborated further on having more students with disabilities in the regular education classroom when she discussed cluster grouping. Lastly, the Special Education Lead teacher talked about how important it is going to be for educators to be open to change in the future as they see new needs of students developing.

The Special Education Lead Teacher discussed that the district has a Six-Year Plan and that the plan addresses the needs of all students. The Director of Instruction also shared about the Six-Year Plan and emphasized that the plan “is inclusive to everybody.” She emphasized, “The academic goals and strategies obviously include all students just like the Standards of Learning and NCLB Act.” The Special Education Lead Teacher noted that the eventual goals of the Six-Year Plan are to make sure that all schools in the district are achieving at a rate to be fully accredited and “that would include special education in that frame.”

The Special Education Lead Teacher pointed out that the components of the plan support diverse student needs. As examples, she listed the following: diagnosing individual and group needs, matching abilities and needs of all students, using assessment strategies to improve student learning, documenting student learning gains, making subject matter meaningful for all students, understanding how students differ in their approach to learning, and differentiating to meet diverse student needs. The Director of Instruction said that 6 of the 11 commitments in the plan address diversity, the struggling student, and making sure that all students are guaranteed the same benefits to a good education program. The Director of Instruction specifically cited objectives from the plan that relate to diversity, remediation, curriculum leaders, counseling programs, alternative education, and providing appropriate education to children with disabilities. The Director of Special Services said, “The Six-Year Plan really speaks to providing a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities in their least restrictive

environment to the maximum extent possible.” The Director of Instruction also stated how the district’s Six-Year Plan is supposed to tie into the schools’ improvement plans. The Director of Instruction said that the Six-Year Plan is the “cornerstone for those individual school plans” and that those plans must “include instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of students.”

In preparing for the future, the Director of Special Services said, “I think the success of our kids accessing that curriculum will hinge a lot on how successful our teachers are working together.” She said it is important for special education teachers not to be intimidated about being in the regular education classroom and that she is hoping “for a lot less separateness between special educators and regular educators.” She said she would “like to see a lot more teamwork.” The Special Education Lead Teacher discussed how in the past special educators and regular educators have worked separately and need to work together in the future. She stated that general education functions must include special education teachers and vice versa. She also said that the two groups are beginning to work together and that she now gets questions from both special education teachers and regular education teachers.

The Director of Special Services explained, “We have to figure out ways to help students with disabilities achieve.” She elaborated further by stressing she did not know how students with disabilities can achieve without being in the content area classes to hear what’s being said. She said that the Director of Instruction noted that in the future she would like to see instruction occurring at the students’ appropriate ability levels in every classroom. She emphasized that regardless of what is done in gifted and special education separate programs, “children are in those regular classrooms the majority of their time.” She said, “The vision for the future is that 100% of our students will be successful and will be able to meet the benchmarks that have been set on the federal and state levels.” The Special Education Lead Teacher stressed that she sees

the district's overall planning going in the direction of placing more students with disabilities in the regular curriculum with their peers. She foresees improved test scores when the student is in the regular education classroom and there is collaboration between the special education staff and the regular education staff.

The Director of Special Services explained that there is a need "to build the bridges that teachers need to help students with disabilities get across." In the future, she would like to see more clustering of students with disabilities in the regular classrooms, more instructional aides, lower teacher caseloads, increased expectations for student achievement, and joint planning between special educators and regular educators. The Special Education Lead Teacher stressed that in the future it is important that the district be open to change as the needs of students' change.

A theme that emerged from the category of school renewal was that the district administrator initiated school renewal concepts. School renewal concepts were initiated through the development of the district's Six-Year Plan and having a future vision for more collaborative efforts, more placements of students with disabilities in the regular classroom with clustering, and being open to change as the needs of students change.

#### *How Practices of District Level Administrators Have Been Affected*

According to the data collected at the exo-system level, district administrative practices have been affected by the state policy context in the areas of accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, monitoring teachers, placement, professional development, resources, and school renewal. As revealed by the examination of the macro-system and the exo-system, the eight identified exo-system level theme topics fall within the state's policy context, identified as enabling students with disabilities to access the general

curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. The expectations of the state policy context are identified and initiated at the district office level. It can therefore be seen that both the macro-system and the exo-system levels communicate expectations of how students with disabilities will be supported by the meso-system and the micro-system levels of the high school environment so they can access the general curriculum.

The next segment describes the findings related to the meso-system, as seen from the perspective of the high school administrators. A detailed description of the data collected at this level as well as the themes and specific practices is provided.

#### The Meso-System and Building Administrative Level Practices

The meso-system nests between the exo-system and the micro-system, producing intricate inter-relationships within the high school environment. The initiatives from the exo-system level that flow through the meso-system to the micro-system can dissolve unless the proper tension of organizational support practices that relate to the classroom are used at the building administrative level. The high school building administration represents the next level of Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model of the educational system.

It was determined that the expectations of the state policy context were identified and initiated at the building administrative level. It was also found that the patterns of practice initiated at the macro-system level penetrated to the exo-system level and then to the meso-system level. The meso-system level then initiated patterns of practice that would penetrate to the inner core of the educational environment, the micro-system level.

Seventeen practice themes illustrated how the macro-system level policy context of enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and

implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures was supported and initiated at the meso-system level. From the data collected at the meso-system, the following themes emerged: (a) the school administrator identified ways to provide accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms; (b) the school administrator identified the negative effect of stress on teachers who have several students with several accommodations; (c) the school administrator initiated collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers; (d) the school administrator initiated collaboration with the middle school administrator to help students with disabilities have a better transition to the high school; (e) the school administrator initiated parent contact to address student progress; (f) the school administrator initiated administrative review to address student progress; (g) the school administrator identified that the lack of time limited the tracking of student progress; (h) the school administrator identified the need for the student eligibility observation form to be updated to provide the gathering of more information that could better relate to a variety of disabilities; (i) the school administrator monitored teachers; (j) the school administrator designed a special education program that did not utilize an inclusion model and that did not involve cluster grouping of students with disabilities in the regular education classes; (k) the school administrator designed a special education inclusion program that involved cluster grouping; (l) the school administrator initiated professional development activities; (m) the school administrator placed special education resource rooms in areas that helped students better access the general curriculum; (n) the school administrator ensured that the facility does not handicap a student; (o) the school administrator identified that the school focuses are often lost in the excessive paperwork; (p) the school administrator identified that one

of the school's focuses should be providing a different way of teaching before an IEP is sought; and (q) the school administrator based the focus of the school on data, standards, and laws.

State regulations were addressed in all of the 17 building level administrative themes. State professional development training was addressed as the building level administrator initiated professional development activities. State accountability measures were addressed as the building level administrator initiated parent contact to address student progress, initiated administrative review to address student progress, identified the lack of time limiting the tracking of student progress, identified the need for the student eligibility form to be updated to provide more information, designed a program that did not utilize an inclusion model and clustering, designed a program that did utilize inclusion and clustering, and based the focus of the school on data, standards, and laws.

Of the eight exo-system level themes, six of the themes were evident at the meso-system level. The theme topics that remained constant through the exo-system level to the meso-system level were accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, placement, monitoring teachers, and professional development training.

Several of the themes crossing the exo-system and moving into the meso-system, however, were expanded at the meso-system level. At the meso-system level, the state and local emphasis on professional development training associated with collaboration was expanded to include collaboration not only between the special education department and the regular education department, but also between the high school administrator and the middle school administrator for ninth grade transition purposes. As another example, concerns of increased paperwork were identified. These concerns that were related to the state and local regulations and accountability measures produced varied themes.

There were also examples of themes that fell within the state policy context, but varied between the two high schools in implementation due to interpretation. The theme topic of placement fell within the state regulation strategy, but Carson High School implemented an inclusion program with cluster grouping while Bethany High School did not. The following section describes the categories supporting each theme, the identified themes, and the specific practices related to each theme.

### *Accommodations and Modifications*

Based on the data from the interviews at the meso-system level, one category that emerged was accommodations and modifications. Both school administrators shared information that fell into this category. The principal of Carson High School listed several accommodations and modifications that were being used to help students with disabilities to be successful in inclusion classes. The assistant principal of Bethany High School discussed how the many accommodations and modifications that teachers are required to use create a negative effect on teachers.

The principal of Carson High School shared how books on tape were being used at home to help students with disabilities keep up with the content in the inclusion classes. The principal also shared how administering tests orally to students, providing a reduced number of items on a test, and using alternative assignments can help students with disabilities to be more successful in inclusion classes. Lastly, the principal of Carson High School explained how communication logs with school and home, as well as emailing parents, were also helping students to be more successful in inclusion classes.

The assistant principal of Bethany High School stated, “I think teachers really feel like they are burdened with accommodations.” He explained that teachers have to keep up with

numerous accommodations and modifications for many students, and as a result the teachers are feeling stressed. He said that when a teacher has 10 different students with 10 different accommodations and has to be thinking through things like, “I’ve got to read to this one, this one has to sit in the front of the room, and this one has to be given notes,” then the teacher becomes burdened. He further explained how teachers continually have the added pressure of asking themselves, “Did I read this test to him? Did I give him extra time to take notes? Did I give him notes? Did I review the notes?” The assistant principal believes that all the many accommodations create a negative effect on teachers, producing stress.

In contrasting the conversations on the topic of accommodations and modifications with the school administrators, the administrators approached the topic in two distinct ways. One administrator discussed ways accommodations and modifications were being provided. The other administrator mentioned certain accommodations and modifications but emphasized the effect of stress on the teachers created by the many accommodations and modifications required. Thus, an important practice theme that emerged from the category of accommodations and modifications at the school administrative level was that the school administrator identified ways to provide accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. Another important practice theme that emerged from the category of accommodations and modifications at the school administrative level was that the school administrator identified the negative effect of stress on teachers who have several students with several accommodations.

### *Collaboration*

Another category that emerged from the data collected during the interview with the administrator from Carson High School was that of collaboration. The principal of Carson High

School, which has an inclusion program, discussed collaborative efforts between teachers as well as collaborative efforts between the middle school and building level administrators. The assistant principal at Bethany High School, which has no inclusion program, made no mention of collaboration at any time during the interview.

The principal of Carson High School shared that collaboration was an important part of the inclusion program at his school. He said special education and regular education teachers “collude on what they will do to handle the special education students’ needs in that class to meet the IEP.” He also discussed how collaboration is taking place at the school administrative level between school administrators. As an example, he cited the collaborative effort between the middle school administrator and the building level administrator regarding the transition of students with disabilities from the middle school to the high school. One area of collaboration between the administrators was to identify and act upon the need to self-contain fewer students with disabilities and to expose them more to the regular classroom at the middle school level. The principal of Carson High School concluded, “We try to make it work out so that when the kids come here, it is not a sudden cultural shock.”

As a result, two important practice themes emerged from the category of collaboration. The first was that the school administrator initiated collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers. The second was that the school administrator initiated collaboration with the middle school administrator to help student with disabilities have a better transition to the high school. It was interesting to note that the school administrator with an inclusion program discussed collaboration as an important practice and that the school administrator without an inclusion program did not discuss collaboration.

### *Monitoring Student Learning*

Another category that emerged from the data collected at the meso-system level was monitoring student learning. Both administrators who were interviewed discussed information related to monitoring student learning. The administrator from Carson High School shared how the school communicates student progress information to parents and what accountability measures are in place to ensure effective communication. The administrator from Bethany High School explained how hard it is to track student progress due to the large volume of paperwork. He also expressed the need to see changes in certain forms that related to the monitoring of student learning.

The administrator from Carson High School emphasized the importance of monitoring student learning and sharing those results with parents. He described that all teachers at his school are required to contact parents of students who are failing. He said that the district has a policy in place that requires parents of students with disabilities who are failing to be contacted and for an IEP meeting to be held on the behalf of those students. To monitor the implementation of this policy, teachers at Carson High School are required to keep Parent Contact Logs and administrators review the logs periodically. Parents of many students with disabilities request weekly updates on the academic progress of their children. The school initiates the sharing of email addresses so individual student progress reports from the teachers' InteGrade computer grade books can be emailed directly to the parents on a weekly basis. The administrator from Carson High School also explained how important it is for the administrators in his school to monitor the students' progress. To facilitate the monitoring of student learning at the school administrative level, the assistant principals are assigned to students by grade level. The assistant principals are expected to observe students in their assigned grade levels who are being evaluated

for continued eligibility of special education services. The assistant principals are also expected to attend the IEP meeting of those students with disabilities in their assigned grade levels. Should one of the students with disabilities commit an infraction of a school rule, then the assistant principal for that student's grade level would also be in charge of disciplining that student and being involved in the necessary Functional Behavioral Process and Manifest Determination Hearing. The principal of Carson High School related,

Each of our administrators is acutely aware of who our special students are because I require that each one of my administrators in practice be present for and work with IEPs at the grade level for which they are assigned for discipline.

The administrator from Bethany High School pointed out that at his school they have not been able to do the monitoring and tracking of students with disabilities because there has just not been enough time. He discussed in length, however, about the need to adjust a form used by administrators during student eligibility or re-evaluation observations. He cited that the form that directs what the administrators are to look for during the student observation should be a tool that allows the administrator to gather more information that could relate to a variety of disabilities. He explained further that just looking for items such as noticeable hearing problems a few other problems leaves out possible information related to the disability of being emotionally disturbed. He wants to be able to state on the form how the student reacts when corrected and whether the student stays on task.

From the category of monitoring student learning, 4 practice themes developed. Based on the data from the administrator in Carson High School, it was obvious that the school administrator initiated parent contact to address student progress and that the school administrator initiated administrative review of student progress. Based on the data from the

administrator in Bethany High School, it was apparent that the school administrator identified that the large amount of paperwork limited tracking of student progress. Based on the data from the administrator in Bethany High School, it was clear that the school administrator identified the need for the Student Eligibility Observation Form to be updated to provide the gathering of more information that could better relate to a variety of disabilities. In comparing the information from the two schools, it was also interesting to see that the sharing of student progress with parents was more prevalent in the school that implemented an inclusion program.

### *Placement*

An additional category that came from the data related to the meso-system level was placement. Both administrators shared information related to this category but had distinct opinions about the topic. The administrator from Bethany High School described the special education program at his school as not incorporating inclusion and cluster grouping. He also gave what he believed to be a distinct disadvantage to the practice of cluster grouping. The administrator from Carson High School described the special education program at his school as incorporating inclusion and cluster grouping. He explained there were certain other components to an inclusion program that had to be in place to make the program successful. He also shared that there were certain benefits to the inclusion program.

Students with disabilities in Bethany High School are either self-contained or are in the regular classroom through a consultative program. Even though an inclusion program has not been implemented, it is still the goal to place as many students as possible in the regular classrooms. Students in the regular classroom through a consultative program are not grouped in any particular way. The administrator from Bethany High School explained, "Grouping of our kids is not a concrete type of schedule." He said, "We have a special education department in

this building and we have a special education department in that building.” For those students in the regular classroom, he does not believe in clustering, or putting several students with disabilities together in the regular education classes. He explained, “We try to limit the amount of grouping” but “give them as many mainstream activities as we can.” The administrator from Bethany High School said that the reason he likes for the students in regular education classes who are receiving consultative services not to be grouped in a certain way is due to the “self-esteem issue.” He described that grouping students in regular education classes brings attention to them and singles them out.

Students with disabilities in Carson High School are offered an inclusion program. According to the administrator, the types of disabilities students in inclusion classes “range across the continuum. LD, ED, behavior disorder, OHI – you name it, we have it.” The administrator from Carson High School said, “To the maximum extent possible we’re trying to make sure that all of our special education students are in the regular classroom and getting regular instruction from a regular teacher, usually with the assistance of a special education teacher.” He stated in relation to cluster grouping, “We try to place no more than 8 to 10 special students with another 10 to 12 or even 14 regular education students in the classroom.”

To implement the inclusion program, certain preparations had to be made. Most importantly, the teachers given the final assignments to teach inclusion classes had to volunteer. The administrator recalled,

One thing we did was ask for teacher volunteers for this part of our process. If teachers have some say and input, and feel like they have some control over what’s happening in their lives, then they usually cooperate better and their students’ achievement is better.

The transition had to be gradual so teachers could be trained and the middle school could help prepare their students for the program. The master schedule had to be designed carefully to allow enough special education personnel to be in the inclusion classes while still providing special education personnel for the Fundamental Skills and Essential Skills elective classes needed to support the students in the regular classrooms. In designing the master schedule, the administrator also had to take into consideration when special education teachers would be available for a particular class as well as at what times inclusion classes would fit into students' schedules. Caseloads also had to be reviewed as more special education teachers were assigned to inclusion students as well as students in special education elective classes. The review was needed to ensure that each teacher's caseload was not too high.

The administrator from Carson High School felt there were several benefits to the inclusion program. He said that when students are placed in self-contained classes, they are taught "learned helplessness." He explained,

The thing with moving towards inclusion and more access to the general classroom is that it forces them to be just like their peers and to work harder on developing the skills that they need to be successful in life, not just in school."

He also mentioned that students with disabilities "being present in the current inclusion model that we're using will also help us ensure that 95% of those students make progress, which is one of the measures and indicators of a school's progress with NCLB Act." He said that because his students with disabilities have access to SOL EOC instruction, "we've tested every special education student who is labeled for any special education exceptionality, with the exception of the kids who are only eligible for the alternative assessment." One final and most important benefit from the inclusion program at his school is the gratitude expressed by the parents. He

cited an example of a parent who baked treats for her child's teachers, principal, and school counselor as an expression of gratitude for her child's progress.

In comparing the data from the two schools from the category of placement, two different themes emerged. The first theme was that the school administrator designed a special education program that did not utilize an inclusion model and that did not involve cluster grouping of students with disabilities in the regular education classes. The second theme was that the school administrator designed a special education inclusion program that involved cluster grouping. The difference in practice themes seemed to be based on a difference in philosophy between the leadership in the two schools. The administrator in Bethany High School felt that putting groups of students with disabilities in regular education classes singled them out and had the potential to cause self-esteem problems. The administrator in Carson High School felt that putting groups of students with disabilities in regular education classes helped the students to become more independent and counteracted the "learned helplessness" behavior that he believed could be facilitated by having students with disabilities in self-contained classes.

#### *Monitoring Teachers*

Another category that emerged from the data obtained from the meso-system level was monitoring teachers. Both administrators shared information relevant to this category. The two school administrators discussed how they monitored teachers through the observation process and through the review of lesson plans. In addition, both administrators made mention of the fact that they have observed a negative effect of the large amount of paperwork teachers must now complete as they monitor teachers.

The administrator from Carson High School described how he monitors teachers through teacher observations. As a part of the teacher observations, he said he looks at the level of

questions teachers are asking, if the teachers are checking for student understanding, and how teachers are assessing what they are teaching. He also stated that the teacher evaluation tool has a place to mark differentiation and that he looks to see if teachers are differentiating their instruction. The administrator from Carson High School also noted that he gives teachers a lesson plan format with minimum components, and then monitors teacher lesson plans by collecting the plans periodically. In addition, the administrator from Carson High School also mentioned that the need to monitor teachers has increased. He clarified that teachers are being overburdened and as a result, sometimes things fall through the cracks. He said, "I hate to say that, in today's times, but teachers are overburdened with many, many things, and sometimes things fall through the cracks. So part of our responsibility is to monitor and ensure that those things don't happen."

The administrator in Bethany High School explained that teachers are monitored through classroom observations. During the observations, he looks to see that the IEP and the modifications for students with disabilities are being implemented, how the students are questioned, and if the students with disabilities are being singled out. He also monitors teachers by reviewing the teachers' lesson plans and ensuring that the plans are at the appropriate developmental level for the students. To help him know the needs of the students with disabilities in the classrooms where he is assigned to do teacher observations, he makes sure that he attends those students' IEP meetings. The administrator from Bethany High School also said that as he monitors teachers, he is noticing that they are doing a great deal of paperwork because they are afraid of future lawsuits. He says that that the paperwork is being done to cover the teacher and not to track the students. An unfortunate effect of the increased burden of paperwork, according to the administrator from Bethany High School, is that the school is losing teachers.

From the category of monitoring teachers the practice theme that the school administrator monitored teachers emerged. Both administrators stressed how the teacher observation process and the reviewing of lesson plans help to ensure teachers are completing their necessary tasks. The administrator from Bethany High School added that attending students' IEP meetings helps him to know what to look for during the teacher observations. Both school administrators said they have noticed that teachers have an increased workload and gave an example of a negative effect from the additional work.

### *Professional Development*

A category that also came from the data from the meso-system level was professional development. Both administrators discussed professional development activities. The administrator from Bethany High School stated that much of the professional development training had been in one particular area. The administrator from Carson High School said that the professional development training had been in two areas and he stated what his plans for future professional development training where.

At Bethany High School, most of the professional development had been in IEP development. The administrator at that school had seen IEP development to be the greatest need. He explained that in some cases the administration has had to go back to the basics to ensure that all the teachers have read the IEP and know the specific student's modifications. "That is your Achilles heel: when you have those teachers who will not take the time to go in and sit down and read that IEP," he elaborated. To reinforce the past IEP professional development training, the administrator at Bethany High School shared how in daily conversations with teachers he included questions to check for their continued understanding for IEP development.

At Carson High School, the administrator recalled two important professional development activities in which his faculty recently participated. One professional development activity was on the Reauthorization of IDEA. He said, “All our teachers had to become aware of and learn the potential impact of that for the future.” The other professional development activity that recently involved his faculty was on the topic of NCLB Act. The administrator from Carson High School said, “When this first became a recommendation that it become a Bill in the House of Representatives and then in the Senate, one of the things that I had done here was start looking at the potential impact.” The administrator from Carson High School explained, “The general teacher in the classroom does not yet begin to understand the vast impact that’s going to have on them.” The administrator from Carson High School is already preparing professional development training for the future. He has requested funding by the district office for professional development training for the next school year in the areas of differentiation, learning styles, and NCLB Act.

A theme that came forth from the category of professional development at the meso-system level was that the school administrator initiated professional development activities. The administrator at Bethany High School identified the need of IEP development and continues to reinforce concepts in the IEP development training through daily conversations with teachers. The administrator at Carson High School initiated professional development training in the past and will do so in the future based on the new federal laws and the need to help his staff meet the mandates in the new laws.

### *Facilities*

Another category that emerged from the data at the meso-system level was facilities. Both administrators discussed the topic of facilities and the impact they have on special

education programs. The administrator from Bethany High School tied in the need of special education classroom placements to student self-esteem. The administrator from Carson High School tied in the need of special education classroom placements to the inclusion model implemented in the school.

The administrator from Bethany High School explained the importance of not having “any particular building” or area “where the special education kids are located.” He explained that students who are consultative and need not to spend more than an elective period or 5 to 15 minutes a week with their case managers should not have the stigma of having to go to the special education building or hallway to see their case managers. He also emphasized that it is important for the students with disabilities who are in self-contained classes or who are consultative and have a special education elective class, to have the opportunity to travel with the regular education students. He described the arrangement at his school, where “it looks like they’re really just changing classes with everybody else.” He stressed, “Self-esteem plays a big part when you come to grouping and location.” He also discusses how important it is to ensure that the school facility does not handicap the student. He explained that administrators must be alert to the students’ disabilities and that their school buildings are accessible to them.

During the Bethany High School tour, I found the resource classes to be arranged as the administrator described – a resource room in each hallway and not all on one hallway or in one building. The students traveling throughout the hallways seemed comfortable with one another and it was hard to determine exactly who was going to the special education resource room in a particular hallway until seconds before the ringing of the bell. During the class period, a very few students traveled from different regular education classes to a resource room apparently to have a

test read to them. The walk down the hall was short and the students appeared at ease with the movement.

The administrator from Carson High School stated,

Number one, all of our special education classrooms are assigned throughout all academic areas in the building. I do not have them relegated to a particular spot in the basement or some place in a hallway where they are segregated from student population or student flow throughout the building.

In addition, he explained that the locations of the special education resource rooms are in place to support the inclusion model. He stated, “They’re also placed in close-by community classrooms, where they are working with regular education teachers in what we call our inclusion model.”

During the tour of Carson High School, I found the resource rooms to be located throughout the building and near the inclusion classrooms. At the beginning of the periods, there were not many students in the rooms. It was my understanding, however, from talking to staff members that students in the inclusion classrooms would sometimes visit the rooms in small groups with their inclusion teachers to have tests read, etc.

A practice theme that emerged from the category of facilities was that the school administrator placed special education resource rooms in areas that helped students’ better access the general curriculum. The resource rooms in Bethany High School were placed throughout the regular education hallways to help students be closer to their peers, to facilitate a better self-esteem, and to be closer to regular education classes. The resource rooms in Carson High School were placed near inclusion classrooms to support the inclusion special education program.

Another practice theme from the category of facilities was that the school administrator ensured that the facility does not handicap a student. The school administrator must know the disabilities of the students and must ensure that the facility does not hinder the students from being able to travel from place to place.

### *School Focus*

A final category that emerged from the data at the meso-system level was school focus. Both administrators discussed information that fell into the category of school focus. The administrator from Bethany High School shared how the focus is often lost due to excessive paperwork. He also discussed the need for the school to try to teach students differently before they are recommended for special education testing. The administrator from Carson High School shared that school decisions need to be based on data, standards, and laws.

According to the administrator from Bethany High School, “the actual instruction of our special education teachers is being caught up in paperwork.” He claimed, “They are being given so much paperwork that the actual intervention with the child is depleted.” In addition, he shared that much of the administrative counseling of students regarding discipline is also caught up in paperwork. The administrator from Bethany High School would like the district to find ways to lessen the paperwork for teachers and administrators. As an example, he explained how the county discipline referral form could easily be made to be more compatible with the Functional Behavioral Assessment forms and the Manifestation Determination Hearing forms. The administrator from Bethany High School also emphasized that too many students are being identified for special services. He explained, “Just because a kid is not successful in your classroom doesn’t mean he needs an IEP. Maybe he needs another way of teaching.” He said that teachers should not have to have a thick folder to tell them to place a student in the front of the

room or to write the student's notes down for him because he is not a good note-taker. He is concerned that "teachers are using IEPs as a crutch not to look at an individual" and that sometimes students just need "another way of teaching" before being recommended for special education assessment.

According to the administrator from Carson High School, school decisions need to be based on data, standards, and laws. He said that the school must focus on "the data that is available." Specifically, his school has been using the SOL testing data to analyze individual and strand scores to look at individuals and groups. The analysis results are then used to help determine how students should be grouped in clusters in the regular education setting. The administrator from Carson High School also said that when making decisions, the school must focus on "Standards of Accreditation, the federal law, and the state law – all those things mandated to be part of what we do with the kids assigned to our building." The mandates then bear on the decisions made regarding master scheduling, caseload management, placement, the kind of cooperation expected from parents, and the kind of work ethic that is instilled in students when the students understand that effort and results are directly related. The decisions made related to the mandates then relate to "inclusion, differentiation, and all that needs to be done in the regular classroom setting." Lastly, he stressed how important it is for educators "to become acutely aware of how students with disabilities access the general curriculum." He stressed that accessing the general curriculum will impact how the students with disabilities will score, and how they will learn enough to even graduate." He also added, "The students with disabilities' performance on the SOL tests could keep a school from getting federal money. As a result, the focus of the school must be on data, standards, and laws."

Three themes emerged from the category of school focus. The first theme was the school administrator identified that the school focuses are often lost in the excessive paperwork. The second theme was the school administrator identified that one of the school's focuses should be providing a different way of teaching before an IEP is sought. The third theme was the school administrator based the focus of the school on data, standards, and laws. In comparing the themes from the two schools, it was interesting to note how each administrator viewed his school's focuses. One saw obstacles such as paperwork generated from the laws getting in the way of the school's focuses and the other saw the laws being the school focus.

*How Practices of Building Level Administrators Have Been Affected*

According to the data collected at the meso-system level, building level administrative practices have been affected by the state policy context in the areas of accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, monitoring teachers, placement, professional development, facilities, and school focus. The direction and ideology introduced by the macro-system or state department level and the exo-system or district office level was reflected in the collection of data from the meso-system level of the high school environment. All meso-system level themes were consistent with the policy context and fell within the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. It was also determined that the expectations of how students with disabilities will be supported to access the general curriculum is further communicated by the meso-system level to the micro-system level.

There were 17 building level administrative practice themes related to the state policy context supported by the exo-system. All 17 building level administrative practice themes related to state regulations that were identified as having been implemented to enable students with

disabilities to access the general curriculum. There was 1 building level administrative practice theme related to state and professional development training that were identified as having been implemented to enable students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. There were 7 building level administrative practice themes related to state accountability measures that were identified as having been implemented to enable students with disabilities to access the general curriculum.

The next segment describes the findings related to the meso-system, as seen from the perspective of the high school administrators. A detailed description of the data collected at this level, along with the themes and specific practices, is provided.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE FINDINGS: PART II

#### The Micro-System: Instructional and Assessment Practices in High Schools

The inner level of the educational environment in the Bronfenbrenner (1979) model is the micro-system, which encompasses the developing person or student. At the micro-system level, the researcher is able to determine if a public policy has determined the condition of people's lives thus affecting their wellbeing and development. It was determined that the state policy context has affected instructional and assessment practices used by general and special educators. It was found that the patterns of practice initiated at the macro-system level penetrated to the exo-system level, through the meso-system level, and finally to the micro-system level. The ways in which the patterns of practice penetrated the micro-system level were mostly similar; however, in the theme area of collaboration the patterns of practice were unique. Both schools experienced similar professional development training activities as prescribed at the exo-system level, but only 2 teachers at 1 school made mention of professional development activities.

Ten practice themes obtained from the data collected at the micro-system level illustrated ways in which general and special educators use instructional and assessment practices to support the state policy context of enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. From the data collected at the micro-system, the following themes emerged: (a) the classroom teacher provided accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities; (b) the regular education teacher and the special education teacher initiated collaboration activities; (c) the regular education teacher and the special education teacher initiated limited collaboration activities; (d) the classroom teacher used various tools to monitor student learning; (e) the

classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities to be taught in the regular classroom with a limited class size and the opportunity for a fundamental skills elective course; (f) the classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities to be taught in the regular classroom while realizing that the regular classroom is not always the best placement; (g) the regular education teacher participated in differentiation course work; (h) the classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities; (i) the content taught to students was driven by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests; and (j) the instructional methods used supported students mastering the objectives being taught.

State regulations were addressed in all of the 10 classroom level themes. State professional development training was addressed as the regular education teacher participated in differentiation course work. State accountability measures were addressed as the classroom teacher (a) used various tools to monitor student learning; (b) identified a preference for students with disabilities to be taught in the regular classroom with a limited class size and the opportunity for a fundamental skills elective course; (c) identified a preference for students with disabilities in the regular classroom while also realizing that the regular classroom is not always the best placement; (d) provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities; (e) taught content that was driven by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests; and (f) used methods supporting students mastering the objectives taught.

Of the 6 theme topics that were evident at the exo-system level and the meso-system level, 5 of the themes were evident at the micro-system level. The theme topics that remained constant through the exo-system level, to the meso-system level, and to the micro-system level were: (a) accommodations and modifications; (b) collaboration; (c) monitoring student learning; (d) placement; and (e) professional development training.

The following section describes by school the categories supporting each theme, the identified themes, and the specific practices related to each theme.

### *Accommodations and Modifications in Bethany High School*

Based on the data from the interviews and observations at the micro-system level at Bethany High School, one category that emerged was accommodations and modifications. All five teachers from Bethany High School shared information about practices that fell into this category. All teachers observed also demonstrated practices that fell into this category. The following practices related to the category of accommodation and modifications were evident: (a) using mnemonics; (b) using peer tutoring; (c) using student interns; (d) using graphic organizers;(e) providing class notes; (f) providing supplemental reading materials; (g) providing preferential seating; (h) working individually; (i) using ability level questioning; (j) using visual aids; and (k) providing extra time for testing, having tests read, and testing in the fundamental skills elective class.

#### *Using Mnemonics*

The math teacher at Bethany High School shared and demonstrated how she teaches her students to use a cloud symbol as they take notes and to write reminders in the symbol to help the students remember certain math steps. She also said that as she presents information, she prompts the students to draw a cloud in their notes by saying, “It is time to write down a cloud here, because this could be a problem on the test.” The math teacher explained that usage of this mnemonic device is further developed as she works with students with disabilities. During individualized instruction, she refers to the cloud symbols in the students’ notes and states that a certain test problem is going to be like a particular cloud problem (e.g. “Now, this is going to be like number 14.”). The math teacher explained that she also draws clouds on the students with

disabilities' test copies to create a trigger that will initiate their remembering of a particular concept.

The social studies teacher and science teacher at Bethany High School related and demonstrated how they use mnemonic devices to help their students with disabilities to remember definitions as a part of their whole group and individual instruction. The social studies teacher related and demonstrated in the classroom observations how he helps students to remember meanings of words. Students are prompted to think of certain terms in specific ways. For example, after a word is defined he tells the students to think of that word in a particular way (e.g. "Think of the word totalitarian as total control."). The science teacher also explained in the interview and modeled in the classroom observations how she helps students remember terms. In teaching new terms, she breaks the words down and provides the meaning for each part of the word (e.g. "Poda refers to feet and arthro refers to jointed. Phyto means plant."). "How do you remember how we remember it?" she asks the students in a review session. "Hypo grows like a hypo." "For prokaryotic and eukaryotic, what was the trick I gave you for remembering?" she further questions the students in the review. "Pro means no and eu means true."

The English teacher at Bethany High School also explained and demonstrated how she helps students to remember concepts and terms. As a review of a literary selection, she has students orally complete an activity known as Analysis A to Z. The process begins with one student being called upon to share a word that begins with the letter A that relates to the literary selection just studied. The student says the word and explains it. The teacher then clarifies the term or concept and checks for student understanding through further questioning. The process continues as words are shared that begin with the rest of the letters in the alphabet. The process is a fun way to help students remember information as they are studying for a test.

### *Using Peer Tutoring*

All teachers interviewed from Bethany High School related how they use peer tutoring in their classrooms for students with disabilities. The English teacher shared, “I’ll try to pair them with somebody, or if I know somebody who may be able to explain it to them in a much clearer way than I feel like I’ve done, on their level, then I’ll do that.” From the beginning of the school year, the math teacher ensures that all her students with disabilities are paired with other students. The students are then allowed to sit next to each other and are permitted to talk to each other at appropriate times. During the classroom presentation and guided practice in the math classroom observations, students with disabilities were observed working with their partners. The social studies teacher shared how he pairs his students together. During the social studies observations, the concept was also demonstrated. The social studies teacher held a conference with students at his desk before a unit test. During that conference, he checked for student understanding and allowed students to ask him questions. Students are allowed to come to the teacher conference with their assigned partner with whom they have been working.

The science teacher pairs students with disabilities not only for tutoring benefits, but also for social benefits. The science teacher explained that one of her students has hyperlexia, which is a compulsion to read nearly all the time. Even though the student is extremely intelligent, the disability has created a lack of social skills on the student’s part. As a result, the teacher pairs this student with another student who has a high ability level. The student with the disability is learning to take her cues from the other student and is beginning to fit in much better.

### *Using Student Interns*

Senior students at Bethany High School are encouraged to work as interns for teachers if they have room in their program of studies. The social studies teacher and the science teacher use

their student interns to provide additional assistance to students with disabilities. During the social studies classroom observation, the student intern was seen working with students with disabilities as the teacher presented a lecture. During a guided practice activity, the social studies teacher and the student intern walked throughout the room individually checking for student understanding and providing clarification as needed. After the guided practice exercise had been spot checked by the teacher and the intern, the intern quietly reported to the teacher the progress and needs he saw with students.

The special education teacher at Bethany High School also reported how she uses student interns assigned to other teachers to tutor students in her elective fundamental skills class. For example, interns who are assigned to a math teacher are often sent into her classroom that is made up of not more than eight students to tutor. The student interns are especially helpful to the special education teacher since she majored in special education and not math.

### *Using Graphic Organizers*

All the teachers observed demonstrated their use of basic graphic organizers. Information related to the lesson is posted in a clear and organized manner. The lesson objectives, lesson activities, and homework assignments are posted on the board. Before the tardy bell, many students are seen already reviewing the postings and starting to get out their necessary materials. As the teachers begin class, they review the postings on the board. Students with disabilities especially find the postings helpful since many of them have organizational goals in their IEPs and the postings help those students organize their materials.

Students in Bethany High School are all provided Student Agendas. The Student Agenda is made up of the Student Handbook, core subject area charts, and a calendar. Part of the calendar includes at least 10 lines to pencil in daily class assignments. Students are taught to

organize their schedules and assignments using the calendar. The postings on the board also help students with disabilities to write down their assignments in their Student Agendas.

The math teacher in Bethany High School shared how she teaches the students to use the graphic organizer of taking notes in 2 columns. She told of how she teaches the students to divide their papers into 2 columns. Students are then taught to place lecture details in the right column. In the left column, students are encouraged to list their questions, examples, ideas, and illustrations of the steps to solve a particular problem. The math teacher also described how she ties in the 2-column note taking with her testing by preparing tests in a 2-column format. Students are encouraged to show their thoughts, work, and notes in the left column and their answers in the right column. The math teacher then grades both columns. The strategy helps students organize their thoughts as they work through math problems. The science teacher teaches her students to write notes in the margins of their class work and tests. She emphasizes to her students the importance of writing in the margins when they take the SOL test to help them organize their thoughts. For students with disabilities who have organizational goals, the process helps them better achieve those goals.

The special education teacher from Bethany High School explained that she sees graphic organizers being used with students with disabilities in many math and English classes. The purpose of using graphic organizers is to help students organize and process the information they are learning. In math classes, she sees charts of how to complete problems in a step-by-step manner. These charts help the students organize and process the steps they need to learn. In English classes, she sees comparison diagrams that help students understand concepts such as characterization. Students are then able to write their essays from the information they see on the diagrams. Graphic organizers help the students with disabilities to understand the concepts and

skills they need to learn. The special education teacher also explained how she creates charts that her students can memorize and write out before a test to help them organize what they have learned.

### *Providing Class Notes*

The special education teacher from Bethany High School explained that in the past many students' IEPs have required that copies of lecture notes be provided to students. She said that the problem with that modification was that students would not attempt to take notes because the students knew lecture notes were automatically going to be provided. Currently, IEP modifications are being written in a way to help correct this problem. She elaborated, "We write now, 'If student takes notes, skeleton notes should be provided for them.' Therefore they have to put forth something to receive." The math teacher and the social studies teachers demonstrated this practice during their classroom observations. In those classes, however, students with disabilities are not the only students to receive the class notes. All the students in their classes receive copies of the notes. Providing notes to all students helps not to single out the students with disabilities. The social studies teacher stated,

When I do lecture, I always make sure I have a handout of the lecture notes I can give to them so they will have something to look at and something to fall back on. I also give the students permission to look on the notes of the person next to them, but they must do it quietly.

### *Providing Supplemental Reading Materials*

The special education teacher at Bethany High School explained that she is also a reading teacher and that the textbooks that are currently used in the regular classrooms are extremely hard. To help students with disabilities, additional textbooks have been purchased. The

additional textbooks are aligned with the SOLs, but are on a much lower reading level. The special education teachers, who have students in regular education classes and are in their fundamental skills elective classes, use the new textbooks to help students learn the information. The science department, however, has been able to obtain extra copies of these books so they can be used directly in the regular classroom.

To compensate further for textbooks that are too hard for the students with disabilities to read, the special education teacher described how “Books on Tape” have been obtained. Students with disabilities are able to read along in their textbooks and listen to a recording of what they are reading. These students are also able to take the tapes and a tape recorder home as they complete their homework assignments.

The special education teacher also mentioned that sometimes class notes are written at a reading level that is too high for students with disabilities. To help modify, she reads the notes into a tape recorder and provides her students with a tape recording of the class notes.

The special education teacher also described that in some of the students’ IEPs it is written that they can highlight in their textbooks. Additional textbooks must therefore be purchased specifically for highlighting purposes. Providing this modification helps students with disabilities organize and process their thoughts as they read.

### *Providing Preferential Seating*

In all the classrooms observed, students with disabilities are given preferential seating. In each case, the students with disabilities are seated near the front of the room or near the teachers’ desks. In the science classroom, most students sit at tables, but one student with a disability is allowed to sit at a desk without a partner. During the interview with the science teacher, she made mention of this situation and explained that the student requested that he be permitted to sit

at his own desk to keep his belongs from getting confused with someone else's. The student, however, still has the option of working with a partner or in a group.

### *Working Individually*

In all classrooms observed at Bethany High School, each teacher was seen working individually with students with disabilities. The one-on-one time occurred during guided and independent practice activities. The special education teacher in her interview related how some teachers even give up their planning time to work with students with disabilities. With the pacing guides regular education teachers are required to follow, the students with disabilities are often not able to receive the extra opportunities during class for review and drill that is needed for them to master a skill. The special education teacher shared, "I think that with the pacing guides, it is too fast for almost all of my kids, and I think that if we don't slow it down they're going to fall through the cracks." The special education teacher explained how some regular education teachers give up their planning time to combat this problem and to get in the individual attention that is needed. "I even have teachers that during my fundamental skills time will take my kids and say, 'Just bring them to me and I'll do a small lesson with them,' which I think is wonderful. They're giving up their planning for other students."

### *Using Ability Level Questioning*

Another accommodation and modification that was evident in the classroom observations was the use of ability level questioning. Teachers pose questions at various ability levels. Asking basic concrete or recall questions to students who are struggling academically provides an opportunity for success. Asking analytical or critical level questions to gifted students offers opportunities for those students to be more challenged. Even though ability level questioning was seen in all classes, it was most prevalent in the social studies class. The social studies teacher in

Bethany High School asks ability level questions during his whole group presentation and during his individual student conferences at his desk. Students with disabilities are encouraged when they are able to answer correctly. Their sense of success motivates them to listen and participate even more.

### *Using Visual Aids*

Several of the teachers who were observed demonstrated the use of visual aids to illustrate their lessons. The math teacher uses bright colored magnetic arrows on the chalkboard to emphasize key points being discussed. The special education teacher shows her fundamental skills students pictures and videos related to what the students are studying in their regular education classes. The social studies teacher keeps a picture file and shows the students pictures of places and events discussed in class. All teachers use the chalkboard or overhead projector to illustrate the concepts that are being taught. *Providing Extra Time for Testing, Having Tests*

### *Read, and Testing in Fundamental Skills Elective Class*

Several of the teachers interviewed mentioned the need for students with disabilities to have extra time for completing classroom tests. The English teacher at Bethany High School said, "It may be that the special education student doesn't really need remediation as much as they just need some extra time."

The science teacher at Bethany High School said that having tests read orally to students with disabilities was probably the most common modification. The fundamental skills elective class provides time for the special education teacher to read tests to students with disabilities.

The science teacher said,

With one of my students that I have this year, rather than single him out so that the other students know that he does not take the test the same way we do, I will give him the test

in the classroom along with the other students. He will do what he can, and he will turn it in just like everyone else, and then I send it to his special education teacher and he will work on the remainder with her.

The social studies teacher at Bethany High School also discussed providing extra time for testing through the fundamental skills elective class. He said,

Many of these kids have a period a day so they can take the work that they have not finished, and I will do this quite frequently on tests where a kid will not finish a test and I will give him or her time to finish it in the skills classroom.

In comparing and contrasting the data from the accommodations and modifications category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the classroom teacher provided accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities. The specific practices related to this theme were: (a) using mnemonics; (b) using peer tutoring; (c) using student interns; (d) using graphic organizers; (e) providing class notes; (f) providing supplemental reading materials; (g) providing preferential seating; (h) working individually; (i) using ability level questioning; (j) using visual aids; and (k) providing extra time for testing, having tests read, and testing in fundamental skills elective class.

#### *Collaboration in Bethany High School*

Based on the interviews and observations from the micro-system level, another category that emerged was collaboration. All 5 teachers from Bethany High School shared information about practices that fell into this category. The following practices related to the category of collaboration were evident: (a) communicating about the fundamental skills elective class; (b) sharing lesson plans, class notes, and materials with special education teachers; (c) sharing information regarding student progress with special education teachers; (d) sharing content

knowledge with special education teachers; (e) sharing IEP information with regular education teachers; (f) meeting jointly with parents and students; (g) using the Student Agenda; (h) working as a team; and (i) empathizing with one another.

#### *Communicating About the Fundamental Skills Elective Class*

According to the special education teacher at Bethany High School, there is currently not a co-teaching program between special education teachers and regular education teachers at the high school. In the future, however, she stated she would like to see co-teaching if the school could have the additional positions for the needed personnel. Other teachers, including the science teacher, said they would like to see more special education teachers in the regular classroom. Even without a co-teaching model, the regular education teachers and the special education teacher still do a great deal of collaboration regarding their students. Much of the collaboration revolves around the fundamental skills elective classes. Students with a disability who have a regular education class have the opportunity to enroll in a fundamental skills elective class that is taught by a special education teacher. The purpose of the class is to provide extra review of concepts and skills needed to help students with disabilities to be successful in regular education classes. For students with disabilities to be successful in the fundamental skills elective classes, there must be quality communication between the regular education teachers and the special education teachers. This communication includes the sharing of materials, information about students, and content knowledge.

#### *Sharing Lesson Plans, Class Notes, and Materials with Special Education Teachers*

Several of the teachers described some of those communications. The special education teacher described how she receives copies of what teachers will be doing in class each week as well as the teachers' lecture notes. These materials help her to plan her fundamental skills lesson

plans. The science teacher explained how she gives the special education teacher copies of materials used in her class. The science teacher also mentioned that now her department shares lab materials with the special education teachers so students with disabilities can obtain content and skill reinforcement.

*Sharing Information Regarding Student Progress with Special Education Teachers*

The English teacher relayed that she completes forms for the special education teachers regarding how her students with disabilities are performing each six-weeks. The social studies teacher said he talks to the case manager on a regular basis. He also said that when a student with a disability is not progressing in his World History II class, he makes special assignments to be completed in the student's fundamental skills class. The purpose of the special assignments is to reinforce what is being taught in the regular classroom.

*Sharing Content Knowledge with Special Education Teachers*

The special education teacher also described how regular education teachers help her to become more knowledgeable about topics that need to be reviewed in the fundamental skills elective classes. She explained that during her planning period she often sits in a math teacher's class as an observer to hear lessons so she can better help the students with disabilities with their math assignments. The special education teacher said,

With the fundamental skills math is my weakest subject, and I will have to go say, "Can I sit in on your class so I can teach this to this child this afternoon?" And they are very willing to let me come in. I have been in maybe four or five classes.

The math teacher showed support for this practice when she mentioned that she thought it was best for the special education teacher to hear the lessons so she could better help with the lessons. The special education teacher also mentioned how regular education teachers, during their

planning periods, sometimes take small groups of students and their teachers from the fundamental skills elective classes to teach mini lessons.

#### *Sharing IEP Information with Regular Education Teachers*

The special education teacher at Bethany High School said that at the beginning of the year she meets with the regular education teachers and discusses their assigned students' IEPs. She explained that she writes down successful strategies that the regular education teachers can use with her students. The science teacher confirmed in her interview how the special education teacher gives her accommodation and modification information.

#### *Meeting Jointly with Parents and Students*

The social studies teacher described that one new practice was meeting jointly with the special education teacher, the regular education teacher, the student with a disability, and the student's parent(s). Having joint meetings helps to merge content information with special education information.

#### *Using the Student Agenda*

All students at Bethany High School carry a Student Agenda that includes a place to list class assignments and notes from teachers and parents. The regular education teacher, special education teacher, and parents use the agenda as a communication tool. After the end of each class, the student has the responsibility of collecting teacher comments about his or her daily progress. The student, parents, and other teachers benefit from seeing the list of comments at the end of the day. During the fundamental skills elective class, the teacher and the student review the comments collected in the agenda. They look for positive and negative patterns. If there is a pattern of concern, the behavior is addressed immediately through additional interventions.

*Working as a Team*

One of the statements made by the social studies teacher summarized the collaboration process that was evident in Bethany High School. He said, “I think most of these kids [students with disabilities] can be successful in the classroom. It definitely takes a team effort – the classroom teacher, the case manager, and all the teachers.” In reflecting on the interviews with the teachers, it was clear that there was not only a high level of respect and appreciation for one another, but also a mutual dependence. The science teacher said, “We rely heavily on our resource teacher.” The special education teacher explained that one reason the teachers are able to work so well together is that the people are so close. That closeness helps them to feel comfortable asking for advice. She said, “If they [regular education teachers] don’t understand something, I don’t think they’re embarrassed to go to someone and say, ‘Can you help me understand this form?’” She also explained that if special education teachers need help with content, such as the civil war, then the special education teachers are comfortable going to the regular education teacher and asking for help. She summarized the process as, “So they’re teaching me what they’re doing with the students, and when they come to me I’m teaching them how to make modifications for the students.”

*Empathizing with One Another*

The respect and appreciation can also be seen in some of the social studies teacher’s comments. He spoke with concern regarding the large amounts of paperwork that special education teachers are required to complete and said he worries about the special education teachers becoming overworked. He also said that the problem is driven by a bureaucracy and the feeling that teachers must protect themselves with large amounts of documentation.

In comparing and contrasting the data from the collaboration category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the regular education teacher and the special education teacher initiated collaboration activities. The specific practices related to this theme were: (a) communicating about the fundamental skills elective class; (b) sharing lesson plans, class notes, and materials with special education teachers; (c) sharing information regarding student progress with special education teachers; (d) sharing content knowledge with special education teachers; (e) sharing IEP information with regular education teachers; (f) meeting jointly with parents and students; (g) using the Student Agenda; (h) working as a team; and (i) empathizing with one another.

#### *Monitoring Student Learning in Bethany High School*

The category of monitoring student learning emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Bethany High School. All 5 teachers shared information that fell into the category of monitoring student learning. The following practices related to the category of methods were evident: (a) exercising accountability in grading; (b) reviewing Flanagan test results; (c) reviewing department writing predictor test; (d) observing students and maintaining portfolios; (e) completing checklists; (f) providing progress reports to case managers; (g) identifying other factors that can interfere with achievement; and (h) holding IEP committee meetings.

#### *Exercising Accountability in Grading*

The math teacher from Bethany High School shared, “I think in the past teachers have graded on effort.” She said that now, “You’ve got to at least show some kind of mastery” and the parents are asking questions like, “Do you think that he’s really mastered this? Is he going to know this? Is he going to pass the SOL? Do you think he’s actually learning this stuff?” The

math teacher elaborated further, “I don’t think you can water down now. I think you actually have to show the accountability. Part of that is the SOLs.”

### *Reviewing Flanagan Test Results*

All the teachers interviewed at Bethany High School shared how important it was to know whether students are achieving so interventions can be provided if needed. The teachers use several instruments to monitor student learning. One of the instruments is Flanagan SOL practice tests. After each SOL is taught, a multiple-choice test can be administered to the student for a particular SOL. The social studies teacher said,

We have to test them with a Flanagan test at least a couple of times a semester. But most teachers at the school where I am teaching do it at least once a week. And we’re constantly monitoring students. I have my grade book full of SOL scores of all the students, so we can look at each one of the students and we can tell what they have done on the Flanagan tests.

If students with disabilities do not show achievement on the Flanagan tests, then the social studies teacher said that the regular education teacher contacts the student’s case manager. The special education teacher confirmed this practice when she said, “The main thing as far as teachers keeping tabs on their curriculum map is that they’re tracking with the Flanagan test, and if they see a red flag they’ll come and let me know about it.”

### *Reviewing Department Writing Predictor Test*

All students must pass the English 11 EOC SOL Writing Test to obtain a high school diploma. The English teacher said that her department uses an important test to monitor student learning in the area of writing. At the end of the tenth grade year, students at Bethany High School are given a writing predictor test similar to the eleventh grade SOL test. This test helps

the English department to identify students who are at risk for not passing the eleventh grade SOL test so intervention can be provided. Case managers for students with disabilities would be contacted.

#### *Observing Students and Maintaining Portfolios*

The social studies teacher says that in addition to Flanagan testing, he monitors student learning by walking around the classroom and seeing how students are completing their work. He also keeps portfolios of the students' work. At the end of each six weeks or sooner if need be, he conferences with the students about their work. If a student with a disability is having problems, then he can also show the portfolio to the student's case manager.

#### *Completing Checklists*

The special education teacher said that at the beginning of the year she talks with the teachers as to how "we're going to monitor the students together." To help her with the monitoring process, she said she sends out weekly forms for teachers to complete. "I send out weekly things – I'm the paper queen here – I sent out weekly things to help teachers let me know if the students haven't progressed." She also creates specialized checklists.

I use some checklists where I will have my students' teachers fill out for me. For example, I have a student that will be taking the SATs, and he's in an algebra class and I'm really concerned with the time situation with him, so I will say, "Okay, he can do so many algebra questions in so much time." And we will do that, and they will time him and check it off for me.

#### *Providing Progress Reports to Case Managers*

The social studies teacher shared that the school uses an InteGrade Pro computer program to keep a record of all student grades. Teachers enter each of their assignments into the computer

system and then each student's grade for each assignment. At the mid-term point of the six weeks student progress reports are printed out and given to the students and parents. The progress reports show students' current grade average, missing assignments, and any comments the teacher chooses to make. If the student has an IEP, then a copy of that progress report is also given to the case manager.

*Identifying Other Factors That Can Interfere with Achievement*

As the math teacher pointed out, other factors such as the student's attendance and behavior can also affect the student's achievement. As a solution to the attendance problem and the student falling behind, the math teacher said she offers after school remediation nearly everyday. The math teacher explained,

We are on block scheduling where students meet every other day, so a gap can be a week of flu. And in a class like math it is so sequentially bound that you really need to fill in that gap as soon as possible. Therefore, I do offer after-school tutoring almost every single day.

The social studies teacher mentioned discipline as potentially having a negative impact on a student's achievement too. He said,

I think most teachers will do anything in the world for students with disabilities. The problem you get into is if you have a child with a learning disability who does not want to put forth the effort. That is when you cannot help them. That is when a teacher may have trouble in the classroom -- discipline. Almost all of the kids that I have are willing to work, willing to try, and they seem to get along very well with their peers.

### *Holding IEP Committee Meetings*

When a student is failing or not progressing, then the IEP committee holds a meeting. The special education teacher confirmed this when she said, “I collect six-week midterm reports and talk with the parents. If I can see they are really struggling with something and I think more modifications would be beneficial, I will say, “Let’s have an addendum meeting and add these.” The committee looks at the achievement data and decides if the IEP should be modified. The IEP committee can also address other factors such as attendance and discipline.

After reviewing the data from the category of monitoring student learning, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that classroom teachers used various tools to monitor student learning. The following practices related to the category of monitoring student learning were evident: (a) exercising accountability in grading; (b) reviewing Flanagan test results; (c) reviewing department writing predictor test; (d) observing students and maintaining portfolios; (e) completing checklists; (f) providing progress reports to case managers; (g) identifying other factors that can interfere with achievement; and (h) holding IEP committee meetings.

### *Placement in Bethany High School*

The category of placement emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Bethany High School. All 5 teachers shared information that fell into the category of placement. The following practices related to the category of methods were evident: (a) preferring the regular classroom; (b) identifying that the regular education curriculum map is too fast; and (c) recommending smaller class sizes.

### *Preferring the Regular Classroom*

The social studies and science teachers both said that they thought students with disabilities preferred being in the regular education general classes. Both, however, mentioned how important it was for those students with disabilities who were in the regular education classes to be enrolled in a fundamental skills elective class. They stressed how important that class was for providing extra time and one on one attention to finish assignments. The English teacher also noted how important it was for the students with disabilities who are placed in regular education classes to be in fundamental skills elective classes.

### *Identifying that the Regular Education Curriculum Map Is Too Fast*

The math teacher, however, emphasized concerns about the placement of students with disabilities in the regular classroom and the pacing guides. She said, “I think over due time most people can learn – but not at the pace with the intensity of the curriculum that has to be taught.”

### *Recommending Smaller Class Sizes*

The social studies teacher stated how important it was not to have too many students with disabilities in one classroom. He said he has heard his colleagues talk about how they have had classes with 4 or 5 students with disabilities in a class that was already a challenge and what an impossible situation it was. He concluded, “If you have a large cluster (4 or 5 students with disabilities), that’s not good education. That’s not fair for the teacher, for the rest of the students, or for the persons with learning disabilities.”

The math teacher explained that an ideal situation would be to have “a classroom where they could have 4 or 5 students being taught by a qualified math teacher.” She described that several years ago she taught in a residential situation with a full-time aide and multiple levels of students. She claimed that with a limited number of students and a full-time aide, the students

could “make 3 to 4 years’ progress on standardized tests.” She concluded her remarks with, “Nothing was more special ed than that.”

After reviewing the data from the placement category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the classroom teacher identified a preference for students in the regular classroom with a limited class size and the opportunity for a fundamental skills elective course. The following practices related to the category of monitoring student learning were evident: (a) preferring the regular classroom; (b) identifying that the regular education curriculum map is too fast; and (c) recommending smaller class sizes.

#### *Assessment Tools in Bethany High School*

Based on the data from the interviews and observations at the micro-system level at Bethany High School, another category that emerged was assessment. All 5 teachers from Bethany High School shared information about practices that fell into this category. Several of the teachers observed also demonstrated practices that fell into this category. The following practices related to the category of assessment were evident: (a) using Flanagan Practice Tests; (b) using SOL EOC Released Tests; (c) using EduTest Online Practice Tests; (d) using the Online Criterion Writing Program; (e) using the Testnav Online SOL Practice Tests; (f) reviewing practice test results; (g) correcting test for half credit; and (h) helping students during testing for partial credit.

#### *Using Flanagan Practice Tests*

All 5 teachers spoke about Flanagan assessments. The Flanagan assessments are practice tests that are aligned with the SOLs. The district office has made available the Flanagan practice tests to help teachers assess student achievement related to the SOLs. There are 3 basic types of Flanagan practice tests: the pretest, the student achievement tests, and the simulation test. The

pretest for a particular subject can be given at the beginning of a SOL course or at the beginning of a remediation course. The student achievement tests can be given after each SOL has been taught. The simulation test can be given a few weeks before the SOL test to simulate the actual test and to let teachers know in what area students need further remediation. The science teacher had some concerns about the Flanagan tests. She said, “I think that the science Flanagan materials are more difficult than the actual SOLs that we’ve seen on the released tests. And my opinion is that the questions are very poorly written. I can argue with probably 50% of the questions and say, “I think there are 2 correct answers,” or “None of these answers are correct.”

#### *Using SOL EOC Released Tests*

Another assessment tool that teachers referenced to using was the Virginia DOE past SOL tests. Past SOL tests in all EOC subjects except social studies are released and posted on the DOE’s web site where teachers can download the test copies. The science, math, and English teachers also use this test to assess students’ achievement and remediation needs. The social studies teacher does not have this option since the social studies past tests have not been released.

The science teacher said, “Our best bet is the 3 released tests that we now have. They are a much more accurate predictor as to whether the students will do well on the test when it comes to them than the Flanagans.” The math teacher also said she uses the SOL released tests. In particular, she uses the released questions to build into her own tests. The English teacher said that her department administers the released SOL test to sophomores. The English teacher explained,

Another thing we do is give some of the released SOL test items. Many times what we will do at the end of the year in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade is that we will give them that as part of their exam so they will have some practice.

#### *Using EduTest Online Practice Tests*

EduTest is another assessment item available, but only to the math department. EduTest is an online practice assessment test that is also aligned with the state's SOLs. Teachers can have their students take different tests in the EduTest testing bank at school or at home, if the students have access to the Internet. The district purchased the license for this service for high school math teachers. EduTest does not provide other subject area tests at the high school level at this time. The math teachers can then access reports of the students' progress so further student remediation decisions can be made.

#### *Using the Online Criterion Writing Program*

A writing assessment tool that is available to the English teachers is the Criterion Writing Program. The English teacher shared that the Criterion Writing Program is an online service that assesses writing skills from 9<sup>th</sup> grade through the graduate level. Students are assigned a prompt according to their grade level and type in their response. On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the lowest score and 6 being the highest score, the computer program grades the students' papers. The English teacher explained, "The computer system gives them feedback. It is not going to pick out every error you have with organization and things like that, but it sees that they address the prompt. It does show them spelling errors, mechanical and grammatical errors." She did say that this tool is especially good for students with disabilities because it gives the students instant feedback. She said,

What I have found with writing – especially with the students with spelling problems, which many times a lot of your special education children have – is, they can use that as a tool to see their mistakes and get immediate feedback.

The math teacher also shared how she creates an SOL report card each 6 weeks. She assigns an SOL number to all her quizzes in her grade book. She then takes those grades and averages them separately so students can see exactly how they are performing on the SOL material. The math teacher explained,

All of my quizzes are in my grade book. I flag them with ‘SOL’ and then we make an SOL report card every 6 weeks, and so if you’re getting real SOL topic stuff that they’re weak in and they’re not doing well, then you’ve got to run some kind of interference plan.

#### *Using the Testnav Online SOL Practice Tests*

The state is now beginning to administer the SOL tests online. As a result, the Virginia DOE has also made available Testnav online SOL practice tests. Instead of bubbling in answers with a pencil onto a paper grid, students simply place their computer cursor on the answer they choose and click the appropriate button on their mice. The math teacher mentioned that a highlighting tool is available on the Testnav online SOL practice tests as well as on the real online SOL tests. She explained that this tool helps the students to focus during the tests. This tool also helps to simulate the real online SOL test.

#### *Reviewing Flanagan Practice Test Results*

The social studies teacher remarked that students with disabilities have a hard time with the Flanagan tests as well as the SOL tests. As a result, he spends a great deal of time using the Flanagan practice tests. He explained further,

Of course, we spend a great deal of time with the Flanagan. Probably every day we will do questions. Kids have a hard time with many of those questions, but I have found that repetition is helpful.

After students have completed the questions independently, the class spends time discussing why certain answers are right or wrong. This same strategy was observed during the science teacher's classroom observation.

#### *Correcting Test for Half Credit*

For students with disabilities who perform poorly on SOL sample tests, the science teacher allows the students to correct the test for half credit. The science teacher explained, "I will send a test back to the case manager and allow the student to correct it for half credit. I figure the more they look at the material, the better they're going to do."

#### *Helping Students During Testing for Partial Credit*

The math teacher also expressed concern for students who do not test well. To her, it is most important that the students not give up and keep trying. To encourage the students to keep trying, the math teacher refuses to abandon the students during testing time. Instead, she will speak to a student who is struggling during a testing. If she has to clarify a point, she does not take points off the paper. If the student cannot complete a problem, then she will write an "H" on the paper and help the student just enough so the student can complete the problem. She then takes off a few points, but at least the student can still get some credit and will keep trying. The math teacher said she does not forsake a student during a test. The math teacher explained, "I always tell them, 'I want to know what you know, not what you don't know.' So if you sit there completely frustrated, I don't know that you know anything."

In comparing and contrasting the data from the assessment category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities. The specific practices related to this theme were: (a) using Flanagan Practice Tests; (b) using SOL EOC Released Tests; (c) using EduTest Online Practice Tests; (d) using the Online Criterion Writing Program; (e) using the Testnav Online SOL Practice Tests; (f) reviewing practice test results; (g) correcting test for half credit; and (h) helping students during testing for partial credit.

#### *Content in Bethany High School*

Another category that emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Bethany High School was content. All 5 teachers discussed and demonstrated information that fell into the category of content. The following practices related to the category of content were evident: (a) using curriculum maps with pacing guides; (b) identifying problems with curriculum mapping for students with disabilities; (c) slowing down the curriculum by offering courses in 2 parts; (d) slowing down the curriculum by offering a fundamental skills elective class; (e) slowing down the curriculum by offering remediation; (f) identifying the need for special educators to be content certified; and (g) focusing on test taking skills.

#### *Using Curriculum Maps with Pacing Guides*

With the pressures of ensuring that all students pass each EOC SOL test, all English, math, social studies, and science teachers from Bethany High School follow curriculum maps. The curriculum maps include the content or what is to be taught, the skills that are to be taught, a pacing guide of when the content and skills are to be taught, and an the type of assessment tool that is to measure the students' achievement. The district office has designed the curriculum maps for the areas of math and social studies. The English department at Bethany High School

and the science department at Bethany High School have designed the curriculum maps for those corresponding areas. The curriculum maps have been designed to be in alignment with the Virginia SOLs. Teachers are expected to follow the curriculum maps and are to ensure that all SOL objectives are taught and mastered before the administration of the SOL tests in the spring.

### *Identifying Problems with Curriculum Mapping for Students with Disabilities*

Several of the teachers shared their concerns about the curriculum mapping process. The math teacher at Bethany High School detailed her frustration of keeping 20 to 25 regular education students moving on track with the curriculum map and having to slow down for the student with a disability because his IEP calls for more repetition. The math teacher shared,

You are frustrated that you cannot accommodate that child for his program. He has to be in this program because you have to pass the state mandate. At the same time, you have 20 other kids, or 25, that really need to follow the curriculum map and the pacing guide. Therefore, that is why teachers throw up their hands and simply say, “If it says 60% of this, then he does 60%.”

She explained, “For many of my colleagues, we find ourselves teaching to the test, which is not our fault, but the fault of the State of Virginia that has mandated the SOLs.”

The social studies teacher at Bethany High School shared that curriculum mapping causes teachers to teach to the test. He explained that in some ways teaching to the test is good because it ensues that all teachers are covering the same thing. He further explained, however, that only average or higher level students are able to handle this type of teaching because students with disabilities need more time to learn skills and concepts. As a result, teachers feel pressure because of the mapping and students with disabilities suffer. He said, “Curriculum mapping has put a whole lot more pressure on the teachers. Students with special needs unfortunately

sometimes suffer because we have to go so fast to keep up with the mapping.” He also pointed out that teaching to the test causes teachers not to have time to cover some of the interesting sidelights in history that so many students with disabilities enjoy. In addition, he added that he problem with curriculum mapping is compounded when school is missed due to inclement weather and the teachers must still keep to their map deadlines.

The special education teacher at Bethany High School shed further insight into the pressure created by curriculum mapping on teachers. She said,

They have to get to such and such a point by a certain date, and if they do not meet that date, then they may be reprimanded, and so they try to keep up with that, which is hard for most of my special education students. It is sad where they need it watered down, at a slower pace, and reinforced several times before they will learn it.

#### *Slowing Down the Curriculum by Offering Courses in 2 Parts*

To slow the curriculum down, several classes at Bethany High School have been divided into a sequence that takes 2 years to cover. For example, students may take Algebra I, Part 1 as 9th graders and Algebra I, Part 2 as 10th graders. Students may take World History I as 8th graders and World History II as 9th graders. Students may take Earth Science Part 1 as 9th graders and Earth Science Part 2 as 10th graders. Biology has been divided into 2 parts as well.

The science teacher explained that at the end of the first semester, students who were not doing well in earth science or biology were put in 2-part classes and will have an extra year to prepare for the SOL test. She said,

As of this year, at the end of first semester, we pulled all of our students in both biology and earth science that were not doing well. We put them in Biology Part 1 or Earth

Science Part 1, sometimes changing their entire schedules. The students will take part 2 next year and should have some extra review time built into that.

The special education teacher at Bethany High School discussed some of the benefits of offering classes in 2 parts. She said,

When they divided the classes up, the classes became smaller. The students went in with the new class, and they just started over with it. It was as if they were reviewing. It made them feel successful. With that Part 2, it boosted their self-esteem. I think that with the pacing guides that we have now, it is too fast for almost all of my kids, and I think that if we do not slow it down they are going to fall through the cracks.

*Slowing Down the Curriculum by Offering a Fundamental Skills Elective Class*

Another way to slow the curriculum down so more review and drill can occur is for students with disabilities who are in the regular classroom to participate in the fundamental skills elective class. The special education teacher from Bethany High School put it this way,

They have the fundamental skills class for a period just like a regular class – they earn a credit for it as an elective. Many of my teachers will send in work that I will reinforce things repeatedly with them, just the basics. They will give me a copy of their notes and we will go through those notes with them, and I will figure out which way is the best way for them to learn it. We may do note cards, I may read the notes for some of my kids that are at a lower reading level, then give them a tape and they can take it home and work with it that way -- listen to it at home.

*Slowing Down the Curriculum by Offering Remediation*

Another way to slow the curriculum down for students with disabilities is to provide remediation programs. Several of the teachers at Bethany High School participate in such

programs so students in their classes can experience more review and drill. The math teacher said, “I offer after-school tutoring as an opportunity.” She said she asks her students, “Do you know this stuff well enough, or do you think you’re going to need some help?” If the students say they need more help, and then she responds to them, “You can come in right after school, or in the morning. I’ll help you when you don’t feel so rattled.” She explained, “Most of the time that gets them through it.”

#### *Identifying the Need for Special Educators To Be Content Certified*

The math teacher identified the need for special educators to be content certified when she said, “I think the biggest breakdown is that those people (special education teachers) aren’t qualified for subjects like upper-level math. We are lucky we have one math person. We have more strength in English. Math is probably a special education weakness.”

The special education teacher also shared her frustration in not knowing the math content. She said, “I will tell you I have a weakness in math, and I have not studied it for a long time.” To compensate for this difficulty, she takes time from her planning period to sit in on math classes. She hopes to learn the math from the math teacher so she can show her students in her fundamental skills elective class how to complete the problems they are assigned.

#### *Focusing on Test Taking Skills*

All of the content taught during the classroom observations at Bethany High School was SOL testing related. If the teachers did not spend at least some time in the period going over sample test questions, then they were making comments during their lectures about a concept appearing on an SOL test. For instance, the English teacher said, “Now looking at a story, we want to find out about point of view. This will be on your SOLs, I am sure.” The math teacher made comments in her lesson presentation such as, “You have to read carefully just like on the

SOL test.” During the observations, the social studies teacher was seen leading review discussions about SOL test topics and the science teacher was seen reviewing the answers to a SOL released test. Specifically during the science teacher’s observations, she was seen integrating into her review test taking strategies such as using the process of elimination, writing notes in the margins of the test copy, finding a sequence, and finding a pattern.

After reviewing the data from the content category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the content taught to students is driven strictly by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests. The following practices related to the category of content were evident: (a) using curriculum maps with pacing guides; (b) identifying problems with curriculum mapping for students with disabilities; (c) slowing down the curriculum by offering courses in 2 parts; (d) slowing down the curriculum by offering a fundamental skills elective class; (e) slowing down the curriculum by offering remediation; (f) identifying the need for special educators to be content certified; and (g) focusing on test taking skills.

#### *Methods in Bethany High School*

Another category that emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Bethany High School was methods. All 5 teachers discussed and demonstrated information that fell into the category of methods. The following practices related to the category of methods were evident: (a) varying activities due to block scheduling; (b) using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities; (c) teaching in a step-by-step method; (d) demonstrating what is being taught; (e) checking for student understanding; (f) providing guided practice; (g) integrating remediation into classroom instruction; (h) providing visual aids; and (i) encouraging students.

### *Varying Activities Due to Block Scheduling*

Bethany High School is currently on an alternating A/B block bell schedule. Students take 7 classes over 2 days. Every other day 3 of the classes meet, while 1 of the classes meets every day. For example, on A Day a student may have English during 1A, physical education during 2A, math during 3AB, and science during 4A. On B Day the same student may have social studies during 1B, French during 2B, math again during 3AB, and drama during 4B. The classes that meet every other day are 94 minutes, while the class that meets every day is 55 minutes. With a block period of 94 minutes for 6 of the classes, the teachers vary their class activities.

The science teacher said,

I try to vary what I do in the classroom as much as possible, and with the 94-minute classes, you certainly have time to do that. I try to break the class up into discussion, maybe some paper-pencil work, and of course laboratory. I like to use the overhead a lot. I do a chapter review in Jeopardy format and use the LCD projector and all the kids enjoy that.

The social studies teacher explained,

An hour and a half is a long time for a kid to be in a classroom without a break, and without any time to get up and move around. You have to talk to them a little bit, then you have to let them do things together, then you let them do things by themselves, and then ideally you will be able to show them an overhead or a 10-minute video clip.

### *Using Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Activities*

Some students with a disability may understand a concept more by hearing about it and others more by seeing it or even putting the concept into motion by doing it. All the teachers

interviewed and observed showed that they understood the importance of using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities although during the classroom observations, auditory and visual activities were most prevalent. The special education teacher in Bethany High School said she is seeing “a variety of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities.” The math teacher put it in perspective when she explained that she has to be mindful to repeat things in multiple ways – auditorially, visually, and kinesthetically. If a student does not grasp a concept after hearing about it, then the concept should be reinforced visually and kinesthetically.

It was interesting to note, however, that even though the special education teacher said that all departments use auditory, visual, and kinesthetic activities, she was able to pick out each department’s particular strength. For example, she said that in the math department she is seeing a lot of visual activities and recently more manipulative hands-on activities. She also said that in the English department she sees many visual activities, but is seeing more auditory or oral reading, than in the past. In the social studies department, she said that the emphasis seems to be in auditory activities. She said, “I was in the social studies class and I was witnessing a lot of auditory – a lot of drill. That’s a lot of what’s going on with our whole social studies department.”

#### *Teaching in a Step-by-Step Method*

All the teachers observed presented their instruction in a step-by-step method. As observed, the teachers at Bethany High School start their classes by explaining the objective(s) and activities for the day. They then provide review opportunities by checking and discussing homework or practicing a few SOL test questions. The teachers then share information about a topic or a skill. As the teachers share information about the topic or a skill, they model what they are saying by using the board, overhead projector, or verbal illustrations. Students are also given

the opportunity to practice what they have learned and then work independently or with a partner. In each class observed, the activities build from one to the next.

The same building process is present when information is presented verbally. The teachers break the lesson content down into sections or chunks of information as they teach. Teachers use words of sequence like the math teacher who said, “The first thing you do is” and “Then I want you to do (such and such).” Teachers also break concepts down such as when the English teacher taught about characterization, “When we learn about characters,” she said, “there are two ways, direct characterization and indirect characterization.” One immediate outcome that was noticed during the observations was that the students are staying engaged in all the activities and are responding well to the step-by-step approach. In a science class after the teacher had presented information in steps, a student summarized the method well by stating, “That is good logical thinking.”

### *Demonstrating What Is Being Taught*

All the teachers observed demonstrated what they were teaching. As observed, the teachers at Bethany High School included demonstrations by using the overhead projector, by using the chalkboard, by giving verbal examples, or by showing pictures from a collection. The math and science teachers demonstrate skills by using the overhead projector. The math teacher also hooks up a graphing calculator to the overhead projector and projects the display screen of the graphing calculator as she shows students how to solve problems. The English and social studies teachers illustrate concepts through using the chalkboard. The social studies teacher also models pictures of the historical events about which he is teaching. For several years, the social studies teacher has collected a set of pictures for each of his units. During the lecture portion of the lesson, he shows the students the pictures and passes the pictures around so students can get a

closer look. The English teacher also reads examples of stanza, tone, and assonance. As the students see and hear examples of what is being taught, they are able to ask for clarification.

### *Checking for Student Understanding*

As the teachers observed in Bethany High School present information or a skill, they orally question students to check for their understanding. The science teacher and the English teacher check for student understanding through the asking of oral cloze questions. The teachers say a sentence but leave a key word out. The students use their context clues and information they have just learned to figure out what the missing word is. The social studies teacher asks basic recall and sequencing questions to check for student understanding. The math teacher starts a problem and then has students tell her the next steps to take to solve the problem to check for her students' understanding. When the math teacher detects that a student does not fully understand how to complete a step, she restates how to complete that step. The other teachers take the same actions. It is a real benefit to the students for the teachers to pause after they deliver instruction and check for their students' understanding before the students begin practice of what has been presented.

### *Providing Guided Practice*

After the teachers present information and demonstrate a skill, they practice the skills with the students. In the subjects of math and science, the teachers put sample problems on the overhead projector. Students try the problems on their own or with a partner. After the students have had time to complete the problems, then the teacher discusses in a step-by-step fashion how the problems can be solved. Students are encouraged to ask qualifying questions during this time. In the English and social studies classes, the teachers also provide guided practice. Students are given the opportunity to think about several comprehension questions. The teacher then leads a

discussion on how the questions should be answered. Providing the opportunity for students to practice a skill before they demonstrate it for a grade, helps students to be more successful.

### *Integrating Remediation Into the Regular Classroom Instruction*

During the class periods observed at Bethany High School, teachers were seen integrating remediation into their regular classroom instruction. As the teachers present information orally, they repeat key concepts several times to ensure students have heard the concepts. They also present the same information visually by overhead projection, posting notes on the board, providing hard copies of their lecture notes, or by having the students read portions of the textbook or some related supplemental material. For example, the English teacher provides extra drill opportunities from the *Buckle Down* workbooks.

When the teachers question the students and suspect a lack of student understanding, they review and clarify. They repeat the concepts or skills and try to make connections the student can understand. Students are also encouraged to work with a partner as needed. If the student still does not understand after class review, then the teachers arrange to work with students individually after school.

In addition, teachers review information from previous lessons that they know the students have still not fully mastered. The teachers put up sample questions on the overhead or on the board that they know challenged the students in earlier lessons. Most of these questions are in the Flanagan or SOL Released Test format. After the students have tried to answer the questions on their own, the teachers discuss the answers and review again as needed.

As culminating activities to units, the social studies teacher divides the students in his class into groups. The groups are then assigned a topic related to the unit. Those students are

given time to prepare a short presentation. Before the unit tests, the groups make their brief presentations that serve as additional review opportunities.

Several of the teachers in Bethany High School also review skills from other subject matters in their classes. The special education teacher shared, “We do have several teachers that are really good about doing the math and the graphics in the social studies department.” Having skills taught across the curriculum in certain cases also provides additional review opportunities.

### *Providing Visual Aids*

All the teachers observed demonstrated the use of visual aids. The math and science teachers mostly use the overhead projector. The math teacher also uses magnetic shapes that stick on the chalkboard to illustrate her lessons. The English teacher uses a combination of the chalkboard and the overhead projector. The social studies teacher uses the chalkboard and maps, but also relies on his picture files.

### *Encouraging Students*

All of the teachers from Bethany High School responded to students in an encouraging and positive way. The science teacher, for example, corrects students with dignity by saying, “Can you get your head up off the table? I am sorry you are not feeling well” and “I know you are tired, but give it your best shot.” The math teacher offers continual reassurance that she is not going to abandon the students when she makes comments such as, “Now I will come around again and help you again.” The English teacher also helps students feel supported and makes comments such as, “That is why you are going to be working in groups,” when a student says, “Oh man, I don’t know anything about this.”

The teachers offer positive evaluative feedback throughout the lessons. The science teacher affirms a student is working a problem correctly when she says, “You are on the right

track.” The English teacher makes students feel good about speaking their thoughts when she says, “And that is a good point.” The social studies teacher praises students in a more lively way when he pauses and has the students give themselves a hand clap at his signal when they do something well. If he is particularly proud of them, he has them give themselves 2 hand claps at his signal. The students smile and the tension eases for a brief minute. The social studies teacher said, “I think you have to motivate them. I think you have to make them feel good about themselves.” The math teacher provides extra credit points for rewards and even gives the students candy as extra special rewards.

The teachers are careful not to single out students and not to embarrass them. In fact, the social studies teacher ensures that he starts out the school year finding something that all students can do. He said, “I think in the early part of the year you have to give them things that they can do.” The social studies teacher continues to help all his students feel successful even during his teacher/student conferences as he allows students to come up in pairs and answer together. When the students show signs of needing extra review, all the teachers are patient and speak in a clear tone with a comfortable pace that should help the students to feel more comfortable.

After reviewing the data from the methods category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the methods used support students mastering the objectives taught. The following practices related to the category of content were evident:

(a) varying activities due to block scheduling; (b) using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities; (c) teaching in a step-by-step method; (d) demonstrating what is being taught; (e) checking for student understanding; (f) providing guided practice; (g) integrating remediation into classroom instruction; (h) providing visual aids; and (i) encouraging students.

*How Instructional and Assessment Practices Used by General and Special Educators Have Been Affected by Policies at Bethany High School*

The policy context addressing the federal mandate was identified as enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. There were 7 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes related to the state policy context which are as follows: (a) The classroom teacher provided accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities; (b) the regular education teacher and the special education teacher initiated collaboration activities; (c) the classroom teacher used various tools to monitor student learning; (d) the classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities to be taught in the regular classroom with a limited class size and the opportunity for a fundamental skills elective course; (e) the classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities (f) the content taught to students was driven by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests; and (g) the instructional methods used supported students mastering the objectives taught. All 7 of the instructional and assessment classroom level practices themes related to the state regulations. The 7 state regulation themes related to the topics of accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, placement, assessment, content, and methods. During the interviews with classroom teachers, there was no mention of any professional development training, thus there were no instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes related to professional development training. There were 5 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes related to state accountability measures. The 5 state accountability themes related to the topics of monitoring student learning, placement, assessment, content, and methods.

*Accommodations and Modifications in Carson High School*

Based on the interviews and observations at Carson High School a category that emerged was accommodations and modifications. All teachers shared information related to this category. The following practices related to the category of accommodations and modifications were evident: (a) using mnemonics in English class but not in other classes; (b) using peer tutoring in science class, occasionally in math class, but not in other classes; (c) using graphic organizers; (d) providing class notes; (e) providing supplemental reading materials; (f) providing preferential seating; (g) working individually; (h) using ability level questioning; (i) using visual aids; (j) providing extra time for testing, having tests read, and testing in fundamental skills elective class; and (k) providing ample opportunities for students to complete easy assignments.

*Using Mnemonics in English Class but Not in Other Classes*

One teacher interviewed related how she uses mnemonic devices in her classroom on a regular basis. The English teacher from Carson High School shared that the students in her inclusion class “learn by pictures.” She said they need to see visual clues, reminders or “mnemonic things that they can be connected with.” To help students remember word meanings, she makes picture dictionaries. She will create a picture of a word on the overhead while the students create one at their desks. She said, “What matters is they’re thinking of something, and we share different pictures that each person has drawn of that particular word so that they could remember the definition.”

On the other hand, the math teacher reported that he does not promote mnemonic devices with any of his students. He says from his personal experience, he “spent more time trying to remember the mnemonic device than learning the real stuff.”

The special education teacher at Carson High School explained that she has not seen anybody with whom she works use mnemonic devices to help students remember what they learn. She said, “I have not seen it. I have tried to do it with them a little bit when I can get the time to work with them. I can’t pull them from the regular instruction because then they miss that.”

*Using Peer Tutoring in Science Class, Occasionally in Math Class, but Not in Other Classes*

The science teacher said he tried to incorporate peer tutoring into his lessons. The science teacher stated,

I try to incorporate students helping each other. I like them to do a lot of the work on their own, or to try, and then if there is difficulty I will let them work with other students.

Many times students are more likely to ask a peer for help or understanding than an adult figure.

The math teacher explained that only occasionally, on Fridays for puzzle activities, does he allow students to work with other students. The math teacher stated,

I teach mostly ninth graders, and I have found that ninth graders have a great knack of finding the smartest kid in the class and everybody wants to be in their group, so I usually do not let much group work go on. If it is a Friday and we are doing some puzzles or something like that, yes. On homework, no.

The English teacher shared that she does not use peer tutoring a great deal because the students cannot handle the activity. The English teacher stated,

We do peer tutoring a little bit, but what I have learned with that is that they do not like working with each other. They do not like it, and they will frequently get into fights and arguments and they are very critical of each other. They say things – it gets out of hand.

They will start crying in class, or someone will get their feelings hurt and start getting a little puffy and want to fight about it.

The social studies teacher explained that he does not use peer tutoring because of the need to cover the curriculum. He said, “I generally don’t use peer tutoring. I think you’re just so pressed for time.”

The special education teacher from Carson High School said that she sees peer tutoring used a little. She said that when she sees peer tutoring used that the students “just work beside their friends and they don’t get anything done.”

### *Using Graphic Organizers*

Graphic organizers help students learn information by breaking the information apart. The social studies teacher said that he uses graphic organizers. He said that some of them he has created and some of them he has gotten from textbook resources. As an example, he told of how he uses transparencies:

One in particular stands out in my mind right now. It was the battle between the British and the Spanish Armada, and I used a graphic organizer with the number of ships that the British had, the number of ships that the Spanish had, artillery pieces and this and that, and tried to base questions on that.

### *Providing Class Notes*

The math teacher from Carson High School shared that he provides copies of class notes to his students with disabilities. He said, “The majority of my kids have that as the modification. A lot of them have ‘teachers provide the student with notes (as a modification).’”

The English teacher from Carson High School explained that she uses cloze-type notes. The teacher prepares notes of sentences, but leaves out key words. The students use context clues and information they hear during the lesson presentation to figure out what the missing word is.

The social studies teacher shared that when he lectures to students, he projects detailed notes through an overhead projector. He explained that the students copy just a few sentences at a time before he lectures on a point. After the students finish writing, he begins talking. He stated,

I will present that and usually I will just uncover as much notes as I am talking about. They will write that down and then we will discuss that: That way they are not just writing while I am talking. They can write and then I will explain it.

The science teacher described having a handout for students who have difficulty writing quickly during classroom presentations. He said, “They don’t have to concentrate on trying to write.” He puts the notes in the form of questions. This format is especially helpful for students with disabilities when they use the handout during an open notebook test. He stated, “This helps keep their notes organized.”

### *Providing Supplemental Reading Materials*

The English teacher at Carson High School said her principal is using remediation funding from the district to purchase supplemental reading materials for her to use in her English class. She is working with the school’s reading specialist to find out the students’ reading levels so she can purchase items the students can enjoy reading and can be successful reading. She said,

I wanted to give them something with which they can have success. In our particular literature text that we have, we have it divided into below average, average, and advanced. There are very few selections in “below average,” so I have very little material

to choose from. It is not always something in which they are interested. I want to find something on level five through nine that they can actually have some kind of success with, so that they can improve their confidence level and can accelerate.

The social studies teacher from Bethany High School also said he uses supplemental readings. He said, "I think our textbook that we've been using has a high level of reading difficulty." His response is to use reading materials on the students' level that support the textbook.

### *Providing Preferential Seating*

In all the classrooms observed, students with disabilities are given preferential seating. In each case, the students with disabilities are seated near the front of the room or near a special education teacher or aide.

The science teacher has 11 students with disabilities in the class observed. Many are seated toward the front and others along the outside rows. The special education teacher makes recommendations on where the students should sit. The science teacher said, "I have worked with her quite often on arranging seating assignments, too. That way we can make sure the students that are not working well where they are, can find a place where they will do better."

The English teacher also has 11 students with disabilities in the class observed. Several are seated toward the front of the room and several are seated near the special education teacher in the back of the room.

The social studies teacher has 7 students with disabilities in the class observed. Several are seated on the front row and others are seated on an outside row next to the special education teacher.

The math teacher has 4 students with disabilities in the class observed. One of the students is seated in the back of the room at a separate table with a special education aide. The other students with disabilities are seated toward the front of the room.

### *Working Individually*

In all classrooms observed at Carson High School, each teacher was seen working individually with students with disabilities. The one-on-one time occurred during guided and independent practice activities. The science teacher shared information in the interview about working with students individually. All teachers from Carson High School also shared information about working individually with students.

The science teacher at Carson High School explained that when students do not understand the material taught in class, he works with them individually before school each morning and after school on Mondays. He said that on Mondays he has a small group of students with which he works. The science teacher also said that he works with students individually during class when he sees they are struggling. He stated, “And then one-on-one in the class. If I see that they’re struggling with something I’ll try to help them along.”

In addition, the science teacher described how the special education inclusion teacher works with students individually. He said,

We have worked out a routine where I’m making sure that the information is being given out, and as I’m also checking to see how the students are doing, she is focusing on the special education students to give them a little bit more one-on-one if they need it, to help keep them a little bit more focused.

He described how the special education inclusion teacher walk around the room helping to answer students questions or take small groups of students aside to give them special help.

The social studies teacher at Carson High School also described how the special education inclusion teacher helps. He stated, “If they’re doing seat work or something like that he would come by and assist them.”

The English teacher at Carson High School said she goes around and works with students individually and prompts the special education inclusion teacher to do the same. She stated, “Now, I go around a lot individually, too, and at times, I will coerce him [the special education inclusion teacher] into doing that with me, because they need a little bit more individual attention. Sometimes I will say, “We are going to circulate, and if you need help raise your hand. We are going to come around, look over your shoulder,” things like that.

The English teacher did mention, however, that she could only work with students individually when the special education inclusion teacher is in class. She explained, “I can only do that when he’s in the classroom. Otherwise, I turn my back and it’s sort of chaotic because of so many of them there.” According to the English teacher,

The special education inclusion teacher is often pulled from her class to work with other students, to work with parents, or to do meetings with parents. Once he went to go get a parent’s signature, and he had to be gone to do that. It is frequent, and recently – this being the latter part of the year – if he is in a couple of times a week I am doing well. Otherwise, it’s me, and it’s a little harder that way with this group.

The math teacher, who has four students with disabilities in one class but who does not have an inclusion special education teacher in his room, explained that he depends on special education teachers who teach his students in the fundamental elective skills class to work with his students individually. He says, “if that fails, you just have to say to the student, ‘You need to

come in for extra help in the morning or during flex time’ or something like that.” Flex is a 20-minute study hall time that is built into the regular school day. At the end of first period, students can stay in their first period class and study on their own or they can get a pass from a teacher and go to that teacher’s room to make up work or receive individualized help. The math teacher further elaborated,

If students with disabilities are not really progressing at the rate everyone else is, I do not try to hit the panic button, because that just gets them frustrated. As I am walking by checking homework or something, I will say to the student privately, “You need to come in for some extra help.” I leave it up to the student. When I am here, if they ever want to come by and get extra help all they have to do is ask for a pass. I will do it.

The special education teacher shared that two of the students with disabilities in her inclusion class want her to work with them individually, but after the rest of the class is gone. She said,

There are two of them, probably about the worst two normally in the classroom, who want me to stay behind with them after everyone else has left and go over their tests individually with them. It is obvious to me that on some level they want to do well.

### *Using Ability Level Questioning*

Ability level questioning was evident in the classroom observations. The teachers pose basic concrete or recall questions to students who struggle academically. They also pose more critical thinking or analytical questions to high-end learners. The science teacher said he has found asking ability level questioning particularly useful when students are viewing pictures. He said, “The lower level students will get something out of it, and the higher level students will get some different understanding.”

### *Using Visual Aids*

The science teacher talked about using the visual aid of color to help students with disabilities break down information. When he presents information in note form, he organizes it by writing in different colors. The students imitate this process as they take notes.

### *Providing Extra Time for Testing, Having Tests Read, and Testing in Fundamental Skills*

#### *Elective Class*

The math teacher from Carson High School said that extra time for testing is provided for several of his students with disabilities and that 2 of his students have their tests read to them. He also talked about why testing in a closed environment, such as a fundamental skills classroom, is helpful. He stated,

Most of the kids I have are ADD or ADHD, and if they are in a regular testing environment in the classroom someone coughs, they lose their concentration; they are up looking around trying to see what it was. When they can test and quiz in a closed environment I think really helps them concentrate, and it gives them that extra time.

The science teacher relayed that,

For some of the quizzes my special education students are pulled out for a small group testing. They can listen to the test or quiz being read, or they can work in a small group with fewer distractions around, and then that way if there is a question that they do not understand they have someone there who is reading the questions, and when they get to that question they maybe understand with someone else reading them.

The social studies teacher discussed that the special education inclusion teacher takes students with disabilities out of the classroom for testing. He said, "For testing purposes he takes the students out and gives them their tests."

*Providing Ample Opportunities for Students to Complete Easy Assignments*

The science teacher explained that for all of his tests he provides study guides. To create the study guide, he takes the test and rewrites the questions leaving a word out. He said, “If they could just apply themselves to that study guide, then they would pass the test.”

The social studies teacher described how he provides ample opportunities for students to complete assignments that are not too difficult. He claimed that if the students would just complete those assignments, then tests would not cause them to fail. He said,

I do enough assignments that I consider easy. If they will do those easy assignments, turn them in on time, and do what they are supposed to do, they can pass. They are not going to make A’s and B’s, but they will pass.

The science teacher at Carson High School also described how he gives the options of additional assignments to improve grade averages. He said, “I don’t give extra credit, but I give the option of an extra grade, an A or B, and it’s usually a report dealing with something that we have covered that six weeks.”

In comparing and contrasting the data from the accommodations and modifications category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the classroom teacher provided accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities. The specific practices related to this theme were: (a) using mnemonics in English class but not in other classes; (b) using peer tutoring in science class, occasionally in math class, but not in other classes; (c) using graphic organizers; (d) providing class notes; (e) providing supplemental reading materials; (f) providing preferential seating; (g) working individually; (h) using ability level questioning; (i) using visual aids; (j) providing extra time for testing, having tests read, and testing in

fundamental skills elective class; and (k) providing ample opportunities for students to complete easy assignments.

### *Collaboration in Carson High School*

Based on the interviews from the micro-system level, another category that emerged was collaboration. All 5 teachers from Carson High School shared information about practices that fell into this category. The following practices related to the category of collaboration were evident: (a) sharing regular education information with the inclusion teacher; (b) sharing special education information with the regular education teacher; (c) identifying the need to share more information regarding student progress with special education teacher; (d) identifying the need to share more IEP information with regular education teachers; (e) the special education inclusion teacher working as a disciplinarian in inclusion classes; (f) using technology to collaborate with teachers and parents; (f) identifying the need to seek teacher volunteers for inclusion programs; (g) identifying the need for the special education inclusion teacher to be in the classroom more; (h) identifying the need for the students to see the inclusion teacher as a teacher; and (i) the inclusion teacher staying out of the way during class lectures.

### *Sharing Regular Education Information with Inclusion Teacher*

The science teacher shared that he reviews his long-term lesson plans with the special education inclusion teacher. He also said that he asks if she would provide input on how the information is presented. He stated, “I’ve said to her, ‘This is what I’m planning on doing for the next couple of weeks. Are there any things that you might look at how we present it?’”

The inclusion special education teacher said that she advises him on curriculum issues. She said, “He has really, really tried on that part of it because when he saw them failing – tests

and quizzes are such a problematic area – he started giving them more assignments that would count: projects and things like that.”

*Sharing Special Education Information with the Regular Education Teacher*

The science teacher described how the special education inclusion teacher shares with him when her students are not “getting it” so he can make plans to go back and cover the skill or content with the students. He also said that the special education inclusion teacher helps him keep the other special education teachers up to date on the activities in the class. He said,

She has worked along with me on trying to keep the other case managers up to date on anything that happens in here – notes that we are taking, how the students are doing behavior wise, and she has worked hard to keep me up to date.

The English teacher shared her frustration in not having time to collaborate with the inclusion special education teacher. She said they are not even able to talk at lunch.

*Identifying the Need to Share More Information Regarding Student Progress with Special Education Teacher*

The school system has provided an InteGrade computer software program that averages grades every time a new grade is entered. The computer program creates a student progress report that can be printed out at any point in the 6 weeks. The math teacher shared that the special education teacher gives him a folder for his students with disabilities. At the mid-term point, he puts in the folder an InteGrade Student Progress Report for the student’s case manager to review.

The special education inclusion teacher at Carson High School articulated the concern of not knowing her inclusion students’ grades. She said she sees the students’ report cards and

interims, but only at those points. She said, “I never know what to pass on to the family, because his grades are never up to date enough – I never know how they’re doing. Never.”

*Identifying the Need to Share More IEP Information with Regular Education Teachers*

The math teacher at Carson High School reported that he receives basic IEP information about the students with disabilities in his math classes. He said, “We’ve got all the modifications. They give us a folder.” He did not mention any other information that was shared.

The social studies teacher at Carson High School explained that the inclusion special education teacher does not share very much information about the students with disabilities. The science teacher said, “It was new to both of us and we really didn’t know what our roles should be.”

The English teacher from Carson High School said that at the beginning of the year she asked about her delivery of instruction for the students with disabilities. She said she asked about it because she felt unsure and wanted to know if she should do something different. The response she got back was that her methods were good.

*The Special Education Inclusion Teacher Working as a Disciplinarian in Inclusion Classes*

The English teacher from Carson High School explained that the special education inclusion teacher mainly helps her with keeping order. She said,

What he does, he has a strong presence in the room, and for the ADD that really is a benefit. If he can keep them from popping up and down, I can pretty much teach my class. That would be about all I get out of it, but that is enormous right there.

The special education inclusion teacher shared her frustration regarding discipline. She said that she makes suggestions to the teacher and he never takes her advice. She also explained

that the students in the class do not view her as a teacher because the teacher has not given her that role.

*Using Technology to Collaborate with Teachers and Parents*

The English teacher shared how she uses technology to collaborate with other teacher and parents. Each week she emails her lesson plans to the special education teacher in the school and to a few of her parents who have requested her to do so. In addition to her lesson plans, she attaches any vocabulary words or other helpful information about the lessons.

*Identifying the Need to Seek Teacher Volunteers for Inclusion Programs*

The special education teacher said, “We wrote down what inclusion areas everybody wanted and no one got what they wanted. No one.” She explained that she thought if teachers had been given the opportunity to volunteer and if their requests had been used when decisions were made, then the inclusion program would have been successful. She elaborated, “Science is not my thing. I will go in there and do the best job I can. Another one of our inclusion teachers is in English and he hates English. He would love to be in math.” She also related how the regular education teachers were not given the choice about teaching an inclusion class. She summarized, “They were told they were going to do it. You know what mindset that brings on.”

*Identifying the Need for the Special Education Inclusion Teacher To Be in the Classroom More*

The English teacher from Carson High School explained how frustrating it is to have a large group of students with disabilities and no special education inclusion teacher in the classroom. She described how he often has to be gone to work with other students or to do parent meetings. She explained that 2 times this year he was gone for 2 weeks at a time. She summarized, “so it’s frequent, and recently – this being the latter part of the year – if he’s in a

couple of times a week, I'm doing good. Otherwise it's me, and it's a little harder that way with this group."

*Identifying the Need for the Students to See the Inclusion Teacher as a Teacher*

The special education inclusion teacher said that the main problem she has encountered is with discipline. She explained that she is in the class but the students think she is not the teacher. She said,

It is very frustrating when you are in there and you are not the teacher – the kids know you're not the teacher when you're in inclusion, unless the teacher really makes you a part, and between you and me, he thinks he has but yet he hasn't because we've seen the same behavior problems this whole year. I have given him suggestion after suggestion, and none has been taken. None.

*The Inclusion Teacher Staying Out of the Way During Class Lectures*

The social studies teacher said that when he is lecturing, the inclusion special education teacher "pretty much stays out of the way." He said the inclusion special education teacher is "there more for support to help me with things I need."

In comparing and contrasting the data from the collaboration category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the regular education teacher and the special education teacher initiated limited collaboration activities. The specific practices related to this theme were: (a) sharing regular education information with the inclusion teacher; (b) sharing special education information with the regular education teacher; (c) identifying the need to share more information regarding student progress with special education teacher; (d) identifying the need to share more IEP information with regular education teachers; (e) the special education inclusion teacher working as a disciplinarian in inclusion classes; (f) using

technology to collaborate with teachers and parents; (f) identifying the need to seek teacher volunteers for inclusion programs; (g) identifying the need for the special education inclusion teacher to be in the classroom more; (h) identifying the need for the students to see the inclusion teacher as a teacher; and (i) the inclusion teacher staying out of the way during class lectures.

#### *Monitoring Student Learning in Carson High School*

The category of monitoring student learning emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Carson High School. All 5 teachers shared information that fell into the category of monitoring student learning. The following practices related to the category of methods were evident: (a) reviewing Flanagan and EduTest results; (b) maintaining writing portfolios; (c) providing verbal and written progress reports to case managers; (d) identifying behavior problems that can interfere with achievement; and (e) identifying other factors that can interfere with achievement.

#### *Reviewing Flanagan and EduTest Results*

The science teacher, social studies teacher, and math teacher shared how they use the Flanagan SOL practice test. The social studies teacher described how he uses the Flanagan practice questions for review but also in his unit test. He said, “I’ll pick out certain questions on the Flanagan test and include them on my test.”

The science teacher also said he uses some of the Flanagan questions on his own tests. He described how he uses the Flanagan grade level test and simulation test. He said, “I incorporate some of the questions throughout the tests and exams.”

The math teacher, however, reported that he has only used the Flanagan practice tests 1 time during the school year. He relies mainly on the online EduTest practice test to assess how students are progressing. He said,

I like EduTest because it gives you that breakdown per question – percentage, and then if nothing else you can still design a test just based on the weaknesses of the students that took that test. It is self-diagnosing, which is great.

### *Maintaining Writing Portfolios*

The English teacher said she maintains writing folders on each of her students. She keeps their work in the folders to illustrate what the students have done. She shared that based on the evidence in the writing folders her students have made a lot of progress. She also mentioned that her students were “really pleased” with the progress in their folders.

### *Providing Verbal and Written Progress Reports to Case Managers*

The special education teacher said she monitors student progress by keeping up “with who’s passing and who isn’t.” Several of the other teachers described how they give information to the case managers and to parents to assist them in monitoring student progress.

The science teacher said that he lets the case manager know when the students are having problems or not having enough time to complete assignments. He talks personally with the case managers and explains where the student is on a specific assignment and where the student needs to be.

The math teacher said that he gives the case managers copies of progress reports. He also mentioned that he talks to the case managers personally about his students’ progress. He said, “If students with disabilities are not really progressing at the rate everyone else is, I don’t try to hit the panic button, because that just gets them frustrated. I will talk to the case manager.”

### *Identifying Behavior Problems That Can Interfere with Achievement*

The special education teacher from Carson High School stressed how important it is to have good discipline in inclusion classes. She cited how poor discipline is affecting the students’

progress. She said, “Our SOL scores are going to really be down this year. If you don’t have control of your class, you can’t teacher them.” She described that students need to be given opportunities to learn better behavior. She said, “At the first of the year the science teacher tried a lab. It was such a disaster with this group that he told them they would not get to try one again for a while. Well, they’ve never had one again.” The special education teacher shared this was not the answer because “the students should have more opportunities and learn how to behave in that situation. Of course they’re not going to learn how to behave if you don’t give them opportunities.” She then related how a math teacher had worked with this same group of students and that the students had learned better behavior. She told how she asked herself, “Are these the same kids?”

#### *Identifying Other Factors That Can Interfere with Achievement*

Several teachers pointed out that other factors affect how students are progressing. The special education teacher discussed that many of the students with disabilities are coming to the high school with “learned helplessness.” She said “they have been given so much” and “that they take no personal responsibility. They just sit there like, ‘Well, tell me the answer. What do I write?’” She then explained how she had a group of ninth graders last year in her fundamental skills class and how she finally saw them begin to take personal responsibility after having “worked and worked and worked with them.” To get the students out of the learned helplessness state, she said, “You have to be almost mean – not mean, but they perceive it as mean. Like, ‘No, I’m not going to tell you that. You figure it out.’” She stated, “You get to tests and they [students] say, ‘Well, last year our teacher would read them and put a different emphasis on one letter so we knew.’” The special education teacher also added, “I don’t know if we can blame it

on access to the general curriculum. Maybe somewhat, because it is hard in a classroom when you've got that many diverse levels, and you've got kids who certainly don't care."

The social studies teacher said he thought the students with disabilities could do better if they applied themselves. He said,

This is lower level stuff. It is like learning a vocabulary list in English, only some of these terms they are not familiar with and they are kind of abstract terms sometimes. I think if they applied themselves, they could do better.

The science teacher said he has noticed that many of the students want just to remember facts. He said he is working hard to get the students to go beyond just regurgitating the information and helping them learn how to apply what they are learning.

The special education teacher expressed frustration in not knowing what to do to help the students who demonstrate a lack of effort. When mentioning the progress of several students with disabilities, the special education teacher explained, "The others [students with disabilities] usually score in the 20 to 30 percentile. And I'm lost. I just don't know what to do."

The special education teacher also stated that she feels this lack of progress has been due to regular education teachers lowering their expectations for the students with disabilities. She said, "I think that [not having high enough expectations] is a problem a lot of our general education teachers make. They do not have high enough expectations. They kind of dumb it down and say, 'Well, everybody can get this,' and these kids are smart enough to pick up on it very quickly." She also said, "Some of the teachers really lower their expectations too much for what these kids can do." She added,

They have [the students] to think they are working for something. They cannot be thinking they have been given something. I think a lot of them are kind of continuing

what they learned in the middle school, they say, “Okay, I can make it here. Nobody is going to fail me. I’m special ed.”

On the other hand, the special education teacher expressed concern over the teachers who had failed students with disabilities and the reprimand they received. She said, “He failed six or seven special education kids. They deserved to fail, very much so, because they had done nothing. But he got jumped on because he hadn’t called home.” She added, “They [the teachers] feel such pressure if they fail a special education student, and the accountability for that is hard.” She concluded, “I don’t think we’re failing the number of kids we should. I do not think we are requiring enough from them, because they can do it. Many of them can do more.”

After reviewing the data from the monitoring student learning category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that classroom teachers used various tools to monitor student learning. The following practices related to the category of monitoring student learning were evident: (a) reviewing Flanagan and EduTest results; (b) maintaining writing portfolios; (c) providing verbal and written progress reports to case managers; (d) identifying behavior problems that can interfere with achievement; and (e) identifying other factors that can interfere with achievement.

#### *Placement in Carson High School*

The category of placement emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Carson High School. All 5 teachers shared information that fell into the category of placement. The following practices related to the category of placement were evident: (a) preferring the regular classroom; (b) acknowledging that the regular classroom is not always the best placement; and (c) recommending smaller class sizes.

*Preferring the Regular Classroom*

The science teacher from Carson High School who teaches an Earth Science inclusion class said it is a big plus for students with disabilities to be included in the regular education courses. He said, “It gives them a little bit of motivation.” On the other hand, however, he said that some students with disabilities still “need to have a small-group setting where they can get caught up on their work if they have to – be able to get that extra help that they need.” He concluded by stating, “I think we’re heading in the right direction with having special education students included with the classrooms instead of trying to keep them isolated.”

*Acknowledging that the Regular Classroom Is Not Always the Best Placement*

The math, English, and social studies teachers from Carson High School said they did not feel the regular classroom was always appropriate for students with disabilities. The math teacher from Carson High School said that he did not think having students placed in inclusion classes helped them achieve more. He described how teachers end up teaching to the regular education students’ needs leaving the students with disabilities lost in the shuffle. He said,

You have kids where it comes down to, ‘I have 1 kid with a disability in this class. I have 21 others. Do I hold 21 back for 1?’ Then you get into more fairness issues. Is it fair to the 21 or the 1? You have to go with the majority sometimes.

The English teacher said she felt that students with disabilities who are being placed in the regular education classes are not achieving as much as they could. She said, “And the reason is, the ones who are distracting or distractible in their focus have an impact on the whole group. And it’s not their fault.” She added, “I think it would be more beneficial for them to have a smaller group and for my other students to not be distracted by that.” Concluding her thoughts she said, “I think anybody could look at their writing and see that individually they have

progressed, but have they gotten as far as they could have? I do not think so. I really don't think so."

The social studies teacher said he thought the students with disabilities would do better if they were learning life skills. He said, "I think that these students could be better served learning real life skills. Most of them are bored with history. They just can't get a handle on it." He also explained that when students with disabilities are in the regular education class, their self-esteem is only lowered. He said, "I think that when they put them in here it only increases their low self-esteem because more of them aren't going to get it unless something clicks."

#### *Recommending Smaller Class Sizes*

The special education teacher from Carson High School expressed concern over how many students with disabilities were placed in inclusion classes. She said it is not good to have a cluster more than six or seven students with disabilities in an inclusion class. She said the problem is created when there is an inclusion teacher in a regular education class and the administrators or counselors end up scheduling more and more students with disabilities into that class. There are some inclusion classes in her school that have ended up with numbers as high as 12. "If there's ever a special change, that's where they end up putting them because they know they'll get extra help," she concluded.

After reviewing the data from the placement category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities in the regular classroom while also realizing that the regular classroom is not always the best placement. The following practices related to the category of monitoring student learning were evident: (a) preferring the regular classroom; (b) acknowledging that the regular classroom is not always the best placement; and (c) recommending smaller class sizes.

*Professional Development Training in Carson High School*

The category of professional development training emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Carson High School. There were 2 teachers who shared information that fell into the category of professional development training. The practice related to the category of professional development that was evident was providing funding for courses on differentiation.

*Providing Funding for Courses on Differentiation*

The English teacher at Carson High School said she did not have the skills that she needed to teach the inclusion class. As a result, her principal made funding available for her to go to two learning experiences. She said that in those two sessions she learned about differentiating instruction. She concluded,

So I'd have to say that that made an incredible lot of difference. I think it's really important that inclusion teachers be given the skills, and I don't think they would have them if they didn't go out and get them.

The social studies teacher from Carson High School also said he had been to a couple of differentiation courses this year. He explained that the courses, however, were mostly geared toward the elementary level, which was a problem. In conclusion he said, "I feel like I still have to teach the SOLs, whether they're gifted or whether they're special education. So I have to cover the SOLs."

After reviewing the data from the professional development training category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the regular education teacher participated in differentiation course work. Providing funding for courses on differentiation was the only practice that emerged related to the category of professional development.

### *Assessment Tools in Carson High School*

Based on the data from the interviews at Carson High School, another category that emerged was assessment. There were 4 teachers who shared information about practices that fell into this category. The following practices related to the category of assessment were evident: (a) using Flanagan Practice Tests; (b) using EduTest Online Practice Tests; (c) using reading assessments; (d) correcting tests for extra credit; (e) modifying tests; and (f) helping students prepare for classroom testing.

#### *Using Flanagan Practice Tests*

There were 4 teachers who spoke about Flanagan assessments. The Flanagan assessments are practice tests that are aligned with the SOLs. The district office has made available the Flanagan practice tests to help teachers assess student achievement related to the SOLs. The special education teacher at Carson High School shared that the students “have done some Flanagan in the regular classroom.”

The social studies teacher said he has used the Flanagan tests for review. He gives the students the opportunity to work on a few of the test questions independently and then discusses the answers with the students. He also said that he includes a few of the questions on his unit tests.

The science teacher shared that he incorporates some of the Flanagan questions into his classes as review. He also said that he incorporates some of the Flanagan questions into his classroom tests. He stated, “They’re very good because they help show the diagrams.”

#### *Using EduTest Online Practice Tests*

The math teacher at Carson High School said he uses EduTest quite a lot and that it helps prepare students for the online Algebra I SOL test. He shared, “I’ll have my kids in the lab

maybe once every six weeks working on something. Before we have breaks, I usually put an EduTest online and allow students to work on it for bonus points.”

#### *Using Reading Assessments*

The English teacher at Carson High School shared how she has acquired the help of the reading teacher in the school. She is choosing materials for students in her inclusion class to read. She wants to purchase materials that are high interest and on her students’ reading levels. The reading teacher is currently taking 2 of the students at a time out of her class to determine their reading levels. To make the testing process go more quickly, the reading teacher is going to teach the English teacher how to do the testing. The English teacher explained, “So with us both testing, it’ll give us a basic framework for selecting materials and knowing what we’re involved with.”

#### *Correcting Test for Extra Credit*

The social studies teacher from Carson High School said at the beginning of the year he allowed the students to correct the answers to the questions they missed on their tests. He said for correcting their tests he would give them extra credit points. He did not continue the practice very long, however, because he said it was just too much work for him.

#### *Modifying Tests*

The science teacher described how he modifies his tests for students with disabilities. He eliminates one of the multiple-choice answers on his tests for the students with disabilities. The students then go to the resource room to finish their tests.

#### *Helping Students Prepare for Classroom Testing*

The science teacher from Carson High School explained that he does many informal assessments before administering the actual unit test. He simply walks around the classroom and

checks for student understanding by asking questions and by looking at students' work to ensure they are doing their assignments. He also explained that he feels like students feel rushed when they are tested. To help ease test anxiety, the science teacher breaks the test up into different sections. He also makes sure that he keeps the same basic testing format so students know what to expect.

The English teacher also includes activities to ease test anxiety. During her class lectures, she provides closure-type notes. Sentences are written down with one or two words missing. As she talks, the students listen and fill in the blanks. Before the unit test, she gives students the same sentences with the same one or two missing words. Students complete the sentences without using any helps. She awards the students with extra credit points and class participation points.

In comparing and contrasting the data from the assessment category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities. The specific practices related to this theme were: (a) using Flanagan Practice Tests; (b) using EduTest Online Practice Tests; (c) using reading assessments; (d) correcting test for extra credit; (e) modifying tests; and (f) helping students prepare for classroom testing.

#### *Content in Carson High School*

Another category that emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Carson High School was content. All 5 teachers discussed information that fell into the category of content. The following practices related to the category of content were evident: (a) using curriculum maps with pacing guides; (b) identifying problems with curriculum mapping for students with disabilities; (c) slowing down the curriculum by offering a fundamental skills elective class; (d)

slowing down the curriculum by offering remediation; (e) identifying the need for special educators to be content certified; and (f) identifying the need for change and a balanced approach.

#### *Using Curriculum Maps with Pacing Guides*

A curriculum map includes the content or what is to be taught, the skills that are to be taught, a pacing guide of when the content and skills are to be taught, and an the type of assessment tool that is to measure the students' achievement. The district office has designed the curriculum maps for the areas of math and social studies. The English department and the science department at the county high schools have designed their own curriculum maps. The curriculum maps have been designed to be in alignment with the Virginia SOLs. One of the purposes of the maps is to ensure that all the SOL objectives have been taught before the time of the EOC SOL tests.

#### *Identifying Problems with Curriculum Mapping for Students with Disabilities*

When teachers are not able to follow the exact pacing guide of their maps due to missed snow days that are not made up due to the district banking time, then the teachers must compact their curricula. The math teacher from Carson High School said that when everybody is behind due to weather, then the department meets and makes choices on how to adjust the pacing guides to ensure all the SOLs have been taught by testing time.

The science teacher from Carson High School said, "One of the things that I do is that I go fast." When days are missed for snow, however, he must go even faster to cover the curriculum. He related, "With the days that we missed this year because of snow, I've made some modifications to the map. I had to shuffle some chapters around."

The special education inclusion teacher from Carson High School shared that she did not have the answer as to what to do about the need to cover content to ensure all the SOLs have been taught and the need to teach for mastery. She stated, “I don’t know that I have that answer. I wish I did. But really, especially in something as critical as math, I don’t see how you can keep going ahead if it’s a sequential skill.” The special education teacher also expressed concern for those teachers who are reprimanded for not being on the pacing guide when the teacher is teaching for mastery. She related, “The teacher explains things over and over again. However, she has been jumped on repeatedly from someone from the central office because they’re not where they should be on the curriculum map.”

The social studies teacher from Carson High School related that he would like to slow down and teach for mastery, but he cannot. He said, “You would like to slow down and spend a couple more days and reinforce things, but you just don’t have time to do that.”

The English teacher from Carson High School said that she does not expect to finish everything on her map. She said, “I wish I would. I’d like to do a lot more.” She adds further, “What I have done, they will know. And they’ll know it fairly well.”

#### *Slowing Down the Curriculum by Offering a Fundamental Skills Elective Class*

One way to slow the curriculum down so more review and drill can occur is for students with disabilities who are in the regular classroom to participate in the fundamental skills elective class. During that class period, student with disabilities have the opportunity to work with a special education teacher in a small group setting of not more than 8 students. The regular education teachers share with the fundamental skills elective class teachers what they are teaching. The fundamental skills teachers then provide extra review and drill to support the

students with disabilities in the regular curriculum. The special education inclusion teacher said the class was critical to the success of the students with disabilities. She also said,

I had a group come in last year as 9<sup>th</sup> graders that I have worked with a core of seven that I had in fundamental skills, and I have worked and worked and worked with them, and this year I see a tremendous difference in their personal responsibility, what they can do, their self-confidence.

*Slowing Down the Curriculum by Offering Remediation*

Another way to slow the curriculum down for students with disabilities is to provide remediation programs. The math teacher from Carson High School mentioned working with students before school. The science teacher from Carson High School also works with students before school and on Mondays after school. He said, “I’ve got time in the mornings before school. I’ve made time available after school on Mondays.”

In addition to before school and after school help that several teachers provide to students, Carson High School has incorporated a 20-minute study hall time into the regular school day for all students. This study hall time is known as Flex. At the end of first period, students can stay in their first period class and study on their own or they can get a pass from a teacher and go to that teacher’s room to make up work or receive individualized help.

*Identifying the Need for Special Educators To Be Content Certified*

The special education teacher from Carson High School identified the need for special educators to be content certified. She said, “I think it’s kind of strange in the high school, because we’re not endorsed in the subject

### *Identifying the Need for Change and a Balanced Approach*

The special education teacher from Carson High School shared that she is seeing some teachers who have not made any changes to the way they teach since the access to the general curriculum mandate was put in place. She said, “I’m seeing some teachers changing nothing, so that it’s hard for the special education kids to succeed.” However, she is also seeing some teachers go in the opposite direction. She stated, “I’m seeing teachers go so much in the opposite direction that the curriculum is so watered down that they’re [students] not getting what they need to get.” What is needed is a balance between the two extremes.

After reviewing the data from the content category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the content taught to students is driven strictly by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests. The following practices related to the category of content were evident: (a) using curriculum maps with pacing guides; (b) identifying problems with curriculum mapping for students with disabilities; (c) slowing down the curriculum by offering a fundamental skills elective class; (d) slowing down the curriculum by offering remediation; (e) identifying the need for special educators to be content certified; and (f) identifying the need for change and a balanced approach.

### *Methods in Carson High School*

Another category that emerged from the data at the micro-system level from Carson High School was methods. All 5 teachers discussed and demonstrated information that fell into the category of methods. The following practices related to the category of methods were evident: (a) varying activities; (b) using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities; (c) teaching in a step-by-step method; (d) demonstrating what is being taught; (e) checking for student understanding;

(f) providing guiding practice; (g) integrating remediation into classroom instruction; (h) providing visual aids; (i) providing different time; and (j) encouraging students.

### *Varying Activities*

The English teacher from Carson High School described how she varies her activities from one day to the next to help students understand concepts and remember terms. For example in teaching vocabulary, she writes down the definitions. The second day she leads the class in an activity called picture dictionaries. After students draw their pictures they have the opportunity to share what they have drawn, which helps them remember what they are studying. The third day she uses a manipulative called “word splash.” She prepares envelopes with the words and their definitions in typed form, but cut apart. The students then splash the words and definitions out on their desks and work to put them together. The students do several rounds of the activity. The English teacher said, “What they’re doing is really learning to put the words together, and it works because they’re manipulating.” The last activity is to play a game such as “hot seat.” She asks a person to volunteer to sit in the hot seat. She says a word and the student says the definition. The object of the game is to see how many definitions the student can get in a certain period. Students are then awarded with a prize. She said that the game is helpful to all students, even the ones not in the hot seat, because they are able to review definitions. She summarized this progression of activities by stating, “So we have writing, manipulation, global learning for the picture definitions, and differentiation because there are different abilities in this.”

The social studies teacher from Carson High School said, “I try to vary my instruction as much as possible. I try to work in a lot of reading activities. I like to use a lot of visuals when I can.” Specifically, he mentioned lecturing, using the textbook, showing pictures of events or

places that are a part of the lesson, and having class discussions that not only focus on facts but also require critical level thinking.

*Using Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Activities*

The science teacher from Carson High School described using a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities. He shared that he lectures and then gives an activity to go with the lecture. He said he likes “to bring in what they see in the everyday world to help tie that in the lesson activity (e.g. shopping for clothes).” He explained that when he is covering certain information, he has the students form blocks. The students then take turns saying what the difference is between the events of the first block and the second block. He stated, “The more you can use your hands, your eyesight, your hearing, and touch – any of your senses – the more likely you’re going to retain information.”

The science teacher also related how he has the students write good quality questions after information from a particular unit has been taught. The students then trade their questions with a friend and answer each other’s questions. If one of the students does not understand the question, then they have permission to go and talk to the author of the question. The author of the question then has to explain exactly what the question is asking. The science teacher said, “It gets them to think a little bit more. If they’re looking for explanations they’re more likely to retain information.”

The English teacher from Carson High School shared, “What I do is approach the same material on several different learning style levels.” She said she does this on various days so that eventually everyone in class will comprehend and remember the material. She said that some students may not need all of them, but some students may prefer one to another. As a result, she said, “If I give them all to everybody, I’m okay.”

### *Teaching in a Step-by-Step Method*

All the teachers interviewed spoke about teaching in a step-by-step method or about breaking down the information so students can learn the information in parts. In each class observed, the activities build from activity to activity. The teachers' lesson plans are organized around the following format: (a) explaining to students what they are going to be learning; (b) presenting information [usually in a lecture format]; (c) demonstrating skills or showing content [through use of an overhead or chalkboard]; (d) questioning students to ensure they understand the information that has been presented; (e) helping students practice with the new information; and (f) providing students the opportunity to practice on their own. The format teachers are using builds upon concepts and skills in a step-by-step way.

The teachers also demonstrate concepts and skills in a step-by-step format. The math teacher said, "Especially in math, you can put the examples on the board and take the students step-by-step and make sure they know what is important."

The science teacher said, "I try to break the information down. I try to do outlines – sometimes flow charts. I have done notes in different colors to help separate."

The social studies teacher said, "I try to break it down as simple as I can." He also described how he uses graphic organizers in this process to break down information.

### *Demonstrating What Is Being Taught*

All the teachers observed demonstrated the skills being taught. As observed, the teachers at Carson High School demonstrate what is being taught by using the overhead projector, chalkboard, or showing pictures. The English, math, and science teachers demonstrate skills by using the overhead projector. The social studies teacher illustrates concepts through using the chalkboard pictures of the historical events about which he is teaching.

The math teacher includes in his lesson plans problems that he plans to demonstrate by using the board or overhead. The sample problems are also included in a handout for the students. He said,

I will write my notes out and put the examples with them. I will make their homework assignment the back page and put problems with that, and I will have it as a handout. We will go through and I will show them the key sections that they need to know.

### *Checking for Student Understanding*

During the classroom observations, all teachers demonstrated that they check for student understanding through questioning students or observing students working. When they see that a student does not understand a certain skill, they repeat and review what is being taught. The science teacher at Carson High School explained that he makes a point of checking for understanding by observing students. He described that he and the inclusion special education teacher have worked out a system for checking to see if all the students understand the lesson. The system also includes what to do if the special education inclusion teacher is having trouble with the content. He said,

We have worked out a routine where I am checking to see how the students are doing and she is focusing on the special education students to give them a little bit more one-on-one. If a question arises that she does not know, then she will raise her hand like the rest of the students and she will ask the question and then I can go help that student or I will see if the rest of the students are having trouble, because sometimes the rest of the students are having that same problem.

### *Providing Guided Practice*

After the math, science, social studies, and English teachers present information and demonstrate a skill, they practice the skills with the students. In the subjects of math and English, the teacher puts sample problems on the chalkboard. In the subject of science, the teacher put sample problems on the overhead projector. Students try the problems on their own. After the students have had time to complete the problems, then the teachers discuss how the problems can be solved. Students are encouraged to ask qualifying questions during this time. In the social studies class observed, the teacher also provide guided practice. Students are given the opportunity to think about several comprehension questions during a classroom discussion.

### *Integrating Remediation Into the Regular Classroom Instruction*

During the class periods observed at Carson High School, teachers were seen integrating remediation into their regular classroom instruction. As the teachers teach, they review key concepts and terms to ensure student understand of what is being taught. The teachers also present information from their lectures in a visual form such as on a transparency, on the board, providing hard copies of lecture notes, or by using the textbook. If a student still does not understand after review, then the teachers make arrangements to work with students individually, usually during the Flex period.

Teachers also find ways to review information from previous lessons that they know the students have not fully mastered. The math teacher from Carson High School described that during the first 5 minutes of class he will have 5 problems on the board that he has taught. The students will first try to solve those problems on their own. The teacher will then review with the students how the problems should be solved. The students check their papers and ask

clarification questions. The science teacher said that he builds repetition into his routine. One fun way he builds review and repetition into his lessons is through games such as Bingo.

### *Providing Visual Aids*

Several teachers from Carson High School shared how they use visual aids as they teach. The social studies teacher discussed how he uses pictures when he teaches lessons in his World History II classes. He said,

I like to use visuals if I can. If we are talking about an individual, I like to find a picture of them so they can put a face with the name. Sometimes we are talking about just different things that you can visualize – an architectural feature or something like that.

As was evident during the observation, the social studies teacher also uses the video player to illustrate events in history students are studying. The teacher shows a section of the video, pauses the video, and explains and questions students about what they are seeing.

As was evident in the classroom observations, the English teacher projects visual aids on the front screen in the classroom by using an overhead projector. She uses the overhead projector to display information about vocabulary words, literary terms, and chapter reviews. She also gives the students handouts of the projections. Another visual tool the English teacher uses is the video player. When dramas such as *Romeo and Juliet* are read, she shows students the video of the drama. The students follow the script of the drama in their textbooks as the video plays. She also frequently uses the pause button on the video player so she can stop and explain the plot, characters, etc.

The science teacher also uses the overhead projector during class as was evident in the classroom observation. Key points or notes are projected to illustrate information the teacher is

presenting. He also writes his notes in different colors to help students discriminate as they view the projection.

### *Providing Different Time*

The English teacher from Carson High School explained that from the first day of school she establishes a philosophy for the inclusion class. She tells the class,

We are alike in many ways but we are all different too. If we are running across the gym and reaching the other side of the wall, we will all get there, but we are not going to get there at the same rate.

She later tells students, “If you happen to be different in finishing reading your short story or the novel more quickly than the rest of us, then you have some ‘different time.’” Students are then allowed to pick up some extra work at an extension center in the back of the classroom. Students pick up the work on their level and go back to their seats to complete it.

### *Encouraging Students*

The English teacher from Carson High School said, “These kids have failed so much. They’ve got to have some encouragement.” To help her students feel encouraged, she makes a point of purchasing materials on her students’ reading levels. She said, “I want to find something on level five through nine that they can actually have some kind of success with, so that they can improve their confidence level and go on and accelerate.” She also shared how important it is for her students to know that she wants them to succeed. She said, “And they know that I want them to pass.” To help her students know that she wants them to pass, she explained that she makes encouraging comments such as, “Now look at that. Look at that. You can be proud of that. You passed that.”

After reviewing the data from the methods category, one theme emerged. The practice theme that came forth was that the methods used support students mastering the objectives taught. The following practices related to the category of content were evident: (a) varying activities; (b) using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities; (c) teaching in a step-by-step method; (d) demonstrating what is being taught; (e) checking for student understanding; (f) providing guided practice; (g) integrating remediation into classroom instruction; (h) providing visual aids; (i) providing different time; and (j) encouraging students.

*How Instructional and Assessment Practices Used by General and Special Educators Have Been Affected by Policies at Carson High School*

The policy context addressing the federal mandate was identified as enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. There were 8 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes related to the state policy context which are as follows: (a) The classroom teacher provided accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities; (b) the regular education teacher and the special education teacher initiated collaboration activities; (c) the classroom teacher used various tools to monitor student learning; (d) the classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities in the regular classroom while also realizing that the regular classroom is not always the best placement; (e) the regular education teacher participated in differentiation course work; (f) the classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities; (g) the content taught to students was driven by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests; and (h) the instructional methods used supported students mastering the objectives taught.

All 8 of the instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes related to the state regulations. The 8 state regulation themes related to the topics of accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, placement, professional development, assessment, content, and methods. There was 1 instructional and assessment classroom level practice theme that related to professional development training. The professional development theme related to the topic of differentiation course work for teachers. There were 5 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes related to state accountability measures. The 5 state accountability themes related to the topics of monitoring student learning, placement, assessment, content, and methods.

#### Comparing and Contrasting Themes in Bethany High School and Carson High School

The practices from the theme topics of accommodation and modifications, monitoring student learning, placement, assessment tools, content, and methods were similar. The practices from the theme topic of collaboration were notably different. In Bethany High School, teachers talked about positive communications between regular education teachers and special education teachers. Communications surrounded around the fundamental skills elective classes, lesson plans, class notes, materials, student progress, content knowledge, IEP information, parents, and using the student agenda to establish communication between the student, parent, classroom teacher, and special education teacher. They also stressed working as a team and exhibited empathy for each other in their dialogue.

In Carson High School, teachers mentioned sharing information with each other, but mainly identified needs for more collaboration. They identified the need to share more IEP information with the regular education teacher, to seek teacher volunteers for inclusion programs, to have the special education inclusion teacher in the classroom more often, and to see

the inclusion teacher as a teacher. The interview data from Carson High School also illustrated how the special education teacher is viewed as a disciplinarian in inclusion classes and the special education teacher stays out of the way during class lectures in inclusion classes.

At first glance, one would think that the differences in the practices between the schools would be related to the theme topic of placement due the identification of concerns being related to collaboration in the inclusion setting. A variation in the placement theme topic, however, was not distinct in comparing the interview data from both schools. Bethany High School teachers identified a preference for students with disabilities to be taught in the regular classroom with a limited class size and the opportunity for a fundamental skills elective course. Carson High School teachers also identified a preference for students with disabilities in the regular classroom while also realizing that the regular classroom is not always the best placement.

The differences in practices from the theme topic of collaboration at the micro-system level between Bethany High School and Carson High School had to be traced to the previous subsystem, or the meso-system level. At the meso-system level, differences were distinct in the theme topic of placement, which originated through a difference in the interpretation of the state policy context. At Bethany High School, the school administrator designed a special education program that did not utilize an inclusion model and did not involve cluster grouping of students with disabilities in the regular education classes. At Carson High School, the administrator designed a special education inclusion program that involved cluster grouping.

A comparison of the classroom observation data from Bethany High School and Carson High School confirmed the differences found in the areas of collaboration at the micro-system level and placement at the meso-system level. At Bethany High School, students with disabilities were placed in the regular classroom in small numbers or not in clusters. At Carson High School,

students with disabilities were placed in the regular classroom in large clusters of up to 11 students with disabilities. In Carson High School, a special education inclusion teacher was assigned to the inclusion class. In 4 of the observations at Carson High School, the special education inclusion teacher who was supposed to be in the classroom was not present.

Several negative effects were observed in the classrooms with cluster grouping at Carson High School. The teacher spent most of the class period bringing the class to order. Many students wanted the teacher's attention and acted out when they did not get the attention. A student with a disability repeatedly requested his special education teacher and became frustrated when he did not have access to the teacher.

Several positive effects were observed in the classrooms without cluster grouping at Bethany High School. The teacher provided whole group instruction, but worked with students individually during guided practice activities. A senior student who was working as a high school intern also worked with students individually during guided practice activities. The teacher had time to call students back to his desk in pairs to check for their understanding through questioning. When it was observed the students needed extra review, the teacher reviewed the key concepts with the pairs of students at his desk. The teacher also took the time to conference with students individually about their academic progress as recorded in their portfolios. Students were engaged in the lesson activities and were very content.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE FINDINGS PART III

#### Synthesis of Patterns across the Amazon County High School Environment

The findings determined in this embedded multi-case study were based on the examination of how specially-designed instruction is being used in the total high school educational environment to ensure that students with disabilities are participating and progressing in the general education curriculum. Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model, which was used as the study's conceptual framework, provided the units for the embedded multi-case analysis. In the next section, the 4 ecological educational systems known as the macro-system, the exo-system, the meso-system, and the micro-system, and their corresponding research questions are addressed and compared.

#### *Setting the State Vision and Strategies to Ensure Access to the General Curriculum*

The question that directed the research for the macro-system level was, "What is the state policy context addressing the federal mandate?" A review of DOE documents showed that the state policy context addressing the federal mandate is built on the vision of enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. The strategies to meet this vision are designed around the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. Enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures is therefore the answer to the macro-system level research question. The data that was collected at the exo-system, meso-system, and micro-system levels show that the state policy context is penetrating the patterns of practice of the total high school environment in Amazon County.

### Penetrating Patterns of Practice at the Exo-System Level

The question that directed the research for the exo-system level was, “How have the practices of district level administrators been affected by these policies?” A review of interview transcripts and district documents revealed that district level administrative practices have evolved to include practices that fell within 8 different theme categories (e.g. accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, placement, monitoring teachers, professional development, resources, and school renewal). All of the 8 theme categories were also grouped under the state’s strategy to provide and implement state regulations. There were 3 of the 8 theme categories that were grouped under the state’s strategy to provide and implement professional development training (e.g. collaboration, professional development, and resources). There were 4 of the 8 theme categories that were grouped under the state’s strategy to provide and implement accountability measures (e.g. monitoring of student learning, placement, resources, and school renewal).

Distinctive occurrences within the exo-system level that originated from the macro-system level included the following: (a) having a focus on accommodations and modifications through the IEP process; (b) encouraging collaboration between special education departments and regular education departments at the school level while also modeling that collaboration at the district level; (c) disaggregating SOL testing data for students and establishing a local diversity task force to address discrepancies found in the data; (d) working with principals to monitor teachers; (e) holding school based meetings to examine student placement; (f) including regular education staff in professional development training opportunities; (g) and allotting money for extra textbooks to be highlighted and to be read on lower reading levels. In moving towards the future, the district office has included all students in the Six-Year Plan and will build

upon the practices in place while simultaneously being ready to change as the needs of students change.

Of the 8 theme district categories, 5 were found to be consistent in the other subordinate environments. At the district level, accommodations and modifications were identified. A point of emphasis at the district level was found to be using the IEP tool for access and to describe accommodations or modifications. Collaboration at the district level was not only initiated but also modeled through the district's collaboration with the regular education department and the special education department at the district level. Also emerging was the district practice of administrators monitoring student learning by reviewing progress information such as SOL data and Flanagan results. Examining student placement at the district level also became apparent as a practice. The district administrator met with school administrators to look at the issue of placement and to ensure that the IEP process had been used to determine placement appropriate to the individual needs of students. A strong emphasis on professional development was also present at the district level. Unique to the special education professional development activities involved opening courses and workshops to special education teachers as well as to regular education teachers.

#### Penetrating Patterns of Practice at the Meso-System Level

The question that directed the research for the meso-system level was, "How have the practices of building level administrators been affected by these policies?" A review of interview transcripts and tours of facilities revealed that building level administrative practices have evolved to include practices that fell within 17 different themes. Based on the 17 meso-system themes, there were 8 different theme categories (e.g. accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, placement, monitoring teachers, professional

development, facilities, and school focus). All of the 8 theme categories were also grouped under the state's strategy to provide and implement state regulations. There was 1 of the 8 theme categories that was grouped under the state's strategy to provide and implement professional development training (e.g. professional development). There were also 7 of the 8 theme categories that were grouped under the state's strategy to provide and implement accountability measures (e.g. monitoring of student learning, placement, and school focus).

Distinctive occurrences within the meso-system level that originated from the macro-system level included the following: (a) the administrator identifying the increased stress level on teachers who have several students in a class with several accommodations; (b) the special education and the regular education collaboration between the high school and the middle school; (c) the administrative review to address the monitoring of student progress; (d) monitoring teachers through observations and the examination of their documents; (e) IEP and regulation professional development training; (f) ensuring building access to students with disabilities; and (g) basing the focus of the school on data, standards, and laws. It was interesting, however, to become aware of the fact that in one high school an inclusion model is being implemented with cluster grouping and in the other high school an inclusion model is not being implemented. The administrator in the school not using cluster grouping said he feels it is best to limit grouping because that draws attention to the student and could have a negative affect on the student's self-esteem.

Of the 8 theme administrative building level categories, 5 were found to be consistent in the other subordinate environments. For example, in reviewing the specific practices under the theme category of accommodations and modifications, it can be seen that the building level administrator identified ways to provide accommodations and modifications to students with

disabilities. In comparing specific practices under the theme category of collaboration, it can be seen that forms of collaboration were also modeled at the building level between zone principals. Under the theme topic of monitoring student learning, it can be seen how the building administrator monitors the students' progress as well as teachers. Under the theme topic of placement, one of the school administrators implemented an inclusion model to ensure 95% participation rate in state testing for students with disabilities by one principal. The other administrator did not implement inclusion due to a philosophical difference and the concern that inclusion would negatively affect students' self-esteem. In comparing specific practices under the theme category of professional development, the School principal at Carson High School shared how he followed up district training events with daily conversations about the training content. The administrator from Carson High School also discussed past training at his school and future training opportunities. The administrator from Bethany High School did not offer comments on the topic of professional development training, but a review of documents showed that teachers in his school had participated in training related to access to the general curriculum.

#### Penetrating Patterns of Practice at the Micro-System Level

The question that directed the research for the micro-system level was, "How have instructional and assessment practices used by general and special educators been affected by these policies?" A review of interview transcripts and classroom observation notes revealed that instructional and assessment practices have evolved to include practices that fell within 8 different theme categories (e.g. accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, placement, professional development, assessment tools, content, and methods). All of the 8 theme categories were also grouped under the state's strategy to provide and implement state regulations. There was 1 of the 8 theme categories that was grouped under the

state's strategy to provide and implement professional development training (e.g. professional development). There were 5 of the 8 theme categories that were grouped under the state's strategy to provide and implement accountability measures (e.g. monitoring of student learning, placement, assessment, content, and methods).

Distinctive occurrences within the micro-system level that originated from the macro-system level and penetrated through the exo-system and meso-system levels of the high school environment included the following: (a) using student interns to work individually with students in the regular classroom; (b) special education teachers sharing IEP information with regular education teachers and regular education teachers sharing student progress information with special education teachers; (c) identifying other factors that can interfere with student achievement; (d) placing students in an elective fundamental skills class to support the regular classroom activities; (e) using a variety of assessment tools; (f) finding ways to slow down the curriculum to teach for mastery; and (g) integrating remediation into classroom instruction. There were also 2 teachers from Carson High School who discussed their professional development experiences related to differentiating course work.

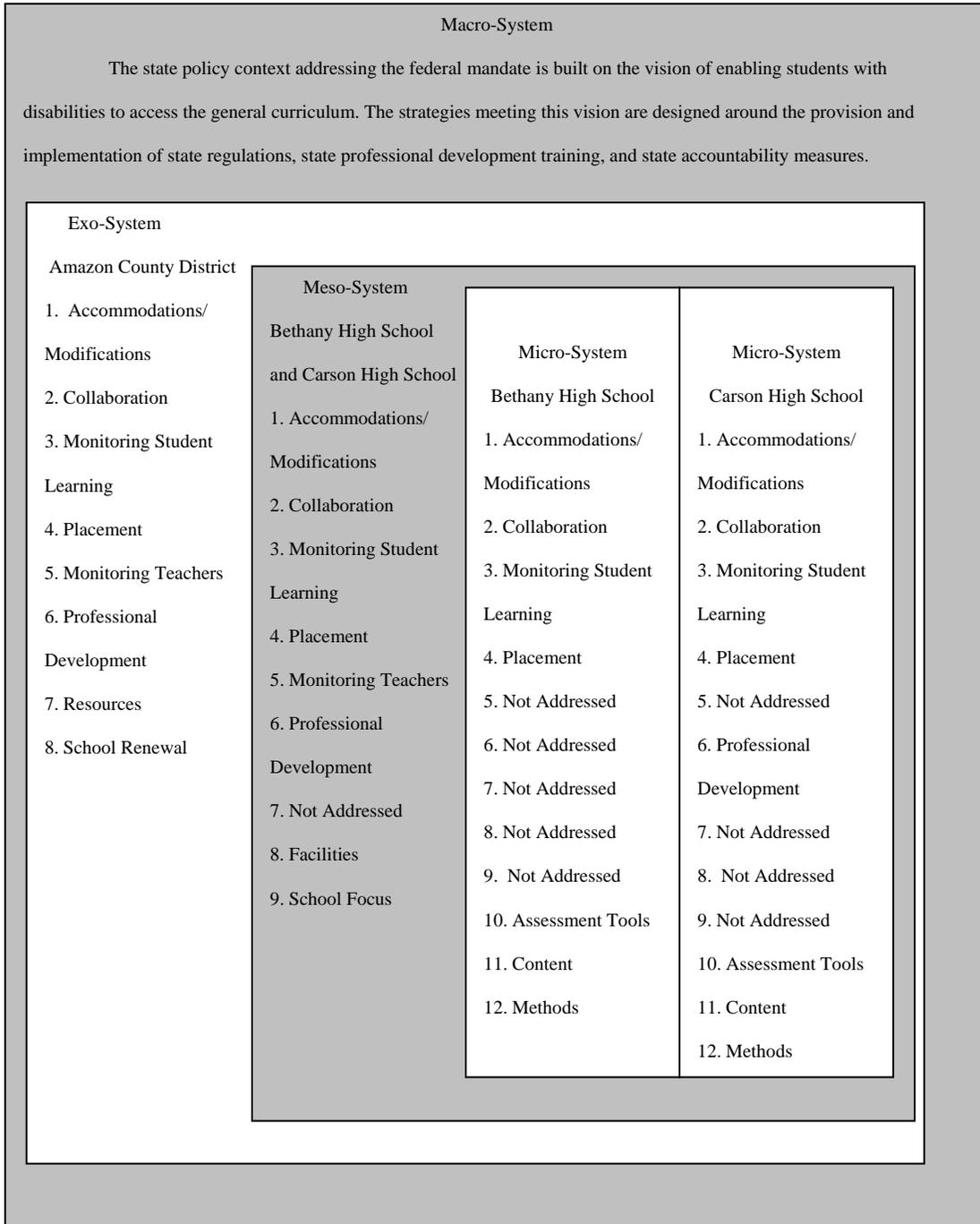
It was of particular interest to find that in the inclusion school teachers were using such practices as peer tutoring and mnemonic teaching very little while these practices were used on a much larger scale at the non-inclusion school. It was also of interest to note that according to the teacher interviews from the inclusion school, teachers did not have the opportunity to volunteer for the inclusion program. Teachers at the inclusion school also identified the need for the special education teachers to be present more in inclusion classrooms instead of attending meetings during the inclusion classes. They also identified the need for more communication between the regular education teachers and the special education teachers at the inclusion school. In addition,

the special education teacher at the inclusion school voiced the need for special education teachers to be viewed as real teachers in the inclusion classes.

Of the 8 classroom level categories, 5 were found to be consistent in the other subordinate environments. At the classroom level, teachers relayed how they used a variety of accommodations and modifications with students with disabilities. Collaboration at the classroom level was noted but limited at Carson High School. The teachers from Carson High School identified concerns related to collaboration that stemmed from the practice of inclusion. The teachers shared many ways they monitored student learning and included how they work with other teachers and parents to help with this task. The classroom teachers noted that the best placement for students with disabilities is in the regular classroom but added that a limited number of students with disabilities should be placed in the classroom. The teachers in Bethany High School also noted the importance of the students with disabilities being supported by a fundamental skills class. Even though teachers from both high schools participated in professional development training on the topic of access to the general curriculum as was determined by the review of documents, the emphasis on professional development was not widely acknowledged. Only 2 teachers from Carson High School mentioned professional development training as they discussed how instructional and assessment practices used by general and special educators have been affected by policies.

#### Summary of Practice Themes in Relation to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Framework

As illustrated in Figure 7, across the total Amazon County high school environment there were 13 categories of themes which included: (a) accommodations and modifications; (b) collaboration; (c) monitoring student learning; (d) placement; (e) monitoring teachers; (f) professional development; (g) resources; (h) school renewal, (i) facilities; (j) school focus; (k)



*Figure 7. Summary of practice themes in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System Framework.*

assessment tools; (l) content; and (m) methods. At the exo-system level, there were 2 categories of themes unique to that level. These exo-system theme categories included resources and school renewal. At the meso-system level, there were 2 categories of themes unique to that level. These meso-system theme categories included facilities and school focus. At the micro-system level, there were 3 categories of themes unique to that level. These micro-system theme categories included assessment tools, content, and methods. All of the themes, however, can be traced back to the state policy context and specifically to one of the provision and implementation strategies (e.g. state regulations, professional development training, and accountability measures). The theme topics: (a) accommodations and modifications, (b) collaboration, (c) monitoring student learning, (d) placement, and (e) professional development training were constant across the total high school environment. Of the 5 theme topics, only professional development appeared to be somewhat weak with only one school acknowledging differentiation training activities. The topic was still seen as consistent due to the review of documents showing that all high school teachers in Amazon County did participate in professional development training related to access to the general curriculum.

#### Linking Consistent Practices with Past Research

A synthesis, of how past research related to the consistent practice themes, was conducted. The synthesis entailed reviewing past literature and comparing that literature to the consistent patterns that emerged at the district administrative level, the building administrative level, and the classroom level. All of the consistent patterns of practice that emerged could be linked to research previously conducted. In the following sections, the relationship of the prominent patterns of practice to past research is discussed.

### *Accommodations and Modifications*

The pattern of accommodations and modifications presented 30 unique practices. The practices associated with this pattern illustrated ways in which individualization was occurring for students with disabilities. In fact, the number of practices associated with this pattern was diverse and plentiful, which illustrated the high value participants placed on this topic. Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) determined that curricular modifications were the most extensively used and effective practices to implement inclusion successfully. Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) reinforced the importance of preserving the individualization of instruction when teaching students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Dailey et al. (2000) underscored the importance of using the IEP as the tool for declaring the supports needed by students with disabilities to participate in a standards-based curriculum and assessment program. Espin et al. (1998) suggested emphasizing individualization when writing IEPs for less restrictive settings. Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) shared that instructional accommodations such as mnemonic devices and peer-mediated instruction could help individual students better identify, organize, comprehend, and remember content information.

The district office policies and administrators in this study echoed the importance of the IEP as the tool for access and the tool that describes accommodations and/or modifications. In comparing the case schools, it was interesting to note the differences in accommodations and modifications. Although one would expect teachers in the school that used a formal inclusion model to rely on recommended practices such as those mentioned by Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) and Nolet and McLaughlin (2000), these practices were more obvious in the traditionally structured school.

In the inclusion school with cluster grouping, peer tutoring was only used in the science class. The other content area teachers in the inclusion school did not feel the strategy of peer tutoring worked well due to the discipline problems the strategy created. In the inclusion school, using mnemonics was not perceived to be helpful as one teacher shared that the students have too much trouble just remembering the mnemonic device. In the school with the more traditional program without cluster grouping, the teachers reported various ways they used mnemonic devices and peer tutoring. They perceived these practices as most helpful for students with disabilities in the regular classroom.

### *Collaboration*

Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) supported the use of collaboration as an effective practice for teaching students with disabilities in the regular classroom. Collaboration was found to be occurring at all levels of the high school environment. It was of particular interest to find that the district office not only initiated collaboration for the other levels, but also collaborated at their own level. For example, personnel from special services frequently planned activities for professional development with the department of instruction. At the meso-system level, the principal from Carson High School expanded his collaboration outside his school to the principal of the feeder middle school.

Even though teachers from both schools reported collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers, there were patterns of concern related to collaboration at Carson High School. Weiss and Lloyd (2002) recommended ensuring that special educators are viewed in the role of a *teacher*, whether they are teaching in the regular education classroom or teaching in the special education classroom. Teachers from Carson High School identified that the special education inclusion teacher: was working mainly as a disciplinarian, was often pulled

from the assigned classroom to take on other special education duties, and stayed out of the way during class lectures. The special education teacher from Carson High School also identified that there was a need for the students to see the inclusion teacher as a teacher.

The data in this study revealed that special education teachers had the same difficulties teaching as intensively in the regular education classroom as they did in the resource settings. This was a similar finding to that of Weiss & Lloyd. Any intensive teaching was done in the resource setting, suggesting that it is very difficult for special educators to assume their individualized teaching role in the general education classroom.

#### *Monitoring Student Learning*

Heward (2003) strongly supported guiding student performance in ways that provide “careful, ongoing monitoring of student progress and frequent and direct measures/assessment of student learning that inform modifications in instruction” (p. 187). Dailey et al. (2000) recommended developing a school based and school faculty led professional development program that helps general and special education teachers integrate the standards-based curriculum and prepares students for assessments. From this previous research, the importance of developing strategies to help prepare students for assessment is noted. It was determined that monitoring student learning to track how students with disabilities are progressing in the standards-based curriculum was happening at all levels throughout Amazon County. A fair question might be: Was monitoring the learning of students with disabilities conducted as intensively and specifically as it should have been?

A diversity task force was created in the school district to address the needs of subgroups, which included students with disabilities. This committee reviewed disaggregated testing data to determine how groups of students were performing on standards-based assessments and made

holistic recommendations on how to assist these students. The outcome of the committee was a recommendation to provide in-service training for all teachers in the county, which occurred during the 2002-2003 school year. Even though the in-service information was of great value, the emphasis was not on strategies to support the success of individual learners as might be expected for students with disabilities. The emphasis was on providing supportive accommodations and modifications that could be used as a part of whole group instruction (e.g. graphic organizers, peer tutoring, and mnemonic devices). The district office also relayed how SOL test scores are disaggregated by subgroups and how instructional needs are identified based on that data. The Director of Special Services said she met with each principal and several special education teachers from each school to discuss the disaggregated SOL test results and what can be done to help students with disabilities to become more successful.

The building level administrators focused on communicating with parents and teachers as well as conducting IEP meetings for students with disabilities who failed a particular marking period as an important part of monitoring student learning. The building level administrators, however, emphasized how a lack of time and the large amount of paperwork made tracking of student progress difficult.

The regular education teachers who had students with disabilities in their classes shared how they used class grades, SOL practice tests, portfolios, communicating with parents and other teachers, and identifying outside factors such as attendance as ways they monitored student learning. The emphasis of monitoring student learning was on communicating progress information to IEP managers.

Heward (2003) stressed that educators needed to do “direct monitoring student learning in a manner that would inform modifications in instruction” (p. 187). Educators in Amazon

County did not suggest using the process of monitoring student learning to inform individualized modifications. Instead, the results from monitoring student learning were mainly used to structure whole group instruction and to communicate more effectively with parents.

### *Placement*

Mastropieri and Scruggs (1997) recognized the continued need for a continuum of placements and services and the need for assigning special education services on a case-by-case bases. The Director of Special Education for Amazon County relayed how she conducted school visitations. During the visitations, the Director of Special Services met with a school administrator and a committee of teachers. In the meetings, the Director of Special Services examined if IEP teams determined student placements through consideration of a continuum of alternative placements based upon students' needs and the IEP process.

In comparing and contrasting information from the pattern of placement from the case schools, however, a significant difference was noted. In Carson High School, an inclusion program with cluster grouping was implemented. The administrator from Carson High School shared that the inclusion model helped provide access to regular instruction and SOL testing. Access to SOL testing was seen to help ensure a 95% participation rate in SOL testing for students with disabilities. In Bethany High School, an inclusion program was not implemented and not as many students with disabilities were placed in one classroom. The administrator from Bethany High School resisted placing large numbers of special education students in any one class saying that grouping in clusters was not supportive of self-esteem issues.

The research of Daniel and King (1997) showed that careful attention must be paid to the number of students with disabilities placed in a regular classroom. In the inclusion classroom observations at Carson High School, it was seen that 11 students with disabilities had been

placed in a regular education class of 18 students. Negative effects of the inclusion placement such as discipline problems, lack of student individualized time with the teacher, and student emotional tensions were observed. Such negative effects were not observed during any of the observations at Bethany High School where only 3 or 4 students with disabilities were present in the regular education classrooms. Howard and Tryon (2002) emphasized through their research the importance of watching for depression in students with disabilities who may be feeling added stress or pressure from being placed in the regular classroom. Whether the emotional tension observed at Carson High School led to depression is unknown, but the discipline problems and student emotional tensions observed supported the idea that students with disabilities who are placed in regular classrooms may be more prone to experience emotional tensions.

#### *Professional Development*

Dailey et al. (2000) recommended that special education and regular education teachers be trained on how to develop accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities to participate in the standards-based curriculum. At the district level, the topic of access to the general curriculum has been a focus for professional development training. A team comprised of a high school principal, a special education teacher, and a regular education teacher were trained in the area of Access to the General Curriculum. The team went to every high school and middle school in the district as trainers. The training sessions were then supported as district administrators conducted IEP training sessions, as the IEPs contain many specific accommodations and modifications required for the individual student. In addition, the district's professional development plan reflects the Dailey et al. (2000) recommendation; the plan includes ongoing training for regular education staff as well as special education staff and

parents on how to develop accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities to participate in the district's standards-based curriculum.

Dailey et al. (2000) recommended that collegiate training programs for general education teachers that teach about the philosophy of inclusion and the pedagogical knowledge and strategies for teaching students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum be offered. The district paid for teams of special education teachers and regular education teachers to take a course on the topic of collaboration at a nearby college. SOL Content Academies at a nearby university on the topic of differentiation were also made available to educators in the district.

Even though all teachers in the district were a part of the Access to the General Curriculum training, none made mention of it during their interviews. Only at Carson High School did teachers share how they had been given funding by their principal for differentiation course work. The strong emphasis on professional development at the exo-system level was not widely acknowledged at the micro-system level even though the training was done.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While access to the general curriculum is necessary, the concept is still revolutionary. With the EAHCA, students with disabilities were provided access to a public education. There were still concerns, however, over students with disabilities being placed in separate classes and not receiving the opportunity to learn the same curriculum that was being taught to students without disabilities in the general classroom (Senate Report, 1997). A new focus on the accommodations and adjustments that would be necessary for students with disabilities to participate and progress in the general curriculum was therefore initiated through the 1997 reauthorization to the IDEA (Yell, 1998). Because of the access to the general curriculum mandate, students with disabilities were not only to have *physical* access to a public school education but also to have *cognitive* access to a public school education. It was necessary that a mandate be created to ensure that students with disabilities would have the same rights and opportunities to be taught the same curriculum as students without disabilities.

The concept is revolutionary in the sense that educators are responding to the policy concept through the implementation of many outstanding practices across the educational environment, but are struggling with the reality of maintaining a truly individualized focus in their delivery of instruction for those students with disabilities who are placed in the regular classroom. The concept is also revolutionary because providing the opportunity for a student with a disability to learn the regular content will often involve appropriately prescribed accommodations and modifications that compensate for the effects of a specific disability. These specially prescribed accommodations and modifications will require more resources that will not come cheaply.

The purpose of this study was to describe how specially-designed instruction is being used to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are participating and progressing within it. The findings in this study described how the VDOE has established a policy context, which ignited patterns of practice that penetrated from the district office level to the building administrative level and then to the classroom level. The findings in this study were massive and insightful. Forty different practice themes with 207 related practices were identified. How the consistent patterns of practice, which related to 5 particular theme topics found across the educational environment, interacted with each other suggested that policy interpretations can also affect “the well-being and development of human beings by determining the conditions of their lives” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. xiii).

In the following sections, the overall research question is addressed along with a discussion of the consistent patterns of practice found in each sub-system. The conclusions of the study are presented along with vignettes that illustrate approaches used at Carson High School and at Bethany High School to ensure access the general curriculum for students with disabilities. Implications for practice along with recommendations for future research are then discussed. The chapter closes with a brief reflections segment.

### Discussion of the Findings

The overall research question for this study was, “What organizational and instructional patterns of practice are being used to ensure that high school students with disabilities are receiving specially-designed instruction and are participating and progressing in the general education curriculum?” The findings from this study revealed that the origin of the patterns of practice began at the macro-system level, or at the state department of education. It was found that the state policy context addressing the federal mandate is built on the vision of enabling

students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. In addition, it was found that the strategies to meet this vision are designed around the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. Most importantly, it was determined that the patterns of practice throughout the total high school environment of Amazon County were initiated through state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures.

Forty themes with 207 related practices were identified, all of which are listed in Appendix C. Out of the 40 themes, the following 13 different theme topics emerged: (a) accommodations and modifications, (b) collaboration, (c) monitoring student learning, (d) placement, (e) monitoring teachers, (f) professional development, (g) resources, (h) school renewal, (i) facilities, (j) school focus, (k) assessment tools, (l) content, and (m) methods.

Five of the 13 theme topics were found to be constant throughout the total educational environment of Amazon County: (a) accommodations and modifications, (b) collaboration, (c) monitoring student learning, (d) placement, and (e) professional development. These 5 patterns and the 117 specific practices used to address them, from the exo to the meso systems in Amazon County, are listed in Appendix D in comparison charts. Viewing each unique practice from each sub-system within the corresponding pattern provides a perspective on the flow of practices from one system to another.

#### *Accommodations and Modifications across the Educational Environment*

The district office administration articulated the importance of using the IEP as the tool for access and the tool to describe the accommodations and modifications students with disabilities are to receive. At the school administrative level, the administrators expressed ways in which accommodations and modifications could be provided and acknowledged that teachers

often feel stressed due to having to provide so many accommodations and modifications to a large number of students with disabilities. Teachers shared ways they provide accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. Interestingly, teachers at the inclusion school with cluster grouping reported that accommodations such as peer tutoring create discipline problems and that using mnemonic devices are often too complicated and disruptive for the students. Teachers, however, in the traditionally structured, or non-inclusion school with no cluster grouping, reported that they relied on recommended practices such as using mnemonic devices and peer tutoring.

#### *Collaboration across the Educational Environment*

Administrators at the district level not only articulated the expectation that collaboration is to occur between special education and regular education departments, but they modeled their expectation of collaboration at the district level. High school administrators not only encouraged collaboration but at Carson High School, administrative special education and regular education collaboration between the high school and the feeder middle school was modeled. Collaboration at the classroom level occurred at both case schools regarding the sharing of special education information with regular education teachers and the sharing of regular education information with special education teachers. At Carson High School, however, several concerns related to the topic of collaboration emerged. Teachers articulated the need to share more IEP information with the regular education teachers, not to use the special education teacher just as a disciplinarian, to seek teacher volunteers for inclusion co-teaching, for the special education teacher to be present more often in the inclusion classes, and for the students to see the special education teacher as a teacher. Based on the information from the teachers, access to the curriculum was hindered when special education teachers' skills were not maximized.

### *Monitoring Student Learning across the Educational Environment*

At the district level, administrators created a diversity task force to look at test results by subgroups and to make instructional recommendations. As a part of this process, SOL testing data were disaggregated by subgroups. The data from the students with disabilities were also reviewed to identify group areas of weaknesses. Other student monitoring measures, such as school visitations, were used by the district office. During the school visitations, the school administrators and teachers had to explain how they were ensuring that students in their schools were receiving access to the general curriculum. School administrators articulated how they ensured that student progress in the regular classroom was relayed to IEP managers and to parents. The school administrators also shared how it is their responsibility to ensure that the county policy of holding an IEP meeting for students with disabilities who receive failing grades is implemented. At the classroom level, teachers explained ways they monitored student learning. The classroom level practices dealt with keeping records of student progress and communicating that progress to IEP case managers and parents. Using monitoring of student learning, however, to inform individual accommodations and modifications was not evident.

### *Placement across the Educational Environment*

The district administration shared how placement should be examined through a continuum of services and through the IEP process. To ensure that IEP committees were determining appropriate placements for students with disabilities, school visitations by the district administration were done to examine placement criteria. School administrators and teachers had to explain how the IEP teams in their schools were making placement decisions. At the building administrative level, a philosophical difference emerged between the two case schools. Bethany High School administration implemented a special education program that

placed students with disabilities in the regular classroom without cluster grouping and without a special education teacher. Students with disabilities at Bethany High School who needed the assistance of a special education teacher were placed in self-contained classes with no more than eight other students with disabilities. Carson High School administration implemented a special education program that placed all students with disabilities, with few exceptions, in the regular classroom with a cluster of other students with disabilities and a special education teacher.

Teachers from both high schools shared how it is preferable for students with disabilities to be in the regular classroom, but emphasized the need for smaller class sizes. Teachers at Bethany High School identified that the regular education curriculum is too fast-paced for many students with disabilities. Teachers at Carson High School identified that the regular education classroom is not always the most conducive place for students with disabilities to learn. Based on classroom observations, students with disabilities in regular classrooms at Bethany High School received more individualized instruction than the students with disabilities at Carson High School who were a part of cluster grouping. When 11 students with disabilities are in a class of 18 students, it is difficult for the teacher to provide the intense and specific instruction that is needed. Merely placing students with disabilities in the regular classroom does not ensure access to the general curriculum. For students with disabilities to receive access to the general curriculum in the regular education class, they must be provided with individualized support.

#### *Professional Development across the Educational Environment*

District administrators prepared and implemented a professional development plan that included district workshops, college course offerings, and the availability of professional development resource reading materials. A large portion of the professional development plan related to access to the general curriculum training as well as IEP development training. At the

building administrative level, special education professional development training emphasized IEP development, IDEA, and NCLB. Only two teachers from Carson High School referenced professional development training. Even though a thorough professional development plan had been created and implemented at the district level, the training was not referenced by teachers in their interviews.

### *Pattern of Concern Related to Inclusion*

Although the state policy context initiates students with disabilities accessing the general curriculum through the provision and implementation strategies of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures, the spirit of *genuine* access can dissipate. This dissipation of *genuine* access can occur if students with disabilities are placed in an inclusion setting as a part of a large cluster group of other students with disabilities.

Influenced by parental requests for an inclusion program and the NCLB mandate to include 95% of students with disabilities in the state testing program, the principal of Carson High School opted to have clusters of students with disabilities attend regular education classes along with a special education teacher. In this study, however, it was clear how difficult it was for the unique needs of a large cluster of students with disabilities to be met simultaneously in the regular classroom. Even though district administrators made visits to the high schools to interview administrators and teachers regarding the progress of students with disabilities and to examine how IEP committees determined student placements, the weakness of cluster grouping was not obvious. Had classroom observations been conducted, the problem related to cluster grouping may have been identified by the district administrators.

To prevent the dissipation of *genuine* access, extraordinary measures will have to be taken. The measures might include the addition of district office personnel, hiring teachers with

dual certifications in special education as well as in content areas, redesigning master schedules to offer classes in two-year sequences that will slow the pace of instruction so there will be more time for accommodations and modifications, and providing smaller class sizes to teach the general curriculum. These additions will require more resources, but it is imperative that the hard realities of not providing access to the general curriculum in the name of providing access to the general curriculum be addressed.

## Conclusions

### *Conclusion I*

State policy is enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum through the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. This well-established policy context has initiated patterns of practice that have penetrated through all levels of the educational environment. The patterns initiated by state policy appeared to strengthen and ensure access to the general curriculum.

### *Conclusion II*

Teachers in the traditionally structured school, non-inclusion, relied on recommended practices such as those mentioned by Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) and Nolet and McLaughlin (2000) to help ensure access to the general curriculum. Accommodations and modifications, such as using mnemonic devices and peer tutoring, were more prevalent in the traditional school.

### *Conclusion III*

Access to the curriculum was hindered when special education teachers' skills were not maximized, when there was insufficient collaboration, when it was perceived that co-teaching

partners were not assigned to their roles voluntarily, and when students did not perceive special educators as teachers.

#### *Conclusion IV*

The results from monitoring student learning were mainly used to structure whole group instruction and to communicate more effectively with parents. A lack of time and the large amount of paperwork made tracking of student progress difficult. Educators in Amazon County did not suggest using the process of monitoring student learning to inform individualized modifications as suggested by Heward (2003).

#### *Conclusion V*

Placement in the general education classroom does not ensure access to the general curriculum. At Carson High School, students with disabilities were part of an inclusion program that involved cluster grouping. Students with disabilities from Bethany High School were placed in regular classrooms if they did not need intensive individualization from a special education teacher. As mentioned earlier, the smaller groups of students with disabilities in the traditional classrooms were provided closer instructional attention.

#### *Conclusion VI*

Although state policy set clear direction, that direction was interpreted differently at different levels across the sub-system. How various actors implemented the state regulations either promoted or inhibited the individualized focus that many students with disabilities relied on to *genuinely* participate and progress in the general education curriculum.

#### *Conclusion VII*

Much of the work involved in providing access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities involves serious changes to the patterns in which schools are organized to

provide general education. In conclusion, it is imperative to confront a hard reality and a clear and present danger to students whose learning needs are exceptional: Genuine access does not come cheaply and change does not come quickly. It is far less likely that school systems will invest more in special education personnel and programming, and far more likely that they will start failing to identify children as having disabilities—especially learning disabilities—in the first place, eliminating the IDEA’s mandate to be so specific in addressing students’ needs.

The subsequent vignettes developed from classroom observation data can best illustrate approaches used at Carson High School and at Bethany High School to ensure access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.

*A Glimpse of Access to the General Curriculum at Carson High School*

In an earth science classroom at Carson High School, a 9th grade boy with rusty, curly hair sits at a table in a middle row on the right hand side of the room. The earth science classroom is an inclusion classroom. There are 11 students with disabilities in the class of 18 students. The boy is one of the 11 students with a disability. The special education teacher who is supposed to be in the classroom is not present. She is testing other students.

The science teacher stands in the front of the room beside an overhead projector directing the students to copy the vocabulary words shown on the screen. Students chattering can be heard throughout the room. To the left of the boy, several students are up moving to different seats. After directing the students to copy the vocabulary words, the teacher takes roll and realizes that several students are not sitting in their assigned seats. The teacher takes several minutes to have the students move to their proper seats. The students argue about their seats, but finally concede.

The science teacher then instructs the students to look up the definition of each vocabulary word and to copy the definitions in their notebooks. Four students enter the

classroom tardy. The teacher then notices that a few of the students are still not in their assigned seats and takes more time to ensure that all students are sitting in their correct seats. The students around the boy with the rusty, curly hair talk impulsively. A student gets out of his seat to borrow a piece of paper and says something about copying the junk.

The boy with the rusty, curly hair raises his hand and without being called upon asks to go to one of his special education teachers' classrooms to get extra help. The teacher continues talking to another student. In frustration, the student shouts out the teacher's name. The teacher responds by telling the student to wait. The student raises his hand and waits. After a period of several long minutes, the student hollers out the teacher's name again. The teacher is still working individually with another student and does not acknowledge the student. Finally, the boy gets out of his seat and approaches the teacher. He asks if he can go to the special education teacher's classroom. The teacher responds, "No." The student questions why. The teacher responds, "Because you are not supposed to."

The teacher comments that he sees that only two people have finished copying the words. The student with the rusty, curly hair holds up his paper in anger demonstrating that he too has copied all the words. He has just not defined the words. The noise level of the students' chatter increases. The teacher goes to the door, and switches the lights on and off to get the class's attention. After the students settle down, the teacher reviews the posted classroom rules on the bulletin board. The boy with the rusty, curly hair sits still staring into space.

On another day, in the Carson High School science teacher's same class, the same 9th grade boy with rusty, curly hair sits on the left hand side of the classroom. The special education teacher who is supposed to be in the classroom is still not present. She is still testing other students.

Students are directed to copy questions from the overhead projector. The students around the boy talk impulsively as he stares off into space and fidgets. The science teacher soon sees that students are not sitting in their assigned seats and takes time to get the students situated in their correct seats. As the students move to their correct seats, a student asks where the special education teacher is. The science teacher responds that she is helping other students with testing today. When the boy with the rusty, curly hair gets to his correct seat, he slams his book in anger on the desk.

Several students try to ask questions about the assignment. A few students get out of their seats to seek the science teacher's assistance. The students talk impulsively. After the teacher sees that the students are struggling with the assignment, the teacher tells the students that if they cannot locate an answer, then they can ask the person beside them for help. The student with the rusty, curly hair glares downward.

*A Glimpse of Access to the General Curriculum at Bethany High School*

In a social studies classroom at Bethany High School, a 9th grade girl with long black hair sits at the front of the classroom. There are two students with disabilities in the class of 17 students. The girl is one of the two students with a disability.

As the tardy bell rings, the social studies teacher walks from his door to the front of the classroom. The students are seated and have their notebooks and textbooks out on their desks. The morning announcements are delivered and the social studies teacher begins class with a review session. Students are then given a paper and pencil assignment to check for their understanding. An upperclassman, who has earned the position of student intern, takes his cue from the teacher and walks up and down the rows helping students on one side of the room while the teacher walks up and down the rows helping students on the other side of the room. The

student intern and the teacher meet in the back of the room. They quietly discuss what points should be further reviewed.

Through whole group instruction, the social studies teacher reviews the assignment and helps students understand why a particular answer is correct. He not only provides the students with information, but he explains to students how to remember certain answers (e.g. “Totalitarian--think of it as total control. Remember ‘T’ for total control”). The girl with the long black hair struggles with her reading, but the teacher and student intern are there to assist. What she has trouble reading is explained to her orally.

On another day, in another one of the social studies teacher’s classes from Bethany High School, there are 3 students with a disability in a classroom of 24 students. A 9th grade boy with sandy hair sits in the second seat from the front of the room. The boy is one of the students with a disability.

All students have their class agendas and portfolios out on their desks. The social studies teacher reviews the impact of the Cold War. After a time of questioning for understanding and clarifying of any points not understood, the social studies teacher divides students into pairs to review further the lesson content. As the students work in pairs, he calls students back to his desk two at a time to review with the students. After the review session, the social studies teacher looks through the students’ portfolios. The students are encouraged and the student with a disability smiles a lot during the conference time with the teacher.

#### *Genuine Access to the General Curriculum Can Be a Reality*

As referenced earlier in Chapter Two of this study, Crockett (1999) stated, “*Genuine* access to the general curriculum hinges on giving individual consideration to the unique educational characteristics of the learner so that specialized instruction can actually make the

curriculum accessible” (p.4) [emphasis added]. Responding to the access to the general curriculum mandate simply by placing more students with disabilities in the general classroom may actually *limit* the students’ *genuine* access to the curriculum.

In Carson High School, too many students with disabilities were placed into an inclusion classroom through the practice of clustering. It was extremely difficult for the science teacher to answer all the many student questions and to work with the students in the individualized manner the students needed. Not having the assigned special education teacher present in the classroom compounded the situation. Hearing the students with a disability request the special education teacher and seeing their signs of stress through their acting out illustrated that *genuine* access to the general curriculum was questionable for those special education students.

In Bethany High School, there were just 2 or 3 students with disabilities placed in a regular classroom. All the students were given individualized attention after the lecture presentations either at their desks or in the teacher/student conferences at the teacher’s desk. Seeing the smile on the face of the student with a disability as he saw his progress in his social studies portfolio illustrated that *genuine* access to the general curriculum can be a reality.

#### *Implications for Educators*

Several implications for educators can be drawn from this study. In the next few sections, implications related to the need for district administrators to conduct classroom observations, the need to use assessment results to inform accommodations and modifications, resolving the conflict between IDEA and NCLB, and practices that can hinder or strengthen access to the general curriculum are discussed.

### *District Administrators Conducting Classroom Observations*

Administrators have the responsibility of ensuring that the intent of a policy is implemented. Throughout the district administrative level, outstanding practices were present. Special education district administrators conducting classroom observations, however, was a much needed practice that was not evident. At the time of this study, the Amazon District special education staff was composed of a Director of Special Services, a Specialist for Special Services, and a Special Education Lead Teacher. These three individuals are hard-working, caring, and most knowledgeable professionals. With their everyday demands, there is little to no time for them to conduct routine classroom observations. It would be beneficial for the district to consider adding positions to the office of special services so that problems like the one observed in this study related to inclusion and cluster grouping can be identified and resolved.

### *Using Assessment Results to Inform Accommodations and Modifications*

Due to the NCLB mandate and the need for the schools and the district to meet the Annually Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements, SOL testing data in this study were analyzed by subgroups and used to inform whole group curriculum and instructional decisions. Even though disaggregating data by subgroups and using the data to inform school curriculum decision are outstanding practices, the individualization in the disaggregating process must not be forgotten. At the district level, again this practice would be more possible if there were more administrative positions to work specifically with the special education department. School administrators and teachers, however, should use assessment data to inform individual accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities.

*Resolving the Conflict between IDEA and NCLB*

The access to the general curriculum mandate found in the IDEA emphasizes individualized education that meets the unique needs of a student with a disability so the student can access the general curriculum. The NCLB mandate requires that 95% of students with disabilities in a school participate in the state testing program. In Virginia, students who are in self-contained classes such as Science Skills 9 or Science Prep 9 are not allowed to take an EOC Earth Science, Biology, or Chemistry SOL Test because the course numbers and the course titles do not match the EOC SOL course numbers and course titles. School administrators are then forced to design special education programs that facilitate either SOL testing or individualization that can only occur in a small group setting. The administrator from the inclusion school therefore chose designing a special education program that would ensure 95% of his students with disabilities participated in state testing. According to the administrator, this decision was motivated by the NCLB 95% participation rate requirement. As a result, the IDEA policy was overshadowed by the NCLB policy at the inclusion school; the reason is understandable. How then can a high school design a special education program that fully encompasses the intent of the access to the general curriculum IDEA mandate and the 95% participation rate NCLB mandate?

Zigmond (1997) presented the concept of returning to special education as it was conceived in the 1960s and 1970s. Zigmond said, "I mean special education that is temporary, intensive, and delivered in a pull-out setting" (p. 386). The only way to return to this model in the current policy context is to re-envision the responsibilities of special and general educators and the way in which they are prepared for their roles. This is a very complex undertaking that requires a commitment of resources. One way to implement this model is to foster dual

certification of teachers. For example, if special education teachers were dually certified to teach a particular content, then on the high school level this model could be considered. Students with disabilities could be placed in classes with a content certified special education teacher to receive “opportunities for sustained and consistent time on task, immediate and appropriate feed back, regular and frequent communication of expectations for achievement, and progress monitoring--the building blocks of special education” (p. 387). Having this option would offer a better chance of providing *genuine* individualization while providing SOL testing opportunities as well as standard and modified standard diploma options. Administrators, however, would have to protect the individualized nature of the class by not allowing more than eight students in the class and by providing instructional materials as needed.

Another option to designing a special education high school program that fully encompasses the intent of the access to the general curriculum IDEA mandate and the 95% participation rate NCLB mandate comes from the theme topic of content present at the inner core of the educational system at Bethany High School. There, teachers and administrators found a way to slow the regular education curriculum down so students with disabilities could access the curriculum by having more individualized attention and extended time to learn the material.

The teachers from Bethany High School found that just placing a student in the regular education class was not enough and that some students with disabilities have a difficult time keeping up with the fast pace of the general curriculum. Their solution was to slow the curriculum down by offering courses in two parts. For example, the science department at Bethany High School offers Earth Science Part 1 and Earth Science Part 2. The course sequence takes two years to complete instead of one and provides the opportunity for students with disabilities to have more review and drill before they have to take the SOL test.

The courses taught in a 2-year sequence could be taught by regular educators, but also by special educators with a content certification. The courses taught by the dually certified special educators would benefit students with disabilities because the courses would be able to be offered at a slower pace and in a smaller group setting. Students with disabilities would then have several choices as they sign up for classes. They could choose the regular curriculum taught in a 1-year sequence by a regular education teacher, the regular curriculum taught in a 2-year sequence also by a regular education teacher with a special education teacher assisting, or the regular curriculum taught in a 2-year sequence by a special educator in a small group setting.

The teaching of courses taught in 2 parts and in more individualized and smaller class size settings by content area endorsed special education teachers, could provide a better environment for students with disabilities to have *genuine* access to the general curriculum. In using the model just described, however, special educators must guard against becoming just another regular education teacher. The special education teacher must make it a top priority to use the special education teaching strategies that focus on individualization in the small group setting while teaching the general curriculum.

Administrators should also find ways to help provide funding to reimburse any teacher completing additional collegiate work. For special educators, that course work might address content areas in specific disciplines; for general educators, that course work might address aspects of diversity to help them respond to a wide variety of students, including students with disabilities. If access to the general curriculum is to be *genuine*, then the access to the general curriculum mandate demands extraordinary resources to support it. Additional personnel and training will be necessary and will not appear without funding.

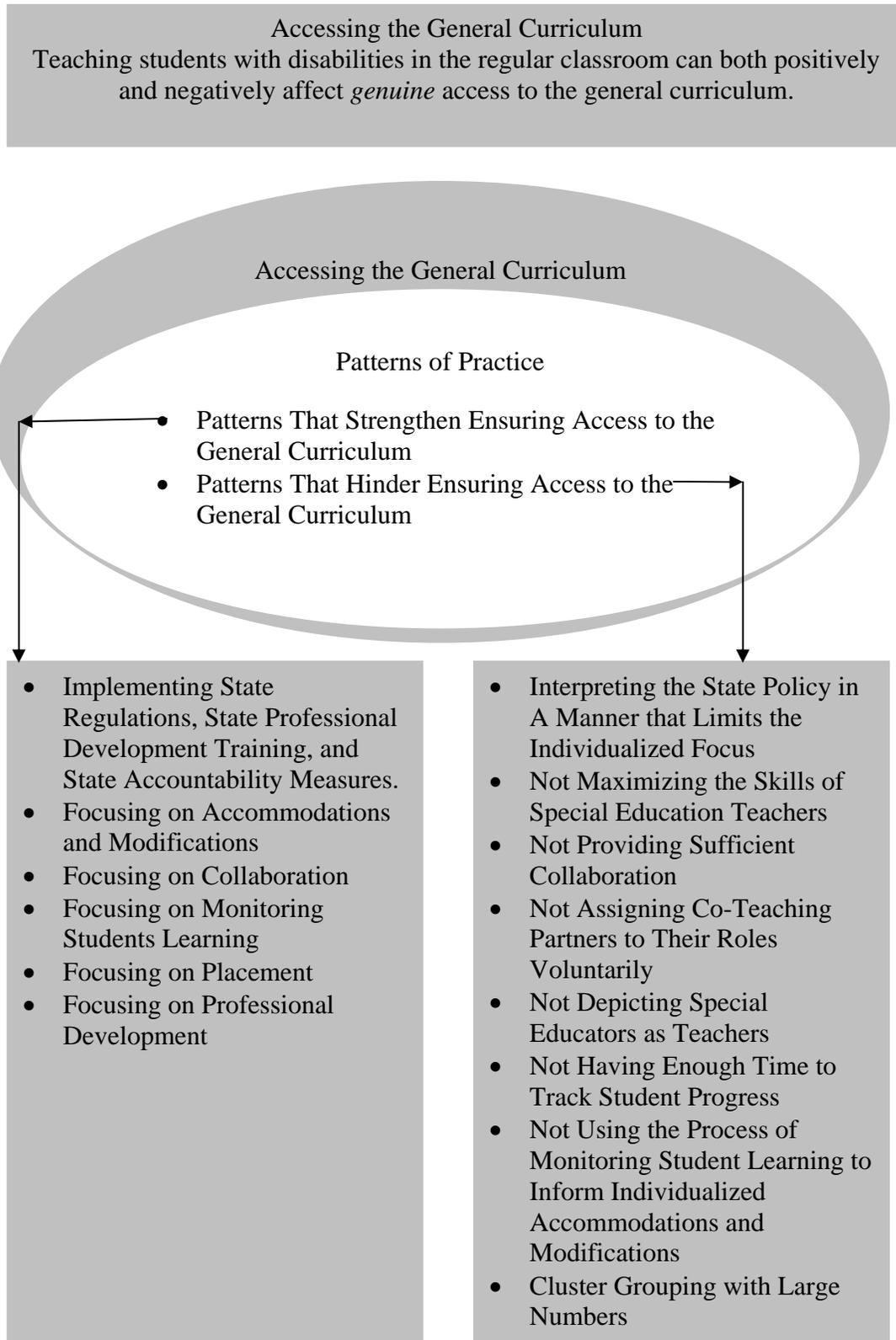
During the school year following the collection of these data, all three high schools in Amazon County were in the process of implementing the inclusion model with cluster grouping as observed in Carson High School. The process has come to be known as Collaboration instead of Inclusion. As schools transition into inclusion or collaboration models, it is important for school administrators to realize that certain factors can strengthen ensuring access to the general curriculum and other factors can hinder ensuring access to the general curriculum.

#### *Practices that Can Hinder or Strengthen Access to the General Curriculum*

Based on the findings from this study, the practices that prevail and strengthen ensuring access to the general curriculum are implementing the state guidelines (state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures) while focusing on accommodations and modifications, collaboration, monitoring student learning, placement, and professional development. The practices that can hinder ensuring access to the general curriculum are interpreting the state policy in a manner that limits the individualized focus, not maximizing the skills of special education teachers, not providing sufficient collaboration, not assigning co-teaching partners to their roles voluntarily, not depicting special educators as teachers, not having enough time to track student progress, not using the process of monitoring student learning to inform individualized accommodations and modifications, and cluster grouping with large numbers of students with disabilities. Figure 8 provides a summary of practices that strengthen and hinder access to the general curriculum.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

This particular study spawned multiple opportunities for future research. An important suggestion for future research involves the study of practices related to collaboration at the secondary level. As a part of the data collection process, teachers from the inclusion school



*Figure 8.* Summary of practices that strengthen and hinder access to the general curriculum.

identified several concerns that related to the practice of collaboration. In the future, it would be of value to conduct a multi-case analysis that focused just on how the practice of collaboration is being used to ensure access to the general curriculum for secondary students with disabilities in inclusion and non-inclusion schools.

In this study, it was also described how the non-inclusion school without cluster grouping used more accommodation and modification practices that were actually recommended for inclusive instruction than the inclusion school with cluster grouping. A future study could involve conducting a multi-case analysis to compare the accommodation and modification practices used with students with disabilities in non-inclusion schools and inclusion schools.

In this study, it was seen how an administrator chose to implement an inclusion special education program due to parent requests and the requirement that 95% of students with disabilities must participate in the state assessment program as dictated by NCLB. Another timely study would be to describe how school administrators are simultaneously responding to the access the access to the general curriculum mandate and to the NCLB 95% participate rate mandate.

The present study might also be replicated in a different state where the special education policy context might not be so clearly established. This lack of clarity would be interesting to trace across levels. Similarly, the present study might be replicated using a different level of schools (e.g. elementary or middle schools).

Lastly, another study might investigate issues in detail from the perspective of the exo-system examining how fiscal and human resources are used within a school system to ensure access to the general curriculum. In this case, cost benefit analyses might be conducted.

### *Reflections*

As described in this study, there were many outstanding patterns of practice used to ensure access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities at all levels and in both schools. I have great admiration for all the administrators and teachers who provide for the individual needs of students with disabilities on a daily basis in such a unique and caring way.

There were also some patterns of concern expressed by teachers and observed in the classroom settings of the inclusion school. Even though the students with disabilities clustered into the regular classrooms were working towards standard or modified standard diplomas, having such a large group of students with disabilities scheduled into a regular education classroom created a difficult teaching and learning situation and made *genuine* individualization on a consistent basis a challenge.

As the access to the general curriculum mandate is implemented, it is imperative that the sense of *genuine* access not be lost. One way to preserve the sense of individualization is to provide core classes in the general education curriculum for students with disabilities who are not successful in general education classes. Deshler et al. (2001) expressed concern that administrators, in emphasizing inclusion, have been narrowly defining instructional opportunities by viewing general education classes as the only placement for secondary students with disabilities. Deshler and his colleagues proposed a 5-level continuum of interventions involving several settings and the coordinated expertise of well-trained educators to deliver effective instruction. In their "Supported Inclusion Model," general educators in regular classes work with students with disabilities on the first 2 levels. Additional degrees of intensity are provided at levels 3 through 5 involving special educators, reading specialists, and speech pathologists working in alternative settings to the regular class. Only a small number of students pursuing

standard diplomas might need this intensive support to address severe reading and language problems that impede their academic success. But Deshler et al. made it clear that both teachers and administrators need to understand that the serious needs of some students with disabilities “demand a type of instruction that simply cannot be provided within the general education classroom. . . . A well-conceptualized model for providing and coordinating services within and across schools must be in place in each district” (p. 106).

*Genuine* access to the general curriculum can only occur when students with disabilities are prescribed an individualized educational program that is delivered in a setting that can foster cognitive attainment of the general curriculum. For some students with disabilities, the regular classroom may be the best place for them to learn. For other students with disabilities, the regular classroom setting may actually be an obstacle to their learning the general curriculum. Denying those students with disabilities the right to an environment where they can master the general curriculum is not providing all the ingredients for *genuine* access.

The concept of access to the general curriculum is truly revolutionary, but necessary. One is reminded of Laurence Lieberman’s words about the importance of providing students with disabilities an appropriate education that meets their unique individual needs: “That is why we do special education. We are trying to prevent handicaps from developing in students with disabilities” (in Crockett & Kauffman, 1999, p. 164). We must continue striving to find new and inventive ways to help students with disabilities meet with greater success and to prevent them from being handicapped by well-intended but disingenuous educational efforts.

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## Appendix A

## Letter to Superintendent Requesting Permission to Complete the Study

February 2003

Dear Superintendent:

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic and State University. I have successfully completed my course work and my prospectus examination and am seeking permission to conduct my dissertation study in your school district.

The purpose of my study is to describe how specially-designed instruction is being used to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are participating and progressing within it. Currently, there is little research on the instructional practices that are being used to implement this new access to the general curriculum mandate. There is research, however, that points out that practices in inclusive settings can positively or negatively affect the success of students with disabilities being taught in the regular classroom. I believe my study will contribute to the administrators' understanding of the practices that are currently being used to implement this new mandate as they design special education programs.

I am enclosing the first three chapters of my study. Those chapters describe the problem and the purpose of the study, provide a literature review, and explain the proposed methodology. I propose to review state department documents (e.g. memos and regulations), interview 3 central office personnel, interview 2 administrators at the high school level, interview 8 regular education teachers and 4 special education teachers; to observe the two high school settings during scheduled tours; and to make 16 classroom observations. The study will not involve the interviewing of any students.

Thank you for considering my request to conduct the study in your school district. I believe that the results of my study will be beneficial to your district as well as to other districts in the state. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or if you need further clarification. I may be contacted at (540) 297-7151 or (540) 586-5259.

Most sincerely,

Cherie C. Whitehurst

cc: Jean B. Crockett, Ph.D. (advisor)

## Appendix B

### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC AND STATE UNIVERSITY

#### **Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects**

**Title of Project:** A Case Study of the Patterns of Practice Used to Provide Access to the General Curriculum for Secondary Students with Disabilities Receiving Instruction in the Regular Classroom

**Investigator(s):** Cherie C. Whitehurst, Jean B. Crockett (faculty advisor)

#### **I. The Purpose of this Research Project**

The purpose of my study is to describe how specially-designed instruction is being used to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are participating and progressing within it. The study will be an embedded multi-case analysis that will be conducted at two different high schools. The study will include the reviewing of state documents, the interviewing of central office personnel, the reviewing of district documents, the interviewing of administrators from each high school, the observations of each high school setting, the interviewing of general education and special education teachers, and the observations of regular classroom activities. Bronfenbrenner's (1976) model for the educational environment will provide the conceptual framework for the study. At the macro-system level, state documents will be reviewed. At the exo-system level, 3 central office personnel will be interviewed and district documents will also be reviewed. At the meso-system level, 2 high school administrators will be interviewed. Additionally, field notes will be made of observations of the high school settings at the meso-system level. The field notes will be written down after such activities as taking a tour of the facilities and before or after interviews and observations in the schools. At the micro-system level, 8 general education and 4 special education teachers will be interviewed. Also at the micro-system level, 16 observations of regular classroom activities will be made. The classes observed will be of the general education teachers who were interviewed.

#### **II. Procedure**

The procedures for this study will include the review of documents, interviews, and observations. State and district documents will be reviewed. The Director of Special Services, the Director of Instruction, and the Special Education Lead Teacher will be interviewed at the central office level. At the building level, each high school principal will be interviewed and field notes will be taken of observations about the school settings. Interviews will also be conducted with general education and special education teachers along with observations of regular classroom activities.

Information from the review of the state and local documents will be transferred to a Document Summary Form. Interviews will take place at the person's place of work

during school hours or at a mutually agreeable place and time that is more convenient. Interviews will be at least 45 minutes in length. The interviews will be tape-recorded and then transcribed at a later time. The observations of the schools will take place during a tour of the facilities or before or after interviews and classroom observations. The 16 different regular classroom observations will be 30 minutes in length and will take place during mutually agreed upon times with the participating classroom teachers. All participants will have the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview or observations. They will be permitted to add hand-written comments or post-scripts to the contents.

### **III. Risks**

There are no risks to you as a subject in this study. Any potential discomfort you may experience related to discussing patterns of practices that enhance individualization and are being used to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities while still working in the setting you are describing should be relieved by the assurance of confidentiality.

### **IV. Benefits of this Project**

The benefits of this study include improved understanding of the patterns of practices that enhance individualization and are being used in the total high school educational environment to ensure access to the general curriculum to students with disabilities. At the conclusion of the research project, you may contact the investigator for a summary of the research results.

### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Your identity as a subject in this study will be held confidential. A pseudonym will replace your name, the name of your school, and the name of the school district in any reports of the information collected through the review of documents, interviews, and observations. Only the investigator will be able to identify you individually with the data collected

The Document Summary Form will remain in the primary investigator's possession. The forms will be stored in the investigator's home office and will be destroyed within one year of the completion of the study.

The audiotapes of the interviews and the transcripts of the interviews will remain in the primary investigator's possession except when being transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The tapes will be stored in the investigator's home office and will be destroyed within one year of the completion of the study.

The observation notes will remain in the primary investigator's possession. The forms will be stored in the investigator's home office and will be destroyed within one year of the completion of the study.

## **VI. Compensation**

No monetary compensation will accompany participation in this study.

## **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Participants are free to refuse to answer particular questions during interviews, are free to not be observed at any time, and are free to not provide information received from the State Department of Education. Finally, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

## **VIII. Approval of Research**

This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic and State University, by the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, and by the school district.

## **IX. Subject's Responsibilities**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I have the following responsibilities:

District office personnel participating in the study:

- To participate in an interview of a least 45 minutes.
- To share State Department of Education and district documents (e.g. regulation manuals, memos, Program of Studies, etc.).

Administrators at the building:

- To participate in an interview of a least 45 minutes.
- To have field notes taken about the school environment observed.

Teachers participating in the study:

- To participate in an interview of a least 45 minutes.
- To be observed by the investigator while delivering instruction.

## **X. Subject's Permission**

I have read and understand the conditions of this project and my role within the project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. Based on the information provided above, I give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

I understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the conditions outlined in this document.

---

Signature

Date

Should you have any questions about the project, you may contact:

Cherie C. Whitehurst, Investigator

(540) 586-5259

Jean B. Crockett, Faculty Advisor

(540) 231-4546

David Moore, Chair, IRB Research Division

(540) 231-4991

**Participants receive a completed copy of the signed informed consent document.**

## Appendix C

### Themes and Practices Used to Provide Access to the General Curriculum for Secondary Students with Disabilities

#### Macro-System (State Level) Policy Context

The state policy context addressing the federal mandate was described as being built on the vision of enabling students with disabilities to access the general curriculum. It was determined that the strategies to meet this vision are designed around the provision and implementation of state regulations, state professional development training, and state accountability measures. The patterns of practice throughout the total Amazon County high school environment were initiated through the state's provision and implementation strategies.

#### Exo-System (District Level)

The 8 district level administrative practice themes and their related specific practices were identified as follows:

- The district administrator identified ways to provide accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities so students are enabled to access the general curriculum. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Finding ways to re-teach and re-test
  - Differentiating instruction through ability level questioning, curriculum compacting, and tiered assignments
  - Using the IEP as the tool for access
  - Using the IEP as the tool that describes accommodations and or modifications (e.g. having books and tests read orally, using a calculator, and modifying the length of the assignments)

- The district administrator initiated collaboration between regular education departments and special education departments. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Articulating the expectation and the need that collaboration is in progress between departments
  - Encouraging collaboration at the classroom and at the district levels
- The district administrator initiated monitoring of student learning. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Director of Special Services meeting with schools to discuss how students are accessing general curriculum
  - Examining placement in relation to student achievement needs
  - Disaggregating SOL testing data
  - Using Flanagan practice tests to monitor student learning
  - Using the regular education curriculum mapping
  - Creating a diversity task force
  - Encouraging open dialogue with parents about students' progress
- The district administrator initiated monitoring of teachers. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Providing more personnel support at the district level
  - Setting the tone with staff regarding what is expected
  - Setting expectations for principals completing classroom observations and tracking curriculum mapping progress

- The district administrator initiated the examination of student placement. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Examining placement through a continuum reflecting student needs
  - Examining placement through the IEP process
  - During district visitations at schools, examining placement criteria and how the placement of students in a resource elective period is being utilized The district administrator initiated professional development activities. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
    - Special services develops a plan for professional development that is based on the State's Special Education Improvement Plan and the local survey results
    - Plan includes training regular education staff, special education staff, and parents
    - Events occur as a part of Train the Trainer program with emphasis on Access to the General Curriculum
    - Events occur as a part of offering of college courses
    - Events occur as a part of bringing in special speakers
    - Events occur as a part of presenting workshops by district administrators
    - Furnishing professional resource materials such as a Process Manual and web site
- The district administrator allotted resources. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Allotting instructional money for all schools and for all students

- Allotting money for new textbooks with extra classroom sets that can be highlighted.
  - Allotting money for additional textbooks that are on students' reading levels and aligned with the SOLs
  - Allotting money for technology
  - Allotting money for additional personnel for positions such as the district's school counseling and testing coordinator, aides, and reading teachers
  - Allotting money for professional development training from grants
  - Allotting money for purchasing textbooks on a lower reading level aligned with SOLs
- The district administrator initiated school renewal concepts. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
- Developing a Six-Year Plan that is inclusive to all students
  - Having a future vision for more collaborative efforts
  - Having a future vision for more placement of students with disabilities in the regular classroom with clustering
  - Vision for future is to see more collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers
  - Vision for future is to include more general education in special education functions
  - Vision for future is to see more collaboration between district special education and school regular education
  - Vision for future is to be open to change as the needs of students change

Out of the 8 district level administrative practice themes, all 8 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of state regulations. The 8 district level practice themes and their specific practices were previously listed.

Out of the 8 district level administrative practice themes, 3 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of professional development training. The 3 district level practice themes are listed below. The specific practices related to the themes were listed previously.

- The district administrator initiated collaboration between regular education departments and special education departments.
- The district administrator initiated professional development activities.
- The district administrator allotted resources.

Out of the 8 district level administrative practice themes, 4 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of state accountability measures. The 4 district level practice themes are listed below. The specific practices related to the themes were listed previously.

- The district administrator initiated the examination of student placement.
- The district administrator initiated monitoring of student learning.
- The district administrator allotted resources.
- The district administrator initiated school renewal concepts.

#### Meso-System (Building Administrative Level)

The 17 building level administrative practice themes and their related specific practices were identified as follows:

- The school administrator identified ways to provide accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:

- Using books on tape
  - Administering tests orally
  - Reducing the number of items on tests
  - Providing alternative assignments
  - Using communication logs
  - Emailing parents
- The school administrator identified the negative effect of stress on teachers who have several students with several accommodations. A specific practice related to this theme is as follows:
    - Identifying cause of teacher stress to be a number of students with a number of accommodations to provide
- The school administrator initiated collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers. A specific practice related to this theme is as follows:
    - Encouraging collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers
- The school administrator initiated collaboration with the middle school administrator to help students with disabilities have a better transition to the high school. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
    - Encouraging collaboration between middle school administrator and high school administrator
- The school administrator initiated parent contact to address student progress. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
    - Contacting parents of students receiving failing grades

- Emailing parents on weekly basis
  - Communicating with parents through a parent communication log
  - Enforcing county policy to contact parents of students receiving failing grades and having an IEP meeting for those students
  - Identifying that the large amount of teacher paperwork makes the tracking of student progress difficult for teachers and staff
- The school administrator initiated administrative review to address student progress. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
    - Reviewing parent contact log
    - Assigning same administrators to students for eligibility observations, IEP meetings, academic monitoring, and discipline purposes
  - The school administrator identified that the lack of time limited the tracking of student progress. A specific practice related to this theme is as follows:
    - Monitoring of student progress limited due to lack of time
  - The school administrator identified the need for the student eligibility observation form to be updated to provide the gathering of more information that could better relate to a variety of disabilities. A specific practice related to this theme is as follows:
    - Articulating the need for the current eligibility forms to be updated
  - The school administrator monitored teachers. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
    - Monitoring levels of questioning used in lessons
    - Monitoring lesson plans

- Monitoring to ensure teachers are checking for student understanding in lessons
  - Monitoring for how lessons are assessed
  - Monitoring for differentiation in lessons
  - Monitoring for IEP implementation
  - Monitoring lesson plans to ensure instruction is at appropriate developmental level
  - Monitoring implementation of IEP modifications
  - Attending IEP meetings of students in classes in which administrator does teacher observations
  - Monitoring to ensure students with disabilities are not being singled out
  - Monitoring that school is losing teachers due to excessive paperwork
  - Monitoring that teachers are doing so much paperwork due to a fear of a lawsuit
  - Increasing monitoring of teachers
- The school administrator designed a special education program that did not utilize an inclusion model and that did not involve cluster grouping of students with disabilities in the regular education classes. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
    - Grouping not practiced
    - Grouping in clusters not done due to self-esteem issues
- The school administrator designed a special education inclusion program that involved cluster grouping. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:

- Implementing inclusion model
- Grouping in clusters in inclusion classes
- Providing content instruction by regular education teacher in inclusion model
- Allowing for training of inclusion model
- Considering master schedule matters when implementing inclusion model
- Considering caseload matters when implementing inclusion model
- Allowing for transition period when implementing inclusion model
- Preventing learned helplessness through inclusion model
- Providing access to regular instruction and SOL testing through inclusion model
- Ensuring 95% rate in student making progress through inclusion model
- Allowing for teacher volunteerism in inclusion model
- Receiving positive parent input of inclusion model
- Including students with a range of disabilities in inclusion classrooms
- The school administrator initiated professional development activities. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Following up on IEP process training through daily administrator/teacher conversations
  - Planning for future professional development activities by requesting training from district office on differentiation
  - Held training sessions on the reauthorization of IDEA
  - Held training sessions on NCLB Act

- The school administrator placed special education resource rooms in areas that helped students' better access the general curriculum. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Placing resource rooms throughout the building hallways with regular core classes provides opportunity for students with disabilities to travel with peers
  - Placing resource rooms throughout the building hallways with regular core classes facilitates better self-esteem
  - Placing resource rooms by community core classrooms supports the inclusion model
- The school administrator ensured that the facility does not handicap a student. A specific practice related to this theme is as follows:
  - Ensuring facility is accessible to all students
- The school administrator identified that the school focuses are often lost in the excessive paperwork. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Identifying lost teacher time with students due to increased paperwork
  - Identifying lost administrator time with students due to increased paperwork
- The school administrator identified that one of the school's focuses should be providing a different way of teaching before an IEP is sought. A specific practice related to this theme is as follows:
  - Identifying remediation needs of students in the regular classroom
- The school administrator based the focus of the school on data, standards, and laws. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Basing school decisions on data

- Basing school decisions on standards
- Basing school decisions on laws

Out of the 17 building level administrative practice themes, 17 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of state regulations. The 17 building level administrative practice themes and their specific practices were previously listed.

Out of the 17 building level administrative practice themes, there was 1 building level administrative practice theme related to the provision and implementation of professional development training. The building level administrative practice theme is listed below. The specific practices related to the themes were listed previously.

- The school administrator initiated professional development activities.

Out of 17 building level administrative practice themes, there were 7 building level administrative practice themes related to the provision and implementation of state accountability measures. The 7 building level administrative practice themes are listed below. The specific practices related to state accountability measures were listed previously.

- The school administrator initiated parent contact to address student progress.
- The school administrator initiated administrative review to address student progress.
- The school administrator identified that the lack of time limited the tracking of student progress.
- The school administrator identified the need for the student eligibility observation form to be updated to provide the gathering of more information that could better relate to a variety of disabilities.

- The school administrator designed a special education program that did not utilize an inclusion model and that did not involve cluster grouping of students with disabilities in the regular education classes.
- The school administrator designed a special education inclusion program that involved cluster grouping.
- The school administrator based the focus of the school on data, standards, and laws.

#### Micro-System (Classroom Level for Bethany High School)

The 7 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes and their related specific practices were identified as follows:

- The classroom teacher provided accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Using mnemonics
  - Using peer tutoring
  - Using student interns
  - Using graphic organizers
  - Providing class notes
  - Providing supplemental reading materials
  - Providing preferential seating
  - Working individually
  - Using ability level questioning
  - Using visual aids
  - Providing extra time for testing, having tests read, and testing in fundamental skills elective class

- The regular education teacher and the special education teacher initiated collaboration activities. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Communicating about the Fundamental Skills elective class
  - Sharing lesson plans, class notes, and materials with special education teachers
  - Sharing information regarding student progress with special education teachers
  - Sharing content knowledge with special education teachers
  - Sharing IEP information with regular education teachers
  - Meeting jointly with parents and students
  - Using the student agenda
  - Working as a team
  - Empathizing with one another
  
- The classroom teacher used various tools to monitor student learning. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Exercising accountability in grading
  - Reviewing Flanagan test results
  - Reviewing department writing predictor test results
  - Observing students and maintaining portfolios
  - Completing checklists
  - Providing progress reports to case managers
  - Identifying other factors that can interfere with achievement
  - Holding IEP committee meetings

- The classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities to be taught in the regular classroom with a limited class size and the opportunity for a fundamental skills elective course. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Preferring the regular classroom
  - Identifying that the regular education curriculum map is too fast
  - Recommending smaller class sizes
- The classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Using Flanagan Practice Tests;
  - Using SOL EOC Released Tests
  - Using EduTest Online Practice Tests
  - Using the Online Criterion Writing Program
  - Using the Testnav Online SOL Practice Tests
  - Reviewing practice test results
  - Correcting test for half credit
  - Helping Students During Testing For Partial Credit
- The content taught to students was driven by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Using curriculum maps with pacing guides
  - Identifying problems with curriculum mapping for students with disabilities
  - Slowing down the curriculum by offering courses in two parts
  - Slowing down the curriculum by offering a fundamental skills elective class

- Slowing down the curriculum by offering remediation
- Identifying the need for special educators to be content certified
- Focusing on test taking skills
- The instructional methods used supported students mastering the objectives taught.

Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:

- Varying activities due to block scheduling
- Using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities
- Teaching in a step-by-step method
- Demonstrating what is being taught
- Checking for student understanding
- Providing guiding practice
- Integrating remediation into classroom instruction
- Providing visual aids
- Encouraging students

Out of the 7 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes, 7 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of state regulations. The 7 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes and their specific practices were previously listed.

Out of the 7 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes, none of the themes related to the provision and implementation of professional development training. During the interviews with classroom teachers, there was no mention of any professional development training.

Out of the 7 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes, 5 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of state accountability measures. The 5

instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes are listed below. The specific practices related to state accountability measures were listed previously.

- The classroom teacher used various tools to monitor student learning.
- The classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities to be taught in the regular classroom with a limited class size and the opportunity for a fundamental skills elective course.
- The classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities.
- The content taught to students was driven by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
- The instructional methods used supported students mastering the objectives taught. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:

Micro-System (Classroom Level for Carson High School)

The 8 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes and their related specific practices were identified as follows:

- The classroom teacher provided accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Using mnemonics in English class, but not in other classes
  - Using peer tutoring in science class, but not in other classes
  - Using graphic organizers
  - Providing class notes
  - Providing supplemental reading materials
  - Providing preferential seating

- Working individually
- Using ability level questioning
- Using visual aids
- Providing extra time for testing, having tests read, and testing in fundamental skills elective class
- Providing ample opportunities for students to complete easy assignments
- The regular education teacher and the special education teacher initiated limited collaboration activities.
  - Sharing regular education information with inclusion teacher
  - Sharing special education information with the regular education teacher
  - Identifying the need to share more IEP information with the regular education teachers
  - The special education teacher working as a disciplinarian in inclusion classes
  - Using technology to collaborate with teachers and parents
  - Identifying the need to seek teacher volunteers for inclusion programs
  - Identifying the need for the special education inclusion teachers to be in the classroom more
  - Identifying the need for the students to see the inclusion teacher as a teacher
  - The inclusion teacher staying out of the way during class lectures
- The classroom teacher used various tools to monitor student learning. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Reviewing Flanagan and EduTest results
  - Maintaining writing portfolios

- Providing verbal and written progress reports to case managers
- Identifying behavior problems that interfere with achievement
- Identifying other factors that can interfere with achievement
- The classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities to be placed in the regular classroom while also realizing that the regular classroom is not always the best placement. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Preferring the regular classroom
  - Identifying the regular classroom is not always the best placement
  - Recommending smaller class sizes
- The regular education teacher participated in differentiation course work. A specific practice related to this theme is as follows:
  - Given funding for differentiating courses
- The classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Using Flanagan practice tests
  - Using EduTest online practice tests
  - Using reading assessments
  - Correcting tests for extra credit
  - Modifying tests
  - Helping students prepare for classroom testing
- The content taught to students was driven by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:
  - Using curriculum maps with pacing guides

- Identifying problems with curriculum mapping for students with disabilities
  - Slowing down the curriculum by offering a fundamental skills elective class
  - Slowing down the curriculum by offering remediation
  - Identifying the need for special educators to be content certified
  - Identifying the need for change and a balanced approach
- The instructional methods used supported students mastering the objectives taught.

Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:

- Varying activities
- Using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities
- Teaching in a step-by-step method
- Demonstrating what is being taught
- Checking for student understanding
- Providing guided practice
- Integrating remediation into classroom instruction
- Providing visual aids
- Providing different time
- Encouraging students

Out of the 8 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes, 8 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of state regulations. The 8 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes and their specific practices were previously listed.

Out of the 8 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes, 1 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of professional development training. The instructional and assessment classroom level practice theme is listed below. The specific

practices related to the provision and implementation of professional development training was listed previously.

- The regular education teacher participated in differentiation course work. Specific practices related to this theme are as follows:

Out of the 8 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes, 5 of the themes related to the provision and implementation of state accountability measures. The 5 instructional and assessment classroom level practice themes are listed below. The specific practices related to state accountability measures were listed previously.

- The classroom teacher used various tools to monitor student learning
- The classroom teacher identified a preference for students with disabilities in the regular classroom while also realizing that the regular classroom is not always the best placement.
- The classroom teacher provided assessment opportunities for students with disabilities.
- The content taught to students was driven by the SOLs and preparing for the EOC SOL tests.
- The instructional methods used supported students mastering the objectives taught.

## Appendix D

## Practices across the Exo-System, Meso-System, and Micro-System Levels

Table D1.

Accommodations and Modifications Specific Practices			
Exo-System Level	Meso-System Level	Micro-System Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Finding ways to re-teach and re-test</li> <li>-Differentiating instruction through ability level questioning, curriculum compacting, and tiered assignments</li> <li>-Using the IEP as the tool for access</li> <li>-Using the IEP as the tool that describes accommodations and or modifications (e.g. having books and tests read orally, using a calculator, and modifying the length of the assignments)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Using books on tape</li> <li>-Administering tests orally</li> <li>-Reducing the number of items on tests</li> <li>-Providing alternative assignments</li> <li>-Using communication logs</li> <li>-Emailing parents</li> <li>-Identifying cause of teacher stress to be a number of students with a number of accommodations to provide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Using mnemonics</li> <li>-Using peer tutoring</li> <li>-Using student interns</li> <li>-Using graphic organizers</li> <li>-Providing class notes</li> <li>-Providing supplemental reading materials</li> <li>-Providing preferential seating</li> <li>-Working individually</li> <li>-Using ability level questioning</li> <li>-Using visual aids</li> <li>-Providing extra time for testing, having tests read, and testing in fundamental skills elective class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Using peer tutoring in science class, but not in other classes</li> <li>-Using graphic organizers</li> <li>-Providing class notes</li> <li>-Providing preferential seating</li> <li>-Working individually</li> <li>-Using visual aids</li> <li>-Providing extra time for testing, having tests read, and testing in fundamental skills elective class</li> <li>-Providing ample opportunities for students to complete easy assignments</li> </ul>

Table D2.

Collaboration Specific Practices			
Exo-System Level	Meso-System Level	Micro-System Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Articulating the expectation and the need that collaboration is in progress between departments</li> <li>-Encouraging collaboration at the classroom and at the district levels</li> <li>- Modeling collaboration at the district level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Encouraging collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers</li> <li>-Encouraging Collaboration between middle school administrator and high school administrator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Communi-cating about the fundamental skills elective class</li> <li>-Sharing lesson plans, class notes, and materials with special education teachers</li> <li>-Sharing information regarding student progress with special education teachers</li> <li>-Sharing content knowledge with special education teacher</li> <li>-Sharing IEP information with regular education teachers</li> <li>-Meeting jointly with parents and students</li> <li>-Using the student agenda</li> <li>-Working as a team</li> <li>-Empathizing with one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Sharing regular education information with inclusion teacher</li> <li>-Sharing special education information with the regular education teacher</li> <li>-Identifying the need to share more IEP information with the regular education teachers</li> <li>-The special education teacher working as a disciplinarian in inclusion classes</li> <li>-Using technology to collaborate with teachers and parents</li> <li>-Identifying the need to seek teacher volunteers for inclusion</li> </ul>

		another	programs -Identifying the need for the special education inclusion teachers to be in the classroom more -Identifying the need for the students to see the inclusion teacher as a teacher -The inclusion teacher staying out of the way during class lectures
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Table D3.

Monitoring Student Learning Specific Practices			
Exo-System Level	Meso-System Level	Micro-System Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Director of Special Services meeting with schools to discuss how students are accessing general curriculum</li> <li>-Examining placement in relation to student achievement needs</li> <li>-Disaggregating SOL testing data</li> <li>-Using Flanagan practice tests to monitor student learning</li> <li>-Using the regular education curriculum mapping</li> <li>-Creating a diversity task force</li> <li>-Encouraging open dialogue with parents about students' progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Contacting parents of students receiving failing grades</li> <li>-Emailing parents on weekly basis</li> <li>-Communicating with parents through a parent communication log</li> <li>-Enforcing county policy to contact parents of students receiving failing grades and having an IEP meeting for those students</li> <li>-Identifying that the large amount of teacher paperwork makes the tracking of student progress difficult for teachers and staff</li> <li>-Reviewing parent contact logs</li> <li>-Assigning same administrators to students for eligibility observations, IEP meetings, academic monitoring, and discipline purposes</li> <li>-Monitoring of student progress limited due to lack of time</li> <li>-Articulating the need for the current eligibility forms to be updated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Exercising accountability in grading</li> <li>-Reviewing Flanagan test results</li> <li>-Reviewing department writing predictor test results</li> <li>-Observing students and maintaining portfolios</li> <li>-Completing checklists</li> <li>-Providing progress reports to case managers</li> <li>-Identifying other factors that can interfere with achievement</li> <li>-Holding IEP committee meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reviewing Flanagan and EduTest results</li> <li>-Maintaining writing portfolios</li> <li>-Providing verbal and written progress reports to case managers</li> <li>-Identifying behavior problems that interfere with achievement</li> <li>-Identifying other factors that can interfere with achievement</li> </ul>

Table D4.

Placement Specific Practices			
Exo-System Level	Meso-System Level	Micro-System Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Examining placement through a continuum reflecting student needs</li> <li>-Examining placement through the IEP process</li> <li>-During district visitations at schools, examining placement criteria and how the placement of students in a resource elective period is being utilized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Grouping not practiced</li> <li>-Grouping in clusters not done due to self-esteem issues</li> <li>-Implementing inclusion model</li> <li>-Grouping in clusters in inclusion classes</li> <li>-Providing content instruction by regular education teacher in inclusion model</li> <li>-Allowing for training of inclusion model</li> <li>-Considering master schedule matters when implementing inclusion model</li> <li>-Considering caseload matters when implementing inclusion model</li> <li>-Allowing for transition period when implementing inclusion model</li> <li>-Preventing learned helplessness through inclusion model</li> <li>-Providing access to regular instruction and SOL testing through inclusion model</li> <li>-Ensuring 95% rate in SOL testing through inclusion model</li> <li>-Allowing for teacher volunteerism in inclusion model</li> <li>-Receiving positive parent input of inclusion model</li> <li>-Inclusion students with a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Preferring the regular classroom</li> <li>-Identifying that the regular education curriculum map is too fast</li> <li>-Recommending smaller class sizes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Preferring the regular classroom</li> <li>-Identifying the regular classroom is not always the best placement</li> <li>-Recommending smaller class sizes</li> </ul>

	range of disabilities in inclusion model		
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Table D5.

Professional Development Specific Practices			
Exo-System Level	Meso-System Level	Micro-System Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Special services develops a plan for professional development that is based on the State’s Special Education Improvement Plan and the local survey results</li> <li>-Plan includes training regular education staff, special education staff, and parents</li> <li>-Events occur as a part of the Train the Trainer program with emphasis on Access to the General Curriculum</li> <li>-Events occur as a part of offering of college courses</li> <li>-Events occur as a part of bringing in special speakers</li> <li>-Events occur as a part of presenting workshops by district administrators</li> <li>-Furnishing of professional resource materials such as a Process Manual and web site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Following up on IEP process training through daily administrator/teacher conversations</li> <li>-Planning for future professional development activities by requesting training from district office on differentiation</li> <li>-Held training session on the reauthorization of IDEA</li> <li>-Held training session on NCLB Act</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Given funding for differentiation courses</li> </ul>

## Appendix E

## Participant Information

Table E1.

Level	Job	Age	Gender	Years of Experience	Educational Credentials	Endorsements
Exo	District Special Education Lead Teacher	38	Female	15	Bachelor of Science Degree in Speech Pathology & Master's Degree in Education	ED, LD, HI, & Supervision of SPED
Exo	Director of Instruction	42	Female	17	Bachelor of Arts Degree in English Journalism, Master's Degree in Administration and Supervision, & Doctor of Education in Administration and Supervision	English 9-12, Journalism 9-12, Administration and Supervision PreK-12, & Superintendent's List
Exo	Director of Special Services	40	Female	15	Bachelor of Arts Degree in Middle School Education & Master's Degree in Administration	6-12 Middle School Social Studies Teacher & K-12 Administration
Meso	Administrator	42	Male	20	Bachelor of Science Degree in PE & Master's Degree in Administration	K-12 Physical Education, Hunter's Safety, & Driver's Education

Level	Job	Age	Gender	Years of Experience	Educational Credentials	Endorsements
Meso	Administrator	52	Male	25	Bachelor of Science Degree in History, Master's Degree in Special Education with an Emphasis in LD, & Master's Degree in Administration	Secondary School and Middle School Supervision & Administration, Special Education Pk-12, Math K-8, & Social Studies K-12
Micro	Math Teacher	54	Female	25	Bachelor of Science in Education & Master's in Education	Mathematics, Technology, & Middle School
Micro	Science Teacher	38	Female	17	Bachelor of Arts Degree in Education & Master's Degree in Secondary Education	Biology, Earth Science, & General Science II
Micro	English Teacher	43	Female	12	Bachelor of Science Degree in English	English 8 - 12
Micro	Social Studies Teacher	64	Male	43	Bachelor of Science Degree & Master's Degree in Education	History, Government, Mathematics, Spanish PreK-12, & General Science I
Micro	Special Education Teacher	24	Female	2	Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology/ Special Education	LD & MR
Micro	Math Teacher	28	Male	2	Bachelor of Science Degree in Chemistry	Chemistry & Provisional Math

Level	Job	Age	Gender	Years of Experience	Educational Credentials	Endorsements
Micro	Science Teacher	35	Male	4	Bachelor of Science Degree in Political Science and Education	Provisional in Earth Science
Micro	English Teacher	53	Female	24	Bachelor of Science Degree in English & Master's Degree in Education	English, Public Speaking, Drama, & Journalism
Micro	Social Studies Teacher	46	Male	4	Bachelor of Science Degree in Social Sciences	World History, World Geography, VA & US History, VA & US Government, & Economics
Micro	Special Education Teacher	49	Female	25	Bachelor of Science Degree in Special Education	MR & LD